

The Steadicam® flyer review

By

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Okay, let's get straight to it. The majority of the Steadicam® flyer parts are simply revamped version of the Steadicam® Mini. The only three things that have been added are the gimbal handle, dual arm and adjustable socket block. Gone are the days of the single spiky elongated arm. Phew! I personally did not like the look at all. Taking its place is the smooth sexy dual arm instead. The other part is the gimbal handle which has been replaced by a more formed handle to that of its more expensive siblings. Last but not least, the ultimate addition, the socket block. These are the three more noticeable attributes of the Steadicam® Flyer. Together, these new additions make the flyer simply the most radical stabilizer in its price range.

I used a Sony PD 170 3CCD camera for this setup, mounted with a mic and the cameras battery. Unfortunately I did not have access to any larger cameras at the time but I can surely mention that, it would have provided more stability due to the law of physics – Larger objects require a greater force to move them. This would have certainly made a difference in operation. I could have used the onboard battery but went with the cameras own; in order to add more weight being that this was a light setup than optimal.

The Sled:



As mention above the one thing that has changed is the gimbal handle. It looks more like its older brothers which gives the sled a much better look. I prefer this design over the older version. I did not see why they didn't just do it in the beginning. If it was cost than it really wouldn't have made a big difference at all. Than again, that's a different story all together. The pan bearing was smooth as with the tilt and roll. It was very smooth in all directions as it should be.



The gimbal sleeve maintains the same design characteristic as it was on the Mini. It was easy to grip and comfortable on the tip of the fingers. As I've stated many times to homebuilders, in order to get absolutely 99.9% free play in any gimbal it has to be machine to the closest of tolerance with the help of optimal bearing. The Steadicam® is no exception and they have continued to prove it with their fantastic gimbals. By looking at the picture above you can see how the gimbals' handle looks. It really gives the rig a more professional look and makes a comfortable rest point for your right hand (or left if you are left handed).



The post still retains its very thin diameter which is between 20-30mm in diameter. I still regard this as very small but as I suspect, since the rig was calculated for very light setups they did not want to add any more expensive. Point taken but the option should have been added, regardless. One thing I dislike was they did not make the post extendable. Regardless of the price and weight range it was expected for, this feature is one of importance. I'm sure, again, they had their reason - cost.



The X-Y stage is still the same with its smooth fore & aft, side-to-side adjustments, a lock down mechanism for preventing the camera from crashing to the floor and locking system. I had little or no problems at all with the mechanism. Just at times the small pin used the mounting plate had to be moved to different holes on the plate to be able to make a neat fit with the camera I was using. A little trails and error are permitted in finding the best suitable connection for your camera. To iterate, it was important to find the right spot on the plate that the camera will sit on because there is a limit to where the sliding stage can be positioned to really get a proper initial balance.

Any way, that falls into 'training' of the rig instead of what this review is about.



At the base of the sled are two Manfrotto® mounting plates. One on top and the other on the opposite side, back to back, that is. If my assumptions are right the pacts are still wired the same. Meaning that the top plate is wired for current and the other one is a dud. Not wired for current. I assume this can be fixed by simply doing it yourself if you are brave enough. The idea was simply to use a second battery as added weight for heavier cameras to in order to get a better balance of the system.



The batteries that came along with the system are two dionic Anton Bauers®. The ones with the little display on the side for

reading power level of the batteries. It is really cool idea but surely expensive on its own. The idea that two are included in the deal was a huge plus. You even get a charger, not single but a dual one, which makes life even more convenient - Smart move.

To view the image a 16:9/4:3 color monitor is used. The image is pretty impressive indoors as it is out doors. See the image below. It also comes with a remote control that can be attached to the monitor bracket by means of a small piece of velcro. A nice little touch to the system I think.



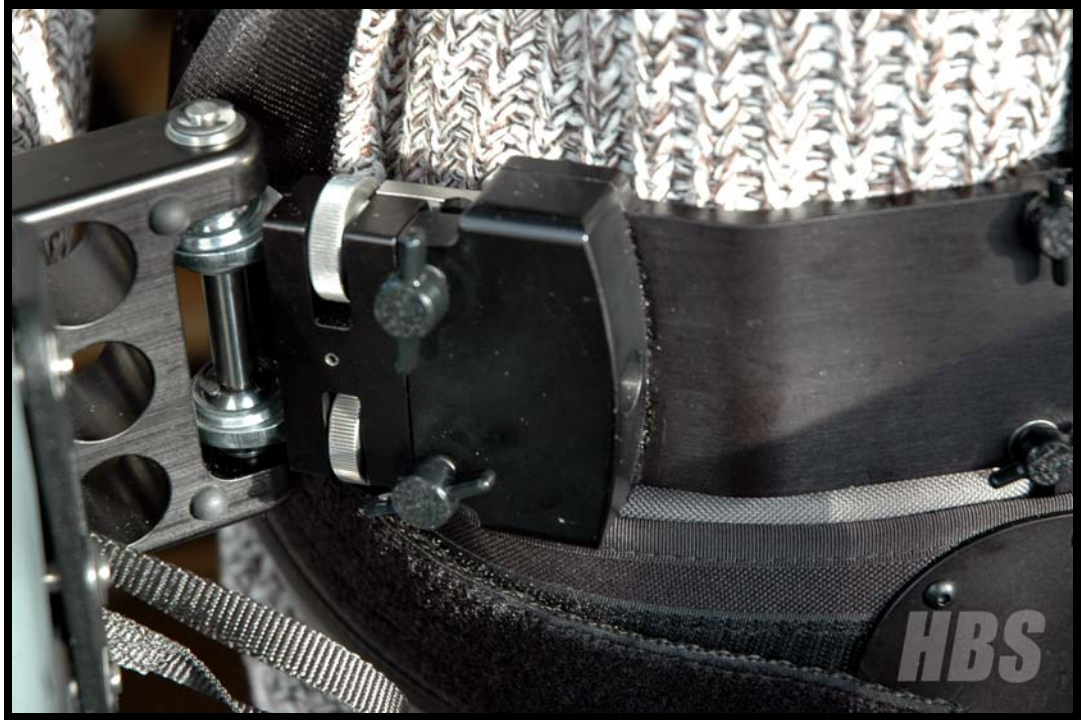
The Vest:

As this system is to be worn it is imperative that the harness used to carry it be very comfortable and most of all, light. As this is a light system the issue of weight is definitely not an issue for this system. The vest resumes the same design as it was design for when it was made for the Mini in mind. It is light and comfortable to wear. The idea of being able to carry around a system for hours without the need to dock is certainly the golden eye of expectations. Well, this system is capable of doing just that. The vest felt very sturdy, a characteristic that is very important when handling any stabilizer system. One thing it does not have is adjustable shoulder straps. Probably not all important but would make finer adjustments possible. Regardless, it felt comfortable sturdy and that is the important thing.

Gone is the arm stud that supported the older single arm which as been replaced by the probably one of the most important feature in any stabilizer system, the famous socket block pair. This is one of the smartest additions to any low budget system and this is one of the reasons that make this Steadicam system shine above all others in this price range and lower.

Like its bigger brothers one can adjust the fore and aft as well as the side to side of the arm to your preference. This is one helluva brilliant concept. Pro ops cannot live without this feature and certainly not I after testing it out. If you are serious

about being an operator, than there is no substitute for this kind of arm adjustment.



The vest bracket resembles the one on its older siblings. It is adjustable for left hand operating and right hand operating. It is also adjustable on its Y-axis, meaning it can be moved up or down for added comfort determining on the operator's physique. Otherwise, there isn't much to say about the vest that has not been covered before when it was packaged with the mini. Although the vest is less padded is still provided a good fit and comfort for this weight range I doubt if is really

necessary. Your clothing acts as extra padding any way so it evens out.

The Arm:

Now I come to the icing on the cake, the best of the best with rigs in this class, the reason why this system shines over the rest. That's right; I'm talking about the arm, the real reason why you would buy this rig. Explain all this in two words – Smooth Sailing!

One of the biggest talks is the Iso-Elastic® feature of the, which I did get to experience in a way. The arm did stay where I put it but only by adjusting the springs to that point. It tended to drift away definitely due to the weight being so light. As mentioned before, the more mass the better the stability of the system. By adjusting for various heights the arm did increased or decreased to the level desired by me. The adjusting knobs were easy on the fingers but I would have preferred the grip to be slightly coarser for better grip. I found it a little too smooth but that's me.

The smoothness of the arm is remarkable. It was simply effortless in performance. When Charles Papert, an excellent Steadicam® operator by the way, said it performed almost like a master arm, he wasn't kidding. I had test driven a Sachtler® rig and can easily tell you that this was smoother than the Sachtler arm. Probably at the time the adjustments were not

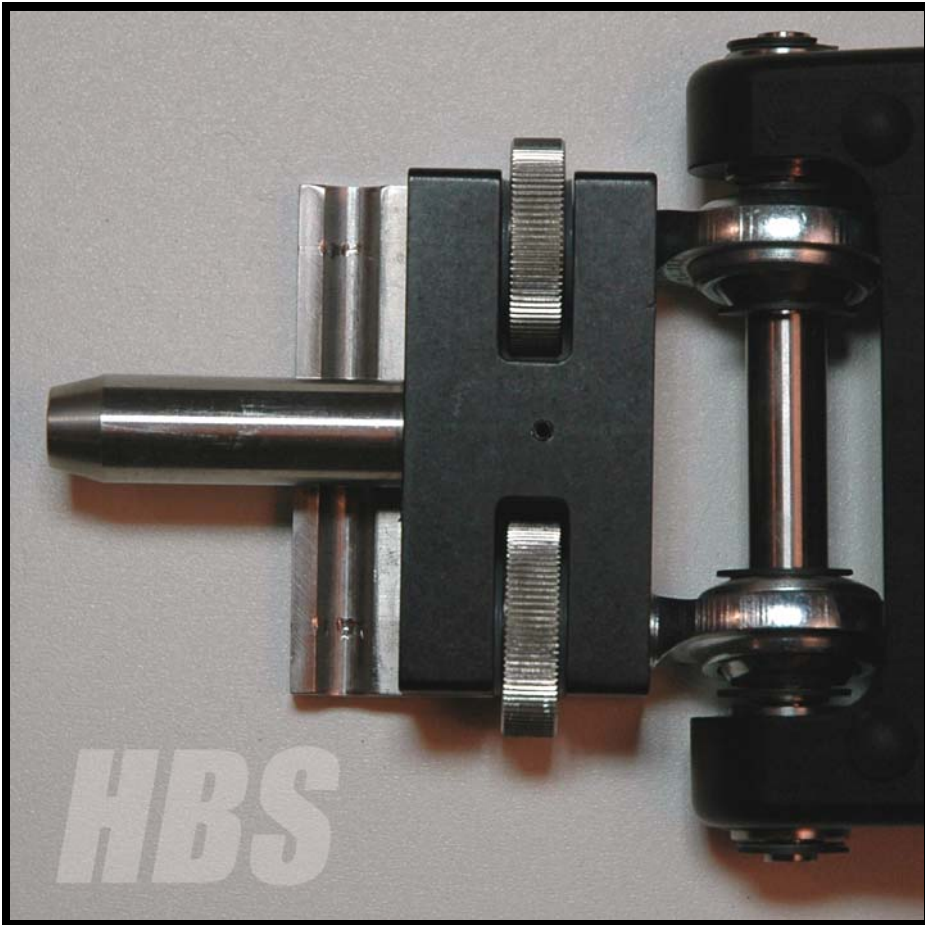
right when I tested the Sachtler but right off the bat, this Steadicam® Flyer arm impressed me within seconds of putting on the arm. Now that was enough to convince me in buying this thing, if I really had a good enough reason for it. The smoothness of this arm continues throughout its boom range. No glitches what-so-ever. Adjusting to different arm heights was easy as butter. It's cool to see the arm actually lifting when turning the knobs. This is a fine example of the build quality of the Steadicam® system.





The side to side adjustments on the arm were difficult to adjust on the fly. I'm not too sure if this was the fault of this particular rig or if this was a standard on all production units? I had to relief some of the pressure of the block by lifting the rig physically (thank goodness it was light). In worst scenarios I had to remove the actual arm and in which case it was easy as butter. I don't want to make assumptions that all other units will present itself with this issue. Again, it could just be that I was unlucky. Anyway, the overall performance of the arm made up for that. The adjustments of the side to side are done with roll knobs as I call them. The original method used an

Allen wrench for adjustments on the big rigs. It seems Tiffen decided to include this in the flyer which was a good move. Again, like the arm adjustment knobs, I would have preferred the roll knobs to be coarser than smooth for better grip of the finger. Than again, it's probably me who has this problem. See picture below.



By looking at the arm you can see that the arm uses a one spring system with no pulleys or cables. Strange you say? Perfect I say. Less friction is a good thing.



I can see that Tiffen tried to get the Iso-Elastic out of an arm that uses no spring and pullies. I am not going to go into the technical aspect of it but leave it you all who decide to audition the system yourselves. I will continue this matter over at HBS as I plan to write out a more technical article with many more detail pictures of the system after this review.

A one spring approach coupled with a strong spring brings the weight bearing capacity of this arm between 2, 3 - 6,8kgs. These are very good specs for those wanting to do small corporate video work. Some of the smaller film cameras would benefit from this system as well. If you have a relative okay back that deems impossible to carry anything over 7 kgs than this system is perfect. I have a slight problem with my back that makes it difficult to carrying heavier rigs for a longer than 5-10mins. With this system, I can definitely feel the difference –Back friendly. When I did the test I had the rig on for about 30mins straight. For me, this is a record. I really don't envy those pro ops like Charles Papert, Jerry Holiway and Garret Brown when they are flying those heavy rigs. Hell, I respect them to the bone.

Conclusion:

What is there to say? Nothing really. How do I consider the system? Well, you already know what I think. Should I recommend it? Hell yeah, only...

1. If you are a serious advent videographer with lots of upcoming jobs that entail lots of on the move scenes then yes.
2. If you are an aspiring Steadicam® operator with the goal to fly heavier rigs but can't afford your own high-end setup at this point in time, then yes.
3. If money is no object, then yes.
4. If you feel that carrying larger rigs hamper your operations due to back problems but you still feel you can manage lighter rigs, than yes.
5. If your clients based are only ultra small scale business with on a tight budget, then yes.
6. If you get lots of offers from indie film makers who crave for the Steadicam smoothness but don't have a budget for pro ops with bigger systems, then yes.
7. If you see yourself as never venturing outside the 6, 8 kgs maximum camera capacity, then yes.
8. Last but not the least. If you just don't care about the cost because you are completely nuts about Steadicam then I say think again.

9. If your interest is purely curiosity then **No!** Build one instead. At least give it a try. You'll learn a lot.

Minus points:

1. Difficulty of the side to side adjustments of the vest. I've already explained why.

2. Both arm socket block adjustments being a little too smooth. Again, I've explained why.

3. Non-adjustable post.

4. Thin post.

5. Shoulder strap adjustments

So, there you have it. Hope you are inspired to get one if you are a serious contender Good luck. BTW, a special thanks to a good friend who assisted me in this great venture. You know who you are. Thanks buddy.