

£3.50/£6.90

film waves

the magazine for independent filmmakers

**The 16th Lesbian & Gay
London Film Festival**

British Cinema
In need of a prescription?

Philosophy and Film
Independent way of thinking

Metrodome
Distribution strategies

Censorship
in Communist Europe

Rosethud and Earthly Echo
Notes on film sound

Kinopraxis: Is film dead? 24P and digital cinematography

ISSUE 17 • 1-2002





By Jake Astbury

Super8

When I was at film college I mastered all my work on video as was advised by my tutors. These were the same tutors that informed me in their infinite wisdom that Super-8 was dead. That was 10 years ago.

Today my films are transferred to Digibeta and mastered on Super-8. Super-8 for Kodak hasn't been a big money maker for probably 15 years, yet they have continued to support this gauge. Two years ago Kodak released two new Super-8 stocks and the user base for this 8mm gauge has grown dramatically in the film and television industry.

However, there are still people who view Super-8 as nothing more than an amateur format. Unfortunately the myth of Super-8 relies on what people have watched when their parents projected a film shot by dad that was shaky, out of focus, scratched, and over or underexposed. The reality of Super-8 is far different. So with the digital age well into gear, I want to talk about why it's still an excellent format to shoot.

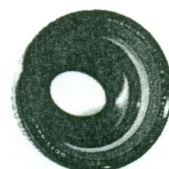
The first Super-8 camera I bought cost me £25.00. It was a very basic point and shoot Chinon XL camera. Through the years I've owned about 13 different cameras. Not because they were unreliable. All but three of them have been sold to various production companies and celebrities. So now I work between my Nalcom with 2X Anamorphic Lens, a Bauer Royal, and a Beaulieu 6008S with a Scheider 6-70 1.4 C-Mount Lens. With these cameras

I have given myself the tools to explore film pushed to its limits at an extremely low cost in comparison to working in 16mm or 35mm.

I use Super-8 as a master format. Thanks to digital technology, I can edit without cutting the film, knowing full well that in the future my images are safe because they have originated on film as opposed to the many different electronic formats that are continually changing. This was one of my strongest reasons for first shooting Super-8, after experiencing a considerable loss of much of my degree work which is now unplayable due to drop out, tracking, and lack of players for the various formats I worked on. So Super-8 has been the perfect medium for creating ideas on film at a low cost.

It's certainly not difficult to make Super-8 shine with images full of production value. For me the image shot on film should reference that it has originated on film. Some present feature films lack any texture, with over-lit scenes and no sign of grain. It's this tactile feel of film that new filmmakers respond to when choosing between Digital and film. Super-8 emulsions are some of the oldest available, and have a seminal feel harking back to the days of Technicolor.

Films like *Taxi Driver* and *Apocalypse Now* have such stunning colour and texture content, that truly represent the infinite dynamics of film. Super-8 emulsions respond in



a similar way without the need of pre-flashing and complex processing techniques that bring images alive. This is due to the fact that Super-8 stocks are in the main Reversal emulsions.

Reversal Film is beautiful. Before I discovered negative stocks of 16mm & 35mm, the first images I ever shot on film were using Reversal Film K40. I had spent so much time before at college shooting various high-grade tape formats, where images looked so disposable in their final form. Yet one roll of processed K40 made me feel like I'd discovered magic. Film at it's purest, shot and processed, no negative, just one positive print, making it so much more precious. Just one roll is all it takes to become hooked to this format.

Reversal film for those who are unfamiliar with the term, is positive transparency film, like slide film. Negative and Reversal stocks are two very different formats. Negative has a very wide margin of latitude that allows for both manipulations in printing and telecine. Reversal stock has a much smaller latitude that is less forgiving in the exposure department, but offers higher contrast and deeper colour saturation, giving images produced in this format a very individual feel.

THE SUPER-8 STOCKS

Kodak produces five Super-8 stocks and each has their own unique look. My favourites are K40, 7278 and 7276. Though for commercial work 7240 and Vision 7274 colour negative prove their worth.

KODACHROME 40 ASA to Tungsten

This stock owes its gorgeous look to the final stages of it's processing. K40 is a B/W stock off the shelf; this also gives the stock a long shelf life. In the processing, colour dyes are added, giving highly saturated colours to the final image. Because it's a colour dye process this stock is less prone to fading, making it ideal for archival use.

EKTACHROME 7240 125 ASA to Tungsten

This is a true colour film originally designed for media use in 16mm as a multi purpose stock, also known as Video News Film of VNF.

TRI-X 7278 200 ASA to Daylight

I just love B/W film. This is a grainy high contrast stock and being B/W has more latitude than colour. It's a great stock for shooting in both low light and bright conditions used with a neutral density filter.

Opposite and next page: Jake's S8 film *A Secret Film*, 1995, shot on TRI-X
Above: an anamorphic lens
Below: a selection of Kodak S8 stock





“The philosophy of Super-8 revolves around freedom. The compact designs with many features allow for spontaneous filmmaking that needs split second decisions without the use of dollies, cranes and heavy tripods”

PLUS-X 7276 40 ASA to Daylight

7276 is a beautiful stock. For that classic Black & White image, this fine grain stock is in a league of its own. Images shot on this stock look so smooth.

7274 VISION 200T

The first colour negative stock on Super-8 to be released through Kodak. Being a negative 'T' stock its fine grain and colour reproduction give the image a more realistic feel. However this stock is designed solely for telecine to digital tape. This stock in Super-8 is another workhorse for the industry and has proved very popular in both film and television productions.

My main use for Super-8 is experimental, using the various filmstocks to achieve new looks for commercial use later. Super-8 cameras are generally packed with features such as: Variable Shutter, Time lapse, Single frame, Slow Motion, Variable speeds, Macro, Auto 'B' Setting, Back Wind, Cross Dissolve, Fade and Fast Lenses of 1.4 and 1.2 used in conjunction with a 180-degree shutter for low light shots.

I've always been fascinated by Stanley Kubrick's film *Barry Lyndon*, which utilised all natural light and 35mm cameras fitted with fast lenses. This kind of exploration in motion picture film would be way out of most Independent filmmaker's budget. But using a XL Model Super-8 Camera you can explore this area with remarkable results. I have used various models of XL camera to push K40 to its limit to create exciting and surreal imagery. I love using slow stocks in low light because of the saturation of colour and the film grain becomes more pronounced if slightly under-exposed.

The philosophy of Super-8 revolves around freedom. The compact designs with many features allow for spontaneous filmmaking that needs split second decisions without the use of dollies, cranes and heavy tripods.

This where Super-8 rules in the filmmaking department, and it's this aspect of convenience combined with film quality that gave me some great urban footage that unfolded next door to a coffee bar I was in, in New York. The area was taped off, the coffee bar was evacuated and we were told that there was a bomb in the basement of the building next door. No sooner was I informed of this, than I was grabbing dramatic footage of Bomb Disposal Units arriving, people panicking, the Police detective arriving and the Fire trucks. All this 15minutes before the press arrived because I had a small Super-8 camera with me at all times.

It was my show reel of such types of footage and experiments, which landed me a Super-8 job for NO.W.HERE Productions.

In September 2000, I flew out to New York to shoot for NO.W.HERE Productions in Brooklyn. The production was based on the Victorian text *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Colour in all its glory was absolutely paramount to the look of this film. The film was to be shot between the formats of 16mm and Super-8.

Our shooting schedule started at 3pm every day in order to capture the magic of September sunshine. This also meant shooting quickly. This is one of the key uses of Super-8 when shooting from the hip. Roll changes take seconds and various stocks can be swapped mid-roll bearing in mind you should make note of the footage counter before removing a roll as they always zero. Focusing is fast, all cameras have auto exposure, and the cameras are quick to set up. This is the first shoot where I experienced absolutely no problems in the shooting dept that have a tendency to spoil the flow on 16mm and 35mm shoots where camera checks are required after every roll. An advantage that Super-8 possesses because the pressure plate is built into each film cartridge. I chose K40 for exterior night-time shots and the 7240 for



This page: Jake's array of S8 cameras and below the king of S8 cameras, the Beaulieu 6008

interior day-time that was also being covered on 7250 and 7251 in 16mm.

The K40 I shot using a Bauer Royal with Auto B setting, which allows for very low light exposures. Car headlights streak, people blur and neon signs look gorgeous. I spent some shots in the back streets of lower Eastside NY with each frame taking six seconds to expose. So patience was a must. The production schedule also allowed me a lot of personal time to film. Using a Beaulieu 6008S I set up early morning in Sunset Park Brooklyn to film the hard morning light hit the incredible view of Manhattan spread out before me. I used 7278 rated at 200 ASA to daylight. I was after a hard graphic look, a kind of "Frank Miller Sin City" comic book image. As I mentioned earlier reversal stock has small latitude. Fortunately I had the time to use a light-meter and the Beaulieu range of cameras have a Guillotine-Shutter¹ in order to transfer light readings direct. So for my needs I underexposed it by a third of a stop to create much harder lines, losing the detail in the shadows. 7278 is a first choice stock for taking urban architecture.

The final images I got back from processing responded perfectly to the city's raw uncompromising structures.

After the shoot was completed the Super-8 was optically printed up to 16mm, lending stunning texture to the film. At present the film is still in postproduction and will be screened at festivals as a two-screen piece.

FINAL WORD

Before Super-8, there was Regular-8. Startlingly moments in history were captured on this gauge. JFK's assassination shot on 8mm on a Bell & Howell clockwork camera. These frames haunt history with their power. 8mm is the King of Cinema Verite, and it lives on as Super-8. Super-8 is a unique gauge, so all preconceptions of filmmaking should be dropped. It needs a different approach

when shooting with it. Super-8 does not need videotapes or expensive crane hire. Super-8 is here to free us up from the constraints of production. The results from Super-8 are as much down to the lens in front as the filmmaker behind. Super-8 allows for candid or inconspicuous filming and is perfect for guerrilla style shooting. Super-8 has stepped in where I didn't want to go with larger gear, and performed by giving me priceless frames of motion picture. My belief is that film is a standard, and Super-8 is where it starts. Everything else that isn't film is hype and Super-8 relies on word of mouth. So I'm spreading the word. Today Super-8 is one of the most valuable cinematic tools I use.

Jake Astbury

1. All other Super-8 cameras use a prism system which takes a third to as much as a stop of light to the viewfinder, for this reason under or overexposure of Super-8 film should only be used once familiar with your equipment.

