

# RACE AMERICA

The Making Of A Film For The National  
Museum Of Racing, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

DAVID COLLISON

RACE AMERICA is an eighteen minute film spectacular on the subject of horse racing across America. It has been produced by DAVID COLLISON and STEPHANY MARKS of Theatre Projects Consultants Inc. for the National Museum of Racing in Saratoga Springs, New York State. The film is intended for screening once an hour in their Hall of Fame. The film was directed by KEITH CHEETHAM; with director of photography TERRY HOPKINS.

The American National Museum of Racing in Saratoga Springs, New York State, has been completely redesigned and refurbished under the supervision of Cleveland Design and Tempus, both London based companies, and it reopened to the public on the 14th July 1988.

I had worked with the all British design team on several occasions, including the Domesday Exhibition in Winchester in 1986, and when designer Ivor Heal invited me to the first meeting on this project I knew that it was to discuss the provision of sound effects throughout the museum. There was also a theatrical tableau with life-size figures depicting scenes from the hey-day of Saratoga as a famous spa town during the late 1800's. The three settings in this tableau were to be the interior of a spa, a hotel reception and a hotel balcony. A six minute sound and light sequence cycling from day to night was devised for the hotel scenes. And the spa, in addition to the theatrical lighting, incorporated an audio-visual display set into a stained glass window employing eighty archive photographs.

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However, one thing led to another and, as the project evolved over the ensuing weeks, the idea arose of providing some form of audio-visual or multi-vision experience in the somewhat barren sixty foot square Hall of Fame. The primary function of this room heretofore was to display the brass plates awarded to a selected number of trainers, jockeys or, indeed, horses, at the annual Hall of Fame induction ceremony. The idea now was to retain this function but to display the plaques in a more interesting environment which would also house a number of interactive video consoles at which visitors could view archive material which had been transferred to laser disc. And, to make fuller use of the room, the designers wished to incorporate a 12 to 15 minute visual montage/spectacular on the subject of American thoroughbred horse racing in all its aspects. At this point I contacted an old friend, Stephany Marks, who is a very experienced BBC television producer; and having just returned from two years in the

USA filming a documentary series on architecture, she had some very useful contacts and, more importantly, was available to act as Executive Producer for the project.

Film, Video or Slides?

After discounting a multi-slide projection presentation on the grounds that a) it had already been done in the Churchill Downs Racing Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, and b) the beauty of horses is in their "movement", we investigated the possibilities of video.

The designers did not wish to use any form of video wall because of the chequerboard effect spoiling the graceful lines of a thoroughbred in motion. We therefore considered the use of large screen video projection utilising a number of linked projectors sourced from a laser disc system.

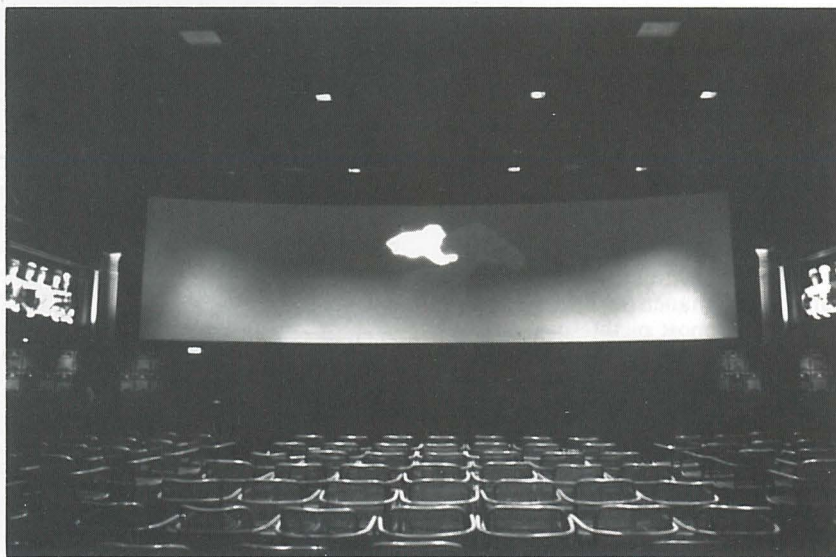
This eventually had to be discounted both on the grounds of maintenance costs (the replacement price of light valves and projector lamps is very high) and the fact that retaining a colour and brightness match between a number of video projectors over a

long period is not currently a viable proposition. Therefore, in the interests of being able to produce the best quality image with maximum reliability at a reasonable cost, we opted for traditional movie film. There was never any doubt that we were going to shoot the original material on 35mm film as there is, as yet, no alternative for colour, depth and image quality.

The Picture Format

The screen was sited over the platform at one end of the Hall of Fame and, for aesthetic reasons, had to be above the head height of people taking part in the presentation ceremonies. This meant, because of the relatively low ceiling, the screen could only be ten foot tall. Therefore, in order to produce an image with maximum impact, we decreed that the screen must be forty foot wide! This 4 × 1 ratio is, of course, completely non-standard (Cinemascope is approximately 2.5 × 1) and it consequently raised a whole set of new problems. Nothing like trying to do it the hard way!

Despite the fact that several experts advised, nay, *urged*, the use of multi-cameras and multi-projectors as the only method of producing a clean, bright and overall undistorted picture of the required size, Sidney Samuelson, Chairman of Samuelsons Plc, ran some tests for us and came up with the solution. Thus the film was shot with 35mm Panavision cameras adapted for "Super 35", which means that you gain some additional picture width by shooting over the edge area which is normally reserved for the optical sound track but which, in our case, we would not be using. (more of this later). Then, in order to get as much picture on to each frame as possible, the cameras were fitted with anamorphic lenses which squeeze the image in the ratio 2:1; and, of course, a complementary anamorphic lens had to be fitted to the projector to unsqueeze the picture and thus make it wider.



Showing the unique 4:1 screen ratio in the Museum's Hall of Fame.