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With the size of many HD camcorders occupying the 5-to-7 lb. range, the need for some extra stabilization is important. Holding one of these HD camcorders for more than half an hour makes for an uncomfortable experience and produces shaky video. The Atlas Camera Support and Stabilization System alleviates both body strain and the "handheld" video look with a single product. You can't run around like a madman, but The Atlas does make smooth shooting attainable. As a bonus, The Atlas is pretty easy on the wallet, too. So if you're a shooter with a sore wrist who's looking for more mobility, keep your eyes panning and scanning below!

Unzipping the Atlas

Commonly known as a fishpole-type support system, the Atlas Camera Support and Stabilization System is just that: a system. It's composed of a number of parts which come nicely packed in the included nylon carrying bag. Each piece of The Atlas fits neatly into a pocket or nylon loop inside, making the kit very organized.

The Atlas doesn't look like other stabilizing products. Included in the Standard Package are multiple rods, nylon straps, and circular weights. But the main piece is the harness. When we pull the harness out of the bag, it looks intimidating. But we quickly find that everything fits together easily, as we read the simple users manual (a print manual is included).

Assembling and Using the Atlas Support and Stabilization System

And now we're onto the testing, steadying and supporting. Though some assembly is required, this is not rocket science. We put on the harness and buckled our nylon support straps. We also have a colleague assist us for step two, which is to slide the rod-and-PVC piping through a few loops on the harness. Since these loops are on the back of the harness, this is the only point where having a second person around is beneficial. We then attached the sturdy Velcro (er, hook-and-loop fastener) wrap to the handle of our camcorder. This hook-and-loop fastener enables a connection point between the rod and our camcorder via a D-ring. At the time of this review, the Atlas System requires camcorders to have a handle (compact camcorders and Video DSLRs will have to use a third-party accessory). We used the Panasonic AG-HVX200 camcorder for our test, which, coincidentally, is the same camcorder that Atlas uses in their marketing materials. The HVX200 is the perfect test candidate too, because of its large size and weight.

We tested the Atlas Camera Support and Stabilization System in a variety of

ways, including pans, pedestals, walking and running over uneven ground. We held the camcorder as we normally do to shoot video. Panning with the Atlas is as smooth as the breeze, partly because of the "zero-gravity" effect the Atlas creates. Our bulky HVX200 now feels very light in our hands. Since the Atlas transfers the weight of our camcorder to the harness, almost all of the weight is taken off our wrist. We think this will allow shooters to spend much more time doing handheld shooting. As you lean down to perform a pedestal movement, the rod bends and allows the camcorder to get even lower to the ground. You will have to stretch out your arms, but as you bring the camcorder up to chest level, you return to a normal shooting posture.

The typical user will probably experience neither wrist nor back fatigue after using the Atlas. (We used the Atlas for about half an hour at a time.) As far as camera support goes, the Atlas gets our highest marks. The Atlas also doubles as a stabilizer. Our panning shots were some of the smoothest we've taken; almost as smooth as if we used a fluid-head tripod. Tilting and pedestal shots aren't quite as impressive, but still notable. We even zoomed into a telephoto shot, and the Atlas did a great job at keeping the shot stable. During our testing time with the Atlas Camera Support and Stabilization System, we put it through its paces by running and walking over bumpy terrain. The Atlas did steady our moving shots, but doesn't offer as much of the "flying" look to our video as other camera stabilizers do. We notice a fair amount of bounce in our shots where we walked quickly, and much more as we ran steadily with the Atlas. In fact, an experienced videographer can likely produce similar results by handholding alone. That said, the Atlas certainly lives up to our expectations of what a camera stabilizer should offer: video that exhibits very little camera shake.

Closing

The Atlas Camera Support and Stabilization System is a great product to keep you mobile and energized. With reduced strain on your wrists and back, you can free yourself up to concentrate on more pressing matters-like the bride, your family member or a client in your video. And with longer recording times coming to HD memory card camcorders, you body will be able to keep up with your camcorder!

Strengths

- Great camera/wrist support
- Smooth handheld panning
- Affordability

Weaknesses

- Does not stabilize well while running or moving quickly

SUMMARY

Atlas Camera Support has designed an affordable way to stabilize your video while allowing you to stay mobile.