



CAMERA SUPPORT

WITH JIM SOTO

Camera Support



When the phrase “camera support” is mentioned, most people think of the tried-and-trusty tripod, and for good reason—its use provides great results. However, there’s more to it than just tripods.

Different Camera Support Systems

Today we'll discuss seven different camera supports other than the tripod:



A dolly crew in action during the filming of *Apocalypse Now* (1979).

- dollies
- sliders
- jibs
- cranes
- stabilizers
- helmet mounts
- car mounts

The Dolly

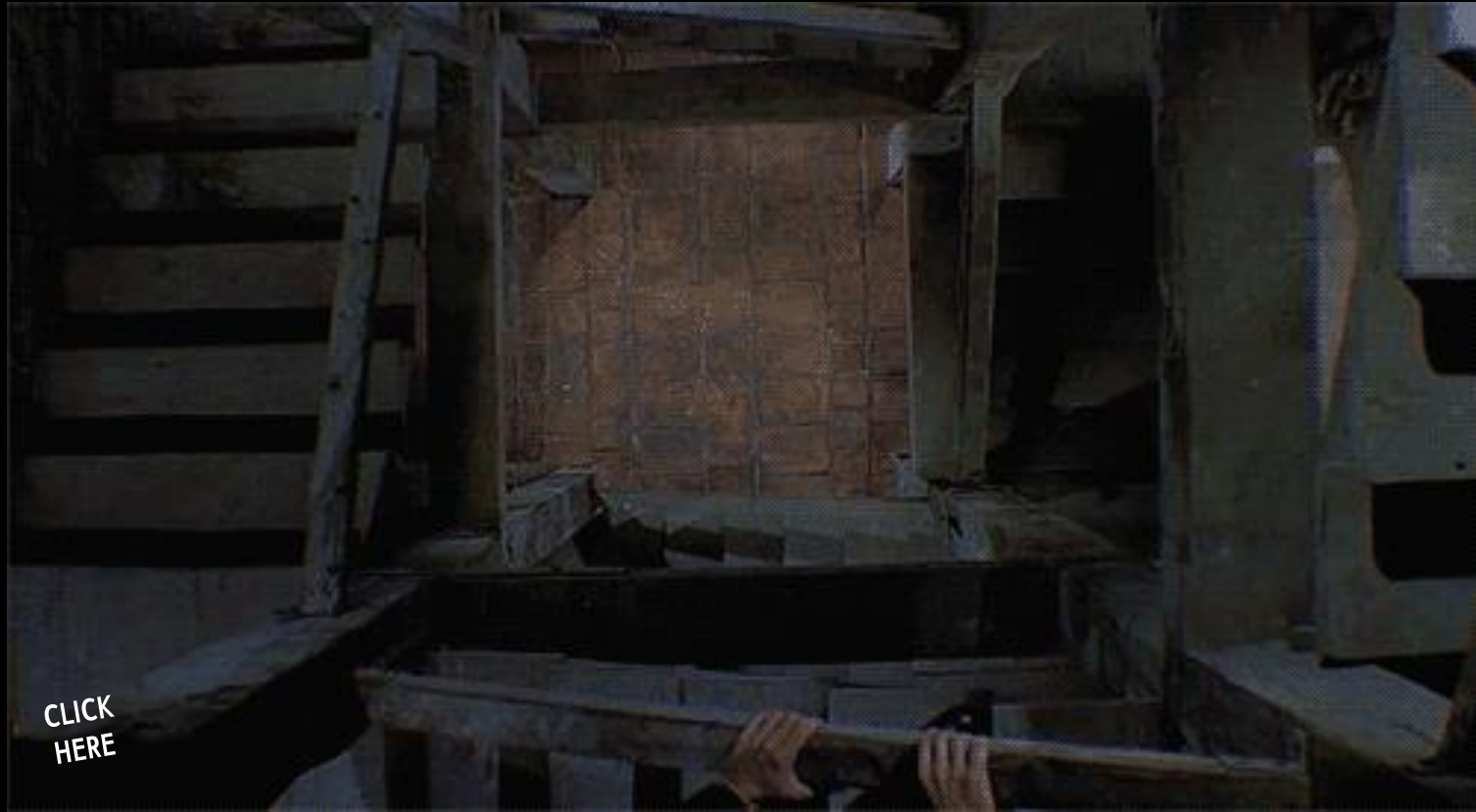
Dollies allow the camera a fluid way to get closer to the subject. Basically, a dolly consists of a wheel attached to the bottom of each tripod leg. This works great in a studio where floors are flawlessly smooth; but outside a studio, one cannot expect a smooth surface. Sidewalks have cracks, houses have bumpy transitions from carpet to hardwood and dollies don't roll smoothly on grass.



A dolly needs a specially designed track - think roller coaster - to provide a silky-smooth camera movement. A portable track will work on most relatively flat surfaces. Are you strapped for money? Try using an office chair as a dolly - or a wheelchair for a smooth ride. Other common items with wheels, like carts, skateboards and toy wagons, can work as a low-cost dolly.



A circular dolly used in the filming of *The Departed* (2006).



Want to really mess with your audience members' minds? Try zooming forward while simultaneously moving the camera backward on a dolly. This will create an otherworldly effect made famous by Alfred Hitchcock in the church tower scene in Vertigo.

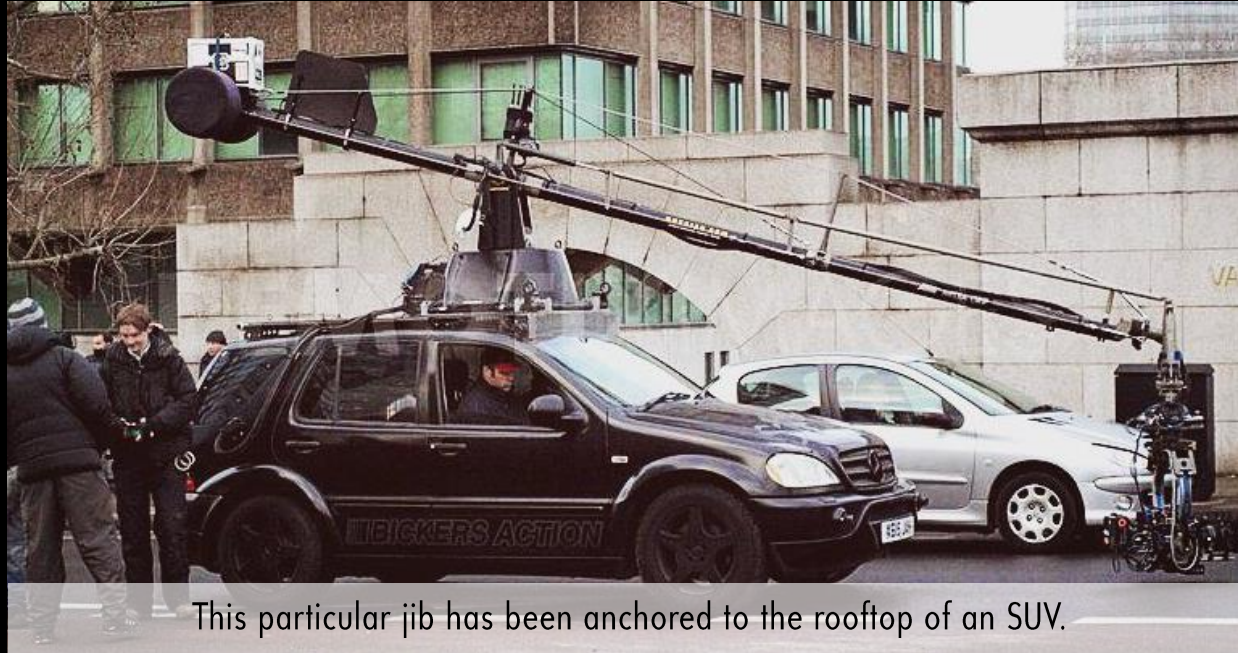
The Slider



A slider is a camera support that's somewhat limited in use, but perfect for those with small budgets. This rig attaches to the head of a tripod - sometime between two tripods - and allows a camera to slide along a track. Sliders work best with lighter cameras.

Camera travels only moves a few feet, but the result can be spectacular. Sliders offer a limited version of what the more advanced, and costly, dolly, jib or crane can accomplish.

The Jib



This particular jib has been anchored to the rooftop of an SUV.

A jib is a telescoping boom attached to a tripod. The camera attaches to the long end of the arm; the short end holds a counter-balancing weight. The tripod works as the fulcrum point resulting in a teeter totter-like tool that provides smooth and varied camera movement.

The Crane



Director JJ Abrams blocks a crane shot for *The Force Awakens* (2015).

A crane builds on the jib concept by adding hydraulics to smoothly move a long boom arm. This system comes at high cost. Similar to a "cherry picker" used to maintain power lines, the camera operator sits at the end of the crane with the camera. A 2nd operator controls the crane's movements. A crane can be attached to a special truck dispatched to the location of a field production.



In the stunning opening of Touch of Evil, Orson Welles directed a crane to capture more than three minutes of precision choreographed action.

Handheld Stabilizers

Handheld stabilizers, are usually small, hand held rigs. The pros often use a type of stabilizer known as Steadicam®. This device, strapped to the operator's torso, uses a heavy counter-balancing system (mostly a gyroscope) to work its stabilizing wonder. To use a body-mounted stabilizer well, the operator must be strong and agile.



Scott Sakamoto uses a Steadicam during filming of *The Revenant* (2016).



Steadicam inventor Garrett Brown shooting *The Shining* (1980).

The stabilizer allows the operator to move over uneven ground, or up stairs, while maintaining a smooth camera movement. While body-mounted stabilizers are expensive, alternatives such as Gimbals and Glidecams are among the most cost effective.

Helmet Mount

A helmet cam offers a compelling "through the eyes of" point of view (POV). In this situation, the human head becomes the camera head. This camera support might be appropriate for documentaries or extreme videos but overuse of this often jittery video might make your audience dizzy. You won't have much control over the operation of a helmet cam - zoom, focus and other settings won't be easy to change.

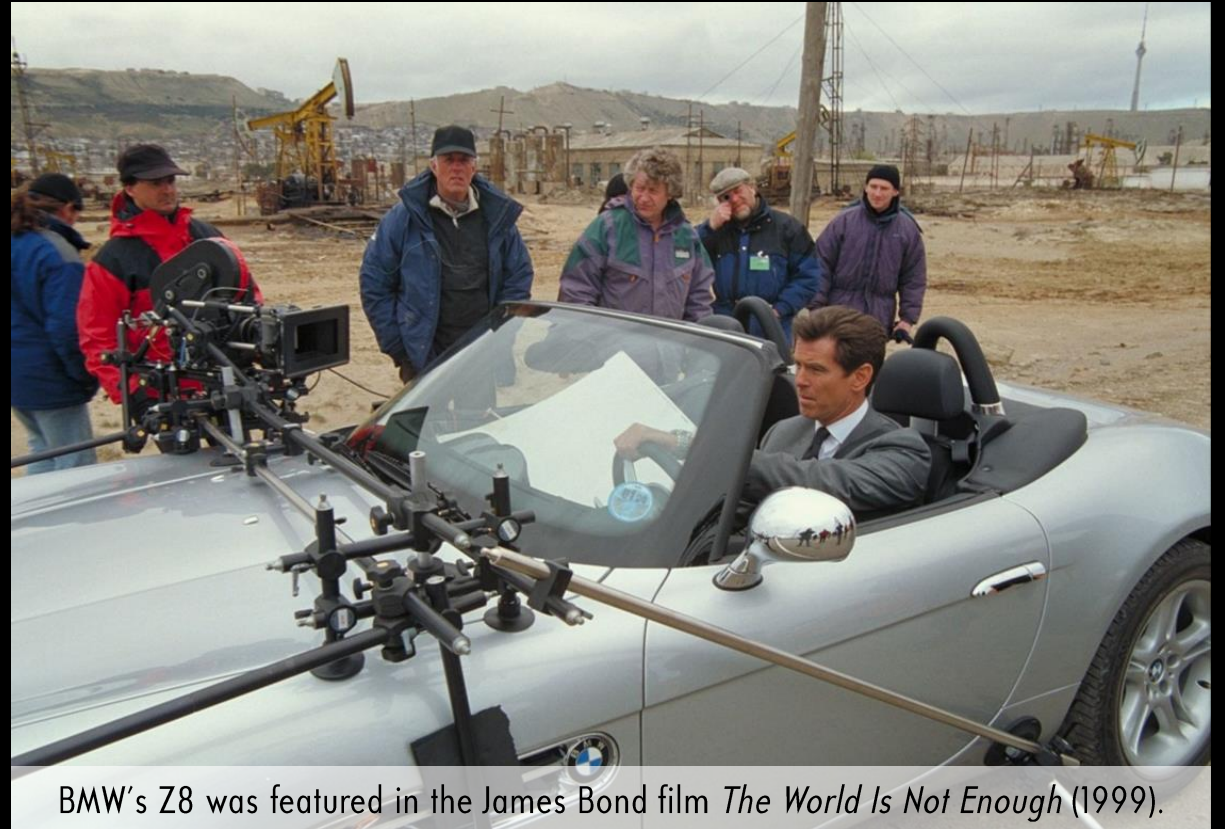


Fortunately, modern low-cost POV cams, like the GoPro Hero 11 Black, feature extremely wide angle lenses and a fixed zoom length, so the amount of control required is minimal.



Car Mount

Support systems designed to attach a camera to a vehicle use suction cups, and/or straps, to secure the camera to the car's hood, fender, door or even inside the car. The perspective from a car cam can be very gripping. To control the camera, you'll need a remote control and monitoring system similar to the jib setup.



BMW's Z8 was featured in the James Bond film *The World Is Not Enough* (1999).

RESHOOT

1. Generally speaking, what are the benefits of using camera support systems?
2. What could you use to substitute a dolly?
3. If you were shooting an action scene that required you to follow somebody being chased down a street, what support would you use? Explain.
4. When would it make sense to not use a support? Explain.



Next:

FIRST PROJECT!

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