

Indie Equipment Review: Steadicam on a budget - the Atlas Camera Support System

Posted by Mat on April 3, 2009

Welcome to the DOJO!

It has been far too long since I've posted a good product review and today I'm going to fix that with a doozy. Like every other low budget, indie or guerrilla filmmaker out there, one of the things I wish for every day of my life is a good, low budget option to a steadicam. Lacking that, I'm always looking for a way to make my handheld shots smoother and more manageable.

Unfortunately, up until now there really hasn't been much out on the market. Options are either crappy hand made, no-gimbal "Poor man's steadicam" units, horribly made knock-offs from India or paying an obscene amount of money for a true steadicam set-up. For me, none of those options were really options at all. Because of that, it always seemed like an affordable camera stabilizer was always going to be out of my reach as a low budget, guerrilla filmmaker.

Luckily, I've got some of the best readers on the Internet and I had my eyes opened to one of the most fantastic pieces of indie filmmaking equipment out there. The unit I'm talking about is a little thing called the [Atlas Camera Support System](#) (also known as the Atlas Camera Stabilizer and formerly the Indie Steadicam). Created by Michael Knowles (no relation to Harry), an indie filmmaker in his own right, the Atlas Camera Support is billed an affordable camera stabilizer that gives you the ability to shoot hand held for longer periods of time and get smoother shots.

As a low budget, guerrilla filmmaker myself, hearing that got me very interested. Seeing shots of the Atlas Camera Support in action quickly made me realize that the system was also a potentially fantastic alternative to the old-school steadicams. Needless to say, the thought of a steadicam style unit being available at a cost under \$375 got me incredibly excited.

The Atlas Camera Support is made up of a body harness, a flexible rod, an adjustable strap which attaches to the top of your camera and a weighted handle that screws in to the bottom.

Now, when you first see a picture of the [Atlas Camera Stabilizer](#) in action, you're probably going to have the same reaction I did: what in

the hell is that thing? It looks a little strange. However, all thoughts of looking silly on set completely vanished the first time I strapped in and took this steadicam-alternative for a test drive. After only a few minutes of practice I was able to achieve some of the smoothest handheld camera shots I've ever seen. It's very intuitive and if you do the steadicam duck-walk you'll quickly be getting shots that rival footage taken on a full steadicam rig.

That is the key to remember: as with any piece of equipment, getting the ultra smooth steadicam shots take practice and take the same sort of skills you need to operate a full steadicam unit. Just strapping the Atlas Camera Support System on and hoping for the best will still get you some decent shots, but the true power of the system comes with practice, proper posture and proper "smooth" walking. Once you get that down you will be absolutely amazed at the footage you can get with this indie, guerrilla steadicam alternative.

If you're on a budget, or just can't bring yourself to pay thousands and thousands of dollars for a standard steadicam, then you absolutely have to check out the [Atlas Camera Support System](#) — heck, Mr. Knowles even gives you a 30 day money back guarantee to test the system out at no risk.

Check back in the next week for a full video review of the Atlas Camera Stabilizer. I loved the unit so much we'll actually be using it on my next film, The Hog!

Until Next time, Keep Shooting!

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