DIGITISING YOUR OLD 8MM MOVIES

On July Focus Night one of our long standing members Phil Brighton gave us a hands on demonstration of the process he uses to recapture those old valuable film images onto magnetic tape.

The subject was of great interest to the audience many of whom obviously had enough "past experience" to have a library of valuable images on film which are well worth the effort of transferring onto modern magnetic media.

Phil brought his "rig" along to demonstrate the process right there on the spot. Now the rig does not have to look like a masterpiece of the joinery craft it just has to be strong and firm. Phil's rig met all those criteria and it worked a treat.

Phil's notes on the transfer process and rig construction are included at the end of this article and the article photographs show enough detail for anyone to copy the set up and have a go by themselves.

Phil lived for many years in South Africa and he used some very interesting film taken at a tribal gathering in what was originally Zululand to demonstrate the process of transfer. We were able to compare the before and after results.

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The finished result was very good with almost no loss of image quality or "flicker", well done Phil.

Phil was also active in a filmmaker club in South Africa and after a bit of encouragement he agreed to entertain us with some of the club short films. As is Phil's style the films were of comical genre (content not to be taken too seriously) and delightfully entertaining.

Well done Phil thanks for a very entertaining and useful presentation.

Notes on copying to tape from 8mm film

1 Ensure that the film to be copied is in good condition for screening; i.e. free from breaks in the perforations and all splices secure.

2 Lubricate the film to assist its passage through the projector. This will also clean the film at the same time.

3 See that the projector is 'warmed-up' before attempting transfer. This will make speed regulation easier.

4 The projection screen should have a clean white non-glossy flat surface. I use a sheet of A4 copy paper, I have also used white blotting paper with good results.

Items Required:

1 A variable speed projector with a three bladed shutter

2 A spray can of lubricant, 'Mr Sheen' furniture polish seems to work well.

3 A pair of film rewinds. Preferably with one of them geared-up.

4 Pass the film around a revolving drum of at least beer can size after lubrication to extend the length of film loop in air and thus allow lubricant air drying time.

5 Your video camera with a suitable mounting bracket. I tend to leave the setting on 'Auto', not everyone's choice, in any case you ca experiment with your own set up. If your camera has an external mike jack you can insert a blank plug to mute the on board mike and avoid picking up the annoying projector noise.

6 A solid board on which to rigidly mount the various items. The one that I use is about one and a half metres long by half a metre wide.

 7 Clean hands and a degree of patience!

Some general notes on the actual operation:

A three bladed shutter is required in the projector in order to get a closer match of the film 'flicker' to that of the tape transport. It will be found that quite a small

variation in projector speed will be required to match the frame speed of the camera.

If possible, a fairly long leader could be attached to the film in order to assess and adjust the speed of the projector before the "good stuff" arrives on screen.

Be warned, this is no time to be inattentive! The speed of the projector has to be monitored at all times.

It is quite important that the ambient light be kept as low as possible during the actual transfer operation. The less light the better. Black is good!

Keep a torch handy during the transfer, an occasional flash at the projector to ensure that all is going well is very reassuring. 200ft of film on the floor at the end of your labours is rather off-putting.

Give it a go. If nothing else it will keep you off the streets!