

All of this gave us the maximum width we could possibly achieve on a 35mm film frame. But still the picture was far too tall for our "letter box" screen. What to do? The obvious answer — but only after one had thought of it — was to blank off the top and bottom of the frame and only show the centre portion. So, following some extremely careful calculations, the camera view finders were marked to indicate the centre third (approximately) of the frame, which was the only part the customers were going to be allowed to see.

Lining up shots with this thin strip in the view finder, where close-ups are inevitably a long way off, made life extremely difficult for Director of Photography, Terry Hopkins. It was not made any easier when Director Keith Cheetham, consulting his storyboard, would announce that he was only interested in a small portion of this thin strip as the shot was going to end up as an optical effect with several different pictures running on the screen at the same time. For the whole concept of the film was to produce a collage of images and sounds, without a formal commentary, providing a kaleidoscopic impression of all aspects of American thoroughbred racing both on and off the track. Thus, the completed film is virtually eighteen minutes of optical effects.

Because of this, the director had *his* major headaches during the editing stage; to give you an example: because there was no editing machine available with an anamorphic lens which could show Super 35 he was always looking at a squeezed picture with a (sometimes critical) strip down one side of the frame missing. Furthermore, there was no way of experimenting with or pre-viewing the split-screen and multi-image effects, so he had to wait until the optical house had completed the laborious and expensive task from his instructions before knowing whether or not it was going to work. Fortunately, he got it right, and it did! In fact, the impact of some of the visual effects even impressed *him!*

### On Location

The shooting of the film, now titled RACE AMERICA, was undertaken during two and a half action packed weeks in April/May 1987 and another two and a half weeks of equally thrill-packed action during July/August of that year. It was necessary to be around in the Spring to film a foaling sequence, and we had to be at the Saratoga track during the Summer for what must be one of America's most picturesque racing seasons, preceded by the yearling sales where untried young thoroughbreds are often sold for in excess of two million dollars.

At the end of the first shoot we had visited a major stud and breeding farm, a training centre, a horse park where we filmed steeple chasing, and seven race tracks from California to New York's Long Island, to

Kentucky (where we were lucky enough to catch the spectacular Kentucky Derby). We had almost enough documentary-type material, including two days of helicopter shooting, but lacked the close-up action shots of horses and jockeys in the starting gate and of the race itself which would add the necessary drama and excitement.

It had become almost too apparent sometimes that one could not expect to get a camera — yet alone helicopters and crane vehicles — anywhere near these highly strung and powerful beasts. And even if it were feasible, there are so many dollars tied up in that horse flesh that the owners and trainers would never take the risk. We therefore turned to Hollywood and sought the assistance of Corky Randall, one of the most experienced horse trainers for films.

Following Corky's advice, we hired some stables and a training track in California plus a starting gate, a six man starting gate crew, eighteen horses (necessary because they tire quickly and are then prone to breaking their legs. . .*expensive!*), six jockeys, three grooms, and all the necessary silks, saddles and blankets, etc. Most importantly, we had two marvellous wranglers, Beth Strickland and Dixie Hart. Dixie was a "real cowboy" who looked an extremely fit forty. We discovered that not only was he sixty but he still competed in rodeos.

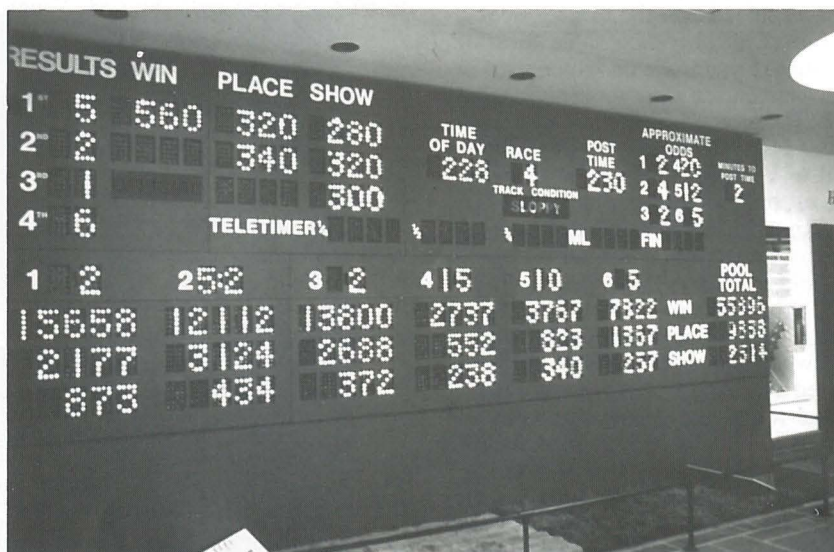
Two special camera vehicles were hired for the four day shoot with crews chosen for their previous experience with horses. There was the four-wheeled buggy, called an ATV, hired from the Clint Eastwood studios which is only slightly wider than a motorbike and has the cameraman sitting behind and slightly above the driver with the camera suspended from a shock mount. The ATV was able to race down the track behind a group of horses at full gallop and, with the camera at jockey height, move right through the pack. It was a dangerous shot, not previously attempted by Corky or the crew, but it worked beautifully.

The other vehicle, the LOUMA crane, despite its dead weight, is a highly flexible piece of equipment consisting of a long counterweighted boom arm mounted on a specially modified flatbed truck. The camera is attached to the end of the boom and is remotely operated — focus, tilt, pan, from a console at the back of the truck using video-assist monitors. Spectacular shots were obtained by swinging the camera right into the middle of the pack for close-ups of horses and riders from every conceivable angle. We did one run with the camera held right in front of a horse's face as it galloped at forty miles an hour, and another run with the camera travelling only a few inches from the ground immediately behind the flying hooves of the pack.

Having obtained the "special" shots, we moved our party of thirteen (director, production manager and two assistants, three camera crew, two lighting crew, one sound engineer and two producers — also acting as drivers, labourers, caterers, you name it) to Saratoga. A few days later we ended the shoot on a high note when Keith Cheetham decided that he simply *had* to have a shot of the camera actually coming round the track and approaching the home stretch *with a full crowd in the grandstand!* Following some delicate negotiations with the track officials, everyone entered into the spirit of the thing and we were allowed to put a camera car on the track fifteen minutes before the start of the first race. Thus the surprised racing public were informed over the public address system that when they saw a car with a film crew aboard racing round the track they were to pretend that it was a horse . . . that it was winning . . . and that they had backed it! "When you see that convertible I want everyone to stand up . . . and shout", exhorted the announcer. *And they did!*

### The Sound

Being a theatre sound consultant and having spent many years as a sound designer for



A working model of the Tote Board measures 19 ft x 10 ft.