

WIDENING YOUR HORIZONS

Pro8mm's Max-8 Widescreen Format makes Super 8 negative film HD and Widescreen-compatible

By: Merle M. Bertrand

The first thing you'll notice is the color. At least that's the first thing I noticed as I took my first look at the digitally transferred Pro8mm negative film footage I'd shot of the Austin skyline. The blue sky was *really* blue; the red canoe cruising down Town Lake vibrant against the spring-green foliage crowding the river's edge. The River City's ever-growing skyline practically glistens in the background as joggers flash past the screen.

The transferred film has a living, textured quality to it that no video format — not even the best hi-def — can match. It's hard to believe that this is Super 8 film, especially if you haven't been paying attention to how Burbank, CA-based Pro8mm has almost single-handedly kept the small gauge format alive over the years with its development and production of 8mm negative film stocks.

While Pro8mm's introduction of Super 8 negative film stocks has been nothing short of revolutionary for a format perhaps still best associated with family movies of yesteryear, the looming onset of HD television and widescreen DVDs left the company facing a new dilemma: how to make the boxy little Super 8 frame relevant in today's increasingly letterboxed world?

They responded by, ahem, "widening" Pro8 negative's appeal through the introduction of Max-8, a 16x9 widescreen format Super 8 film. Pro8mm, (formerly known as Super 8 Sound), achieved this result by expanding the frame size of the Super 8 stock, allowing more of the film frame to get used as it passes through the camera gate, thus leading to a 20% increase in frame size when composing for HD.

With the viewfinder of the company's popular warhorse, the Classic 8 Professional Camera, modified to show the boundaries of the 16x9 frame, it's remarkably easy for the camera operator to compose shots. (It's also

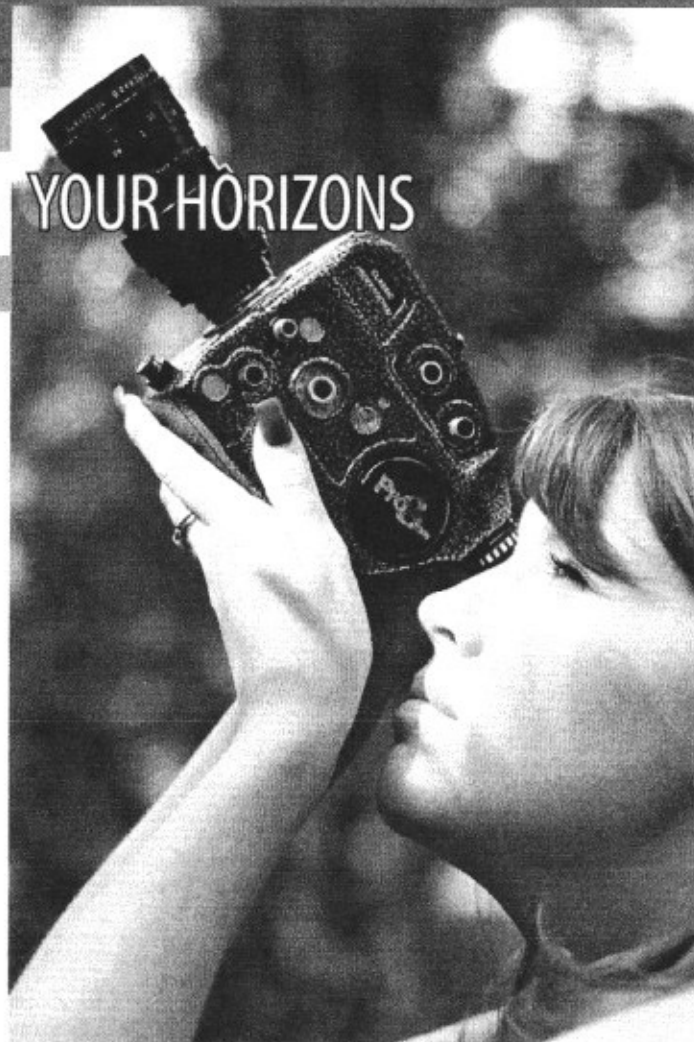


Photo By Rei Sutton

worth noting that these modifications do not affect the camera's ability to shoot a standard 1.33 frame.)

Now, I'm not a cinematographer by any stretch of the imagination. Yet, I was able to achieve some very striking results just runnin' and gunnin' around town one afternoon, armed with nothing more than the modified Max-8 camera and the rudimentary basic photographic skills I learned in film school way too many years ago.

The two stocks I used in my test — Pro8/63 (Fuji Eterna,

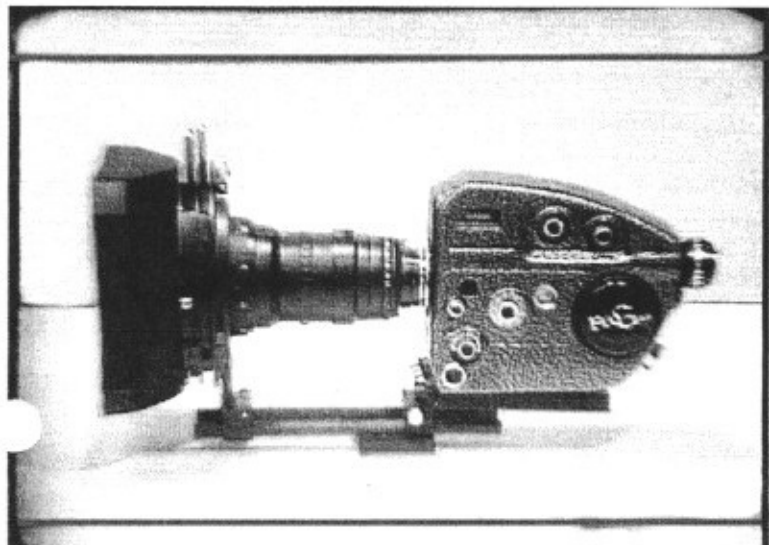
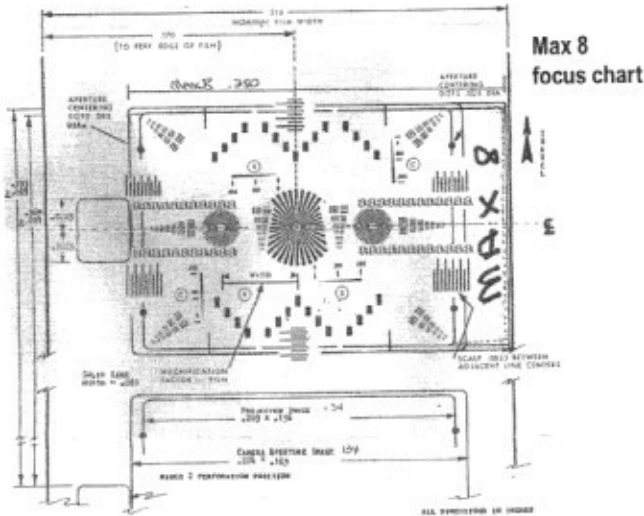


Photo by Robert Rander Harrison



Actual image aspect ratio



► 250 Daylight) and Pro8/05 (Kodak Vision 2, ASA 250D) — are two of the latest film stocks of the many offered by Pro8mm. These are the very same stocks used by professional cinematographers around the world, re-manufactured for use in Super 8 film cameras. The film comes pre-loaded in a traditional Super 8 cartridge, which can quickly and easily be snapped into place. No sweaty loading bags, clattering film cans, or telescoping film cores here; just snap the film cartridge into place, close the camera's snugly fitting door, and you're ready to shoot. Which is nice, considering how spoiled we've become simply by being able to pop a tape or mini-disc into our video cameras.

Ah, but when you squeeze that trigger, man! You *know* you're shooting film! It's literally a visceral thrill to hear the mechanics of the shutter and see the slight flicker in the viewfinder as the film passes through the gate. It's a sensation that no "REC" indicator will ever be able to match.

The Classic 8 camera is remarkably easy to operate and well-balanced. It's a surprisingly light and agile camera for something made out of metal, although the battery pack and cable provide a minor inconvenience.

Oh, and a word of caution: spoiled videographers have grown used to fancy color viewfinders showing them exactly what they're recording to tape. It's easy, especially if you shoot a lot of video, to think out of habit that what you're seeing through the Classic 8's viewfinder is what you're exposing to the film, which, of course since

it *is* film, isn't necessarily so. While the manual exposure setting is easy to learn — a simple indicator needle visible through the viewfinder lets the operator know if the exposure is okay — it's up to the operator to remember to check the exposure before each shot and adjust it, if necessary.

Still, even here, the remarkable resilience of Pro8mm negative film is on display. The stuff simply has so much latitude and so much can be done during the transfer to video, that an operator has to *really* screw up to shoot an unusable image.

For every blow digital video tries to strike against

motion picture film in general — and Super 8 film in particular — Pro8mm always seems to come up with an answer. With their new Max-8 widescreen format, they've literally maxed-out Super 8's potential, and the results are as stunning as my panoramic shot of the state capitol against the blue Texas sky.

Indie Slate assistant editor Merle Bertrand is *not* a cinematographer, although he did shoot everything in his new documentary, "Thunder Hill: Long Shots On A Short Track."

**PARTNERING SUPER 8MM
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WIDESCREEN TECHNOLOGIES.**

INTRODUCING MAX-8

THE NEW 8mm WIDESCREEN FORMAT

The MAX-8 format begins with a widescreen modification to Pro8mm's popular Classic 8 Professional Camera. The custom modification expands the frame size on the super 8 film master.

The viewfinder on the camera has the 16 x 9 frame marked for better framing during production. This gives filmmakers the ability to work in a ratio which is more compatible with High Definition, Enhanced for Widescreen DVD Mastering, and 35MM Academy.

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