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REPRINTED FROM FEBRUARY 18, 2004

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CAMERA SUPPORT

Lisand LCS Camera Support

by Carl Mrozek

It is often not feasible to use a tripod due to time, space or weight constraints, so alternative camera support devices and systems fill an important need. Although a Steadicam may be an elegant solution for many situations entailing handheld shooting, it is not always appropriate and may be too pricey, particularly if needed only occasionally.

Recently, I discovered an interesting alternative manufactured by the Peter Lisand Co., in Edgewater, N.J. The unit is aptly and simply named the Lisand Camera Support, or LCS for short.

FEATURES

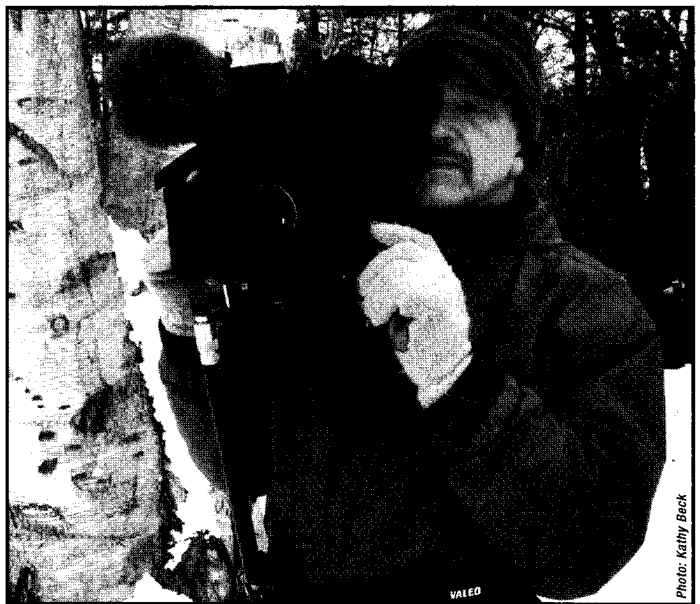
Right out of the box, the LCS looks like a well-made piece of gear. All the components are made of machined steel, brass, aluminum or other high quality metals—the best (instead of the cheapest) components for the job.

The pistol grip features a finely grained, sure-grip rubber handle and most components are painted black and are ice, grease and grit resistant for optimal performance under real-world conditions. Moreover, the unit exudes old-fashioned handcrafted quality with a cool contemporary look.

In its most basic form, the LCS system comprises a camera mounting bracket and horizontal support rod, with an attached pistol grip. This is supported by an adjustable vertical post, which locks into a balljoint-like swiveling socket on the beefy belt buckle with a push, twist-and-lock brass nut. The hefty buckle with swivel socket cinches a wide, padded weightlifting belt that firmly, yet flexibly anchors the LCS.

For mounting the camera to the main support bar, there are two basic options: A plate that screws into the bottom of most cameras; and a quick release, Sony-style V-lock tripod plate that includes an additional safety lock, which was on the version I tested. Both have a pair of two-inch retractable “feet” that can be lowered for extreme low-angle shots.

In the standard LCS model that I tested, the pistol grip slides fore and aft along a perfectly square shaft but can also be mounted in the horizontal plane, on either side of the camera. Moreover, the grip itself can be rotated in a semi-circle on either side of the main (horizontal) support rail and secured in 24 positions, selected by the user, by adjustable interlocking teeth



The author found that the Peter Lisand LCS held the camera firmly and permitted fluid movement.

like those used on many current tripod handles.

The vertical support post attaches to a swivel bracket at the front end of the main support unit with a slip-collar fitting like those used on commercial air hoses. The bottom of this variable-length post snaps into a different swivel socket, secured by a nut that must be rotated 90 degrees to open or release.

This socket is clamped onto a sturdy, padded weightlifter's belt that comes in small, medium and large sizes. The thickly padded belt distributes the weight of the camera system with LCS evenly and com-

fortably around the wearer's girth, rather than focusing it on one point.

IN USE

I tested the LCS standard model, with the 24-position pistolgrip. It assembled fairly quickly, without benefit of instructions or illustrations. The core of the unit—the support bracket with pistol grip and camera mounting bracket—came pre-assembled, although I did need some phone support in order to switch the pistol grip from the standard vertical to a horizontal position by popping the lock open, sliding it off the

square rail, then sliding it back on with the pistol grip in a horizontal position.

After a bit more trial and error, I was able to quickly secure and release the main support bracket from the vertical support rod using the quick release slip coupler. A 90-degree release nut locks the base of the vertical rod into the swivel socket on the buckle of the belt, and this took a bit of practice to master. With practice, I was able to do the one-handed release.

The vertical post can be extended or contracted 10 inches using a thumbscrew at its base. This adjustment changes the angle of the camera support bracket to the post and affects the feel and fit of the camera pad on the shoulder.

This turned out to be critical to camera movement with the LCS system. For me, having the post fully compressed or extended more than a few inches inhibited smooth operation and fluid camera movement. The time to adjust the vertical post and pistol grip is once the LCS is fully assembled and the camera is securely mounted. That's the time to choreograph the shooting you anticipate doing and adjust the height of the vertical post

and angle of the pistol grip to match.

Although this can vary considerably from cameraman to cameraman and from application to application, I found that a horizontally mounted pistol grip, at various angles, provided the best support—especially with my right hand on the lens.

With a little practice I was even able to jog slowly, in short spurts, without fear of dumping the camera, even in more than eight inches of snow on rolling terrain, thanks in part to the peace of mind afforded by the extra safety lock on the camera mounting plate.

The camera clung to the LCS like a fly to flypaper, much more surely than a camera typically feels when connected to a tripod via a manufacturer's adapter plate. Camera and tripod manufacturers would do well to emulate the safety features incorporated into the LCS support system.

With experience, I pushed the envelope further, by hiking with my camera aboard the LCS, across undulating wooded, terrain carpeted with more than eight inches of snow, in pursuit of white-tailed deer. With a little practice, I was able to get steady shots at more than 160mm of telephoto. Sometimes I did so while kneeling and others while standing.

I also tested the LCS in lieu of a tripod at fairly high telephoto lengths, shooting from a stationary vehicle. For one assignment featuring winter waterfowl on the shore of icy Lake Erie, I needed footage of diving or fish-eating ducks feeding, preening, fighting and courting.

Typically, I use a large beanbag plopped on the open windowsill of my truck door. Although this makes fairly stable video at high focal lengths much of the time, camera movement is fairly restricted.

To my delight, the LCS standard easily supported the Sony DSR570 camera and

Canon lens—with the beefy Century Precision 1.6x tele-extender attached. After adjusting the height of the vertical support rod until able to tilt and to pan pretty smoothly, albeit briefly, I was ready for action. I was impressed at how quickly I could line up and execute shots compared with the clunkier beanbag support.

Upon reviewing the footage, I was impressed by the tripod-like steadiness of most of the static shots and the relative smoothness and steadiness of camera movement—horizontally and vertically—at least until I needed to exhale. I found that I could hold a shot nearly twice as long by holding my breath while eliminating the risk of ruining a shot by breathing too soon.

SUMMARY

Although I didn't have a chance to shoot an interview using the LCS system, I believe that my tracking experiences with it demonstrated that it should be great for doing mobile interviews, even on slippery footing. My ability to get long static telephoto shots with it while kneeling or standing against a tree indicates that it should work fine for grabbing short sound bites in standup situations, especially when fully zoomed out.

The worst-case scenario is to release the camera from the LCS mount and lock it onto a tripod, as the LCS is not meant to be an all-purpose replacement for a tripod. However, it fits the bill in a surprising range of circumstances, which makes it a really useful addition to any serious shooters' toolkit. ■

Carl Mrozek operates Eagle Eye Media based in Buffalo, N.Y., specializing in wildlife and other outdoor subjects. His work appears regularly on the Discovery Channel, CBS, PBS and other networks. Contact him at eagleye@localnet.com.

FAST FACTS

Application
EFP and ENG

Key Features
Camera support with mobility

Price
Starts at \$550

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