

Camping Sauvage

turns rain into sunshine

Serge Desrosiers, CSC, had his work cut out on the set of **Camping Sauvage**, a Quebec French-language comedy feature shot in summer 2003. "I had to make a camp site look gorgeous, motorcycle gangsters look funny, and rainy days look sunny!"

DP Desrosiers' other feature credits include **Dans Une Galaxie**, **Icarus Project**, **Farewell Letters** and **Station Nord**. His three-season television series **Diva** was nominated for a Gemini award, along with two other TV series, **Rumeurs** and **Quadra**.

Camping Sauvage tells the story of a broker forced into hiding after he witnesses a hit-and-run killing. He agrees to testify against the biker gang responsible in return for secure police custody. The safe house turns out to be a mobile home on a camping site, but of course the witness doesn't stay hidden forever.

Co-director Guy A. Lepage also played the lead role. Lepage is a major comedy star in French Quebec, although his work is unknown to most English speakers. He created **Un Gars, Une Fille (A guy, a girl)**, which was a fantastic success in Canada and has been franchised out to Israel, Italy, Poland, Germany, Bulgaria and the UK.

It's important to appreciate his background, because this is Lepage's first feature film, and, "The buzz, at least within the industry, is immense," Desrosiers says. "Everybody's waiting for it to come out. Lepage's involvement alone is expected to make it a success."

The movie will initially screen only in Quebec, which Desrosiers hopes will lead to a wider eventual audience. "It was a six million (Canadian) dollar budget, so there should be an English translation, and we're expecting it to make it to France for

theatrical release. Hopefully the DVD will be seen by a wider audience and help put Quebec humor on the map."

Comedy moments

Does he consider himself a brave DP? "I find it all exciting really. I'm claustrophobic, but heights don't bother me at all," he confesses. Just as well, as he was hoisted 75ft above Montreal on the end of a crane, for a shot that didn't even make the final cut. He also shot scenes on water, with his camera attached to the front of a pedal boat, and did the close shots of an explosion and fire scene himself, too.

Desrosiers was encouraged to achieve a different look for his first comedy feature. "Comedy was a new challenge for me. As well as making sure everything's right in each shot, you have to start asking yourself, 'Is this the funniest way I can present this scene?' So we experimented with different angles. We created a fisheye look for the actors' faces by shooting from two feet away on a 10mm lens. We wanted to freak out the audience a bit. Even burly motorcycle gangsters look funny like that."

Was the camp site location a little uninspiring? "It's not a beautiful place to film, but the challenge is making it look as good as possible," Desrosiers says. "Many of the shots were at 400mm zoom, and you can make a camp site look beautiful from that range."

Given the nature of the movie, the decision to shoot on super 35mm was practical as well as budgetary. "It was really important to have the flexibility of a 14 minute reload gap," explains Desrosiers. "Many of the scenes involved actors speaking directly to the camera, as if talking to themselves, in a confessional,



intimate way. During those takes, you don't want to break the mood. It's vital to keep the spontaneity and freshness going to get the best from the actors."

The wet look

A variety of film stocks was used to give the movie – which was shot in the city of Montreal, with the camping scenes based in the surrounding countryside – two distinctly different looks. "The 50 ASA 5245 was used to make the camping scenes bright and high-contrast, what I call the 'Florida look,'" says Desrosiers, "but because the film stock needs a lot of light, our days were shortened when we used it." He is quite a fan of (EASTMAN EXR 50D) 5245. "I've shot a lot of projects using it. You have to be dead on, it has almost no range, but the detail between blacks and whites is perfect."

The 'Florida look' became the wet look, when the weather turned on the crew during the third week of filming. "We had two weeks worth of bright, cheery-looking shots, then nothing but rain," recalls Desrosiers. "It was Biblical rain. The lights kept blowing out, so we had to wait for a break in the bad weather, then light and shoot. Of course there was rain water covering the ground, so we got extras to stand with hoses, to make it look as if they were tenants watering their lawns."

Desrosiers was particularly pleased with the scenes shot on the 500 ASA "This is the perfect stock for a digital transfer. You can't afford any grain," Desrosiers notes. "The (VISION2 500T) 5218 is grain-free and the results were really fantastic. It captures everything, which means you have to pay careful attention to detail. If a cable is in shot, the 5218 will find it!"

A Hot Gears rig was used to give Desrosiers control over the camera while staying in close contact with both Directors. "There were two Directors, both on their first feature project, so they needed an experienced DP to help out. It was useful for me to be on hand and discuss ideas for each scene. I couldn't do that if I was on the other side of the set on the dolly. So the Hot Gears rig was great to have. It was nice to have the three-way conversations on set; it allowed a good collaboration between me and the Directors."

Desrosiers is proud to admit that he has never in his career shot anything but trials on non-Kodak film. "I had to push the producers to go for Kodak film. It never fails to deliver the results you ask of it."

"We had two weeks worth of bright, cheery-looking shots, then nothing but rain, it was Biblical rain."

Camping Sauvage is the first movie for more than a decade to be shot in Quebec on a PanaVision Platinum camera, which Desrosiers calls 'The Cadillac' of camera equipment. The camera was supplied by Location Michel Trudel, whose assistance Desrosiers gratefully acknowledges. "It's pretty rare that a Quebec feature gets to use PanaVision cameras, so I'm pleased we had one at our disposal." ■



Opposite Page: Up in the air in downtown Montreal

Below: Sylvie Moreau and Guy Lepage being filmed in a pedal boat DP Serge Desrosiers, CSC (with camera) and First Asst Patrick Beaulac filming Guy Lepage (in green shirt)

