

march 2009 • issue #41 • rrp \$8.00



australian cinematographer



Quarterly Journal of the Australian Cinematographers Society  
[www.cinematographer.org.au](http://www.cinematographer.org.au)



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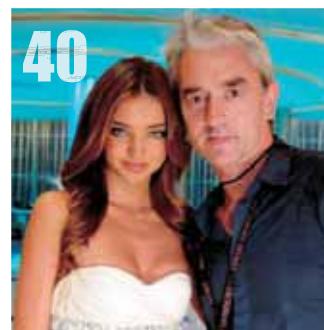
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**ON SET**

# RONAN'S ESCAPE

BY DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY DAVID LEMAY

A BACK TO BASICS FILM 'GEM' AMONGST A WORLD OF HD SHORTS.







*DOP David Lemay, Helena Valley, Western Australia*

We, as cinematographers in this day and age all embrace the new world of HD; we have to or we'll be left behind. But every now and then a special project arises, a project which allows us to get back to the raw basics and reminds us why we all became cinematographers in the first place, and gives us a rare chance to showcase our highly-developed skills which are sometimes forgotten in a sea of High Definition instant playback, File Compressions and Hard Drives.

*Ronan's Escape* Writer/Director A.J. Carter specifically wrote the script around a difficult subject and based the location filming in Perth, Western Australia as a challenge to all cast and crew involved with the idea of seeing what we could all achieve when put through our paces on a limited budget. Many of the locations and setups were so remote they required big budget, feature film-like pre-production efforts from the several young producers and the same from our camera and grip crew. Despite the filming challenges we knew lay ahead, the entire crew, including myself, were all extremely eager to give it our best and embrace this gem for what it was. I think it's the unknown factor of working with 30+ untrained school children actors, remote locations in the middle of summer, the casting of actor David Lazzarus, a 14yr old boy as the lead role in the film and of course having the opportunity to work with a director who was adamant about shooting on film, which offered something we all secretly wanted to be a part of.

I originally found the producers' post searching for an established Cinematographer for the film on an internet forum dedicated to Cinematographers in Australia. The producers had outlined the

basic storyline of the film along with detailed descriptions of the locations they wanted to film in. I was instantly attracted to the nature of the film's controversial script and the filming locations which would provide for some serious 'eye candy' cinematography... the kind of locations us cinematographers dream of! I had initially booked several weeks' holidays at the same time the film was scheduled to be shot but the chance to be a part of such a rare local production was just too much to pass on and I jumped at the chance to be a part of the film. The producers during location scouting had travelled over 1000km through the West Australian wheat belt and surrounding countryside in search of specific locations including 'The Tree' which was a pivotal 'character' in the film. Writer / Director A.J. Carter had a background in basic cinematography and an extremely good understanding of composition and movement, to the point where much of the script was originally constructed around the majestic locations he wanted to film. The rolling landscapes and beautiful sunset-kissed locations in this film are incredible; it was a great opportunity for me to really run with making this film look as beautiful as possible.

A.J. Carter was very particular about the style and feel he wanted the film to have and provided me with many samples and screen shots from other works. A.J and myself also made several trips to the locations before shooting where we would take stills from certain scenes and using Photoshop, we would effectively 'grade' the photos so I was in an extremely good position to achieve the exact look of the film we were after. After evaluating the photos and samples, I and the camera

team took on the challenge to achieve this 'vibe' to the film which led to an intriguing mix of lenses and stock, and later cameras! We successfully gave *Ronan's Escape* that natural older 'feel' we were after but without the audience being able to put their finger on why it looks that way.

The overall look and feel of the film was described by A.J. as 'achieving an aged, rural and somewhat behind-the-times feel but without setting the film 50 years ago'. The challenge was to give the film as much of this look as possible with minimal post

Through a stroke of luck and good fortune, the decision to shoot on 35mm was made and proved to be a bit of a treat, especially for a low budget short film. We had found a well maintained ARRI BL2 which was offered to the film's producers after word got around this small town that this new film was to be FILM and not HD. Our first scene with the BL was almost 3 hours drive from Perth city in the wheat belt town of Boddington, Western Australia. Transportation, prep and rigging of the BL in such a remote area proved to be challenging for our small crew, but a fun one at that; we were all excited at shooting on 35mm!

We started shooting the film on 35mm using a BL2 with an Angenieux zoom lens and the film stock chosen was Vision 2 5217. Having shot a lot on the 200T range and although Kodak has a daylight balanced 250D, I really like the grain on the 5217; to me it has a more honest feel and look about it. The down side obviously is having a 85 filter on all the time but we used 85n9 and 6s plus a polarizer shifting towards the end of the day to use the LL-D. I know some shoot in the harsh daylight of Australia on everything from 50 ASA upwards but I knew we would be shooting close to magic hour and I prefer to simply pull the ND's. Being from London and having shot many years in the Northern Hemisphere, I was blown away by the pure beauty of this land. The wheat belt in summer in WA is not only hot, to say the least, but the natural colors of the wheat versus the stunning blue sky helped to counter point the visual narrative perfectly. Photographically, midday in the Australian summer months, the sun is almost straight up and although we had intended to shoot towards magic hour, this was not possible, due to time constraints, but the rushes show this harsh light to have a lot of character in its own right. I have shot a lot with nets on the back of lenses (Dior nets) and I had worked a visual style based on this initially, but after a technical issue with actually physically being allowed to place a net on the back of the Angenieux lens, we opted to go "clean". I must say I love the much more "honest" look in hind sight; however, it did create a heated debate at the time! This was very much a film of adapting, something I can imagine many people who live in the remote parts of Australia have to do day in and day out for generations. We had a plan, changed it, worked on new ideas and they even got modified.

After shooting began smoothly, thanks to our fantastic production and camera crew, despite our efforts, our luck and good fortune was short-lived. After a successful 1st day filming in rural



Director A.J. Carter and actress Kirstie Chorley,



Camera Assistant Damien Smith and DOP David Lemay check light levels,



Camera Assistant Aaron McCann preps the ARRI Sr3 Super 16 camera



*DOP David Lemay and Director A.J. Carter prepare for the film's glorious opening shot, Helena Valley, Western Australia*

Western Australia, 8am Day 2 saw the failure of our beloved ARRI BL2. Initially it appeared a fuse had blown in the BL, but upon later inspection it became apparent the drive motor had shorted and burnt out. Obviously on any film shoot, this would be bad news, but with a tight budget shoot, two buses of school children extras on set, along with cast and crew, there were a lot of sad faces.

Decisions had to be made. A.J. Carter was scheduled to fly back to Los Angeles within 10 days and with no 'spare' 35mm camera available in the state, the decision was made to continue filming on super 16 with a local ARRI SR3. To achieve the look we wanted with the ARRI, I decided to use the exact same film stock in S16mm to preserve some of the visual integrity of the shoot. Because we had used the older Angenieux lens with the BL2 to give the film a slightly older and 'rural' feel, switching to super 16 halfway meant using newer Zeiss super speed lenses. However, we knew that we could get very close to the same 'look' as the film was to be scanned in at Cutting Edge Post's "bones" suite, pulling everything we could from the neg using the 10 bit log Cineon files for post. We're yet to do a final grade but the rushes look pretty damn close in both 35mm and S16mm not withstanding the obvious depth of field and grain etc.



*Director A.J. Carter works with one of the 'School Bullies' from the film*



*DOP David Lemay and Director A.J. Carter,*



#### DIRECTOR NOTES ASSOCIATED WITH THE ABOVE IMAGE:

Ronan's Hand- Note the extremely shallow depth of field and selective blurring to the frame. We channel our view to Ronan's fingertips brushing gently through the wheatgrass. Probably one of the most important shots in the lead up to his 'escape'. I want to 'feel' this shot with Ronan. -A.J. Carter

#### ABOUT THE FILM:

The film *Ronan's Escape* is an emotional rollercoaster with a highly controversial ending. A strong underlying message about the devastating effects of bullying in schools is the skeleton of the film and while *Ronan's Escape* has many elements within making it a visually beautiful film, it certainly does not follow the clichéd happy ending which Hollywood has served audiences for years. The controversy surrounding the end of the film will no doubt strike a chord with audiences and help to bring the subject of school bullying and its real effects into discussion. It was great working on this little production despite the bad luck and the difficulty and remoteness of the locations, but the end results speak for themselves. Not only do we have a great looking piece of art, working on *Ronan's Escape* really gave me something to look forward to each day and took me back to the days where there was no HD option or fancy Hard Drives to store data. Just film stock, loading tents and magazines. It was just wonderful. The film, due to its controversial script and amazing visual elements, has a very good chance of successful submission to the high end film festivals such as Cannes, Toronto and Sundance so we're all very excited to see where this beautiful film goes and hopefully showcase some of Australia's beautiful landscapes to the world..

*A sneak preview trailer made from the rushes and more behind the scenes images can be found on the film's official website at [www.ronansescape.com](http://www.ronansescape.com)*



DOP David Lemay