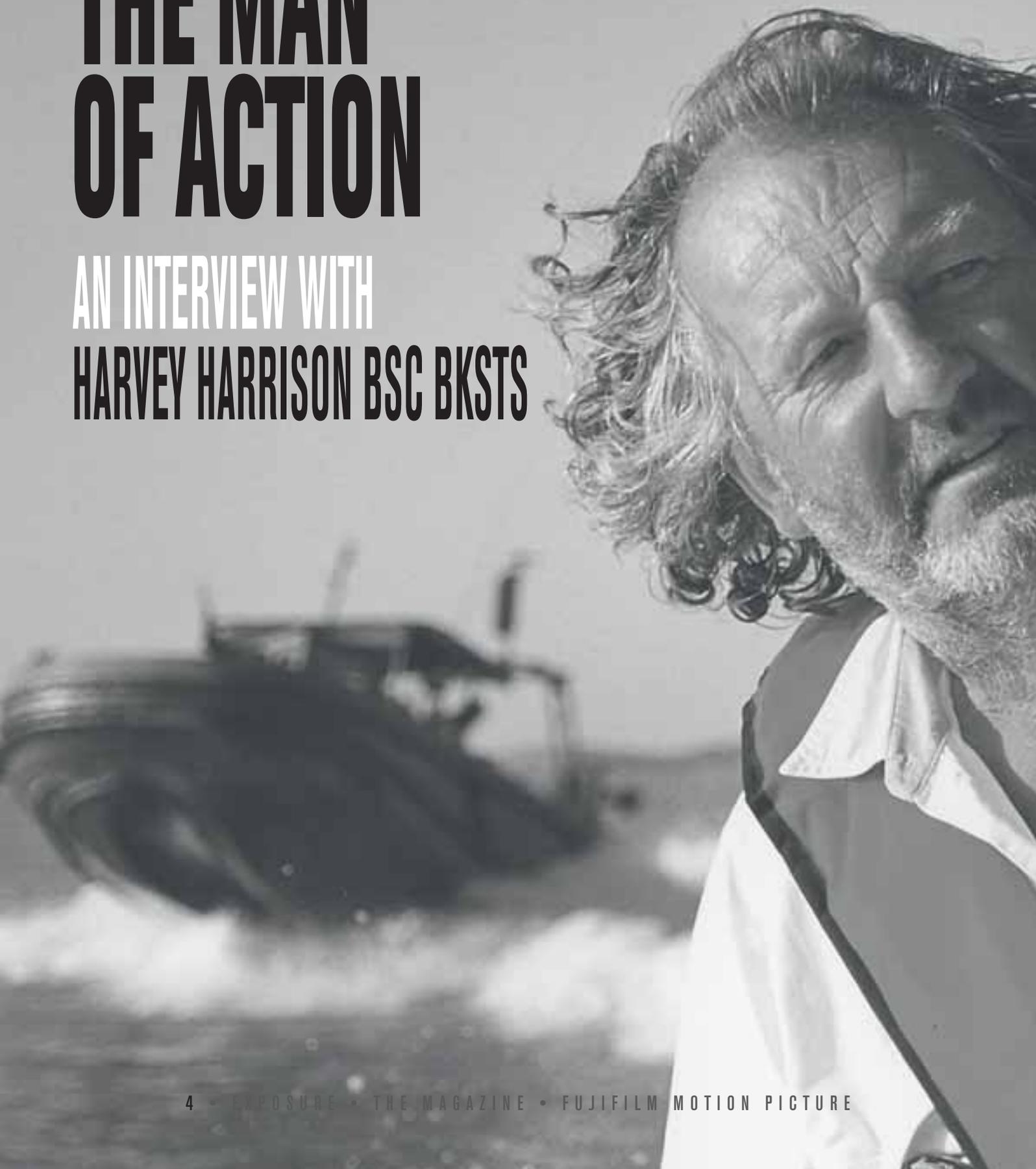


# THE MAN OF ACTION

AN INTERVIEW WITH  
HARVEY HARRISON BSC BKSTS





**W**hether shooting elaborate action and stunts for some of recent cinema's biggest films or devising ever more vivid ways of capturing intense, award-winning sports footage, much of Harvey Harrison's lengthy cinematographic life has been spent at the very edge.

Not that the word 'extreme' necessarily comes first to mind when encountering one of the industry's best-loved and most versatile craftsmen, an amiable big bear of a man who has also found time in between assignments around the world to fit in significant stints as, variously, President of the BSC and IMAGO as well as Chair of the GBCT.

And as if directing and or photographing 2nd Units on megadollar movies ranging from *The Mummy* and *101 Dalmations*, not to mention both their sequels, to *V For Vendetta* and the latest *Rambo* weren't enough, Harrison's CV also boasts some 20 features as the main unit DP in his own right.

Intriguingly, those credits - collaborating with the likes of Nicolas Roeg (*Castaway*, *The Witches*) and Ken Russell (*Salome's Last Dance*) - are spread out across over 40 years of more than half a century in the industry.

Most recently, there has been *Tracker*, a tough, turn of the (20th) century adventure set in New Zealand - "A Western by any other name," smiled Harrison - co-starring Ray Winstone and Temuera Morrison in the wilds of an unspoilt country on the other side of the world.

It re-united Harrison with his old friend, director Ian Sharp with whom he'd first worked on the 2nd Unit of *Goldeneye*, the film that probably changed Harrison's principal career focus forever from the mid-Nineties.

Recalled Harrison: "I had been getting disillusioned shooting main units because of all the politics that were involved. Although it was fantastic filming with someone like Nic [Roeg] because he handled it all perfectly and didn't give a damn anyway, it wasn't always like that.

"I'd done a bit of 2nd Unit for Adrian Biddle [and they'd work together again subsequently on several more films] and enjoyed it, so when Phil Meheux asked me to do *Goldeneye*, I jumped at the chance and it also helped that I then got on so well with Ian.

"It's not about the responsibility because in a way you have just as much but the point is, after talking to the main cameraman about the look they want and the stuff they need, you are then left alone to get on with the action and stunts, which I just love doing."

Harrison admitted this probably stems from his years shooting sports films - covering Winter and Summer Olympics, Football World Cups, motorcycle TTs, Formula One racing, among others - devising and executing ever more outrageous rigs for maximum effect - notably for ABC's prestigious *Wide World Of Sports* programme.

As a member of 'Dad's Amy' - the late Michael Samuelson was 'Dad' - Harrison often spent life on the hoof, hopping around the world, shooting on 16mm film, earning a couple of Emmys as a result. ►



Photo previous page:  
DP Harvey Harrison BSC BKSTS;  
Photo above: Temuera Morrison and  
Ray Winstone in *The Tracker*;  
right l-r: Morrison, Winstone and  
Harrison on location;  
inset far right:  
Director Ian Sharp (left) with Harrison



# HARVEY HARRISON BSC BKST

“I FELT THE FUJIFILM STOCK WOULD DO ALL THE LANDSCAPES JUSTICE WITH ITS RICH INTENSITY OF COLOUR.”



◀ Not that he'd originally ever had any intention of going into the film industry despite the fact that his father, also Harvey Harrison, was already steeped in film as a well regarded documentary cameraman who'd first made his reputation shooting training films during WWII before branching out later into more ambitious subjects often working with his costume designer wife.

Raised in Hampshire, Harrison Jr actually wanted to become a farmer, and would spend all his school holidays on a farm. However, after agricultural college and some more practical farming experience seemed fatally then to dim his once boundless enthusiasm for that particular career path, he decided that perhaps the film industry might be the best bet after all - especially if nepotism could help.

His father took him on as a runner but after working together for a few weeks, handed him a ten shilling note and said, effectively, to Jr's surprise and considerable consternation, "now bugger off and find your own way in this business."

So, to Wardour Street and a job first as tea boy with TVA, one of the pioneering commercials companies whose camera department was led by Billy Williams. When Williams' loader left, Harrison was offered the job - "I thought, 'this is it; I've cracked it'". Of course, the old union Catch-22 then kicked in and in desperation he rang his father with whom he'd become a bit estranged "after he'd chucked me out of house and home with just 10 bob.

"I told him I'd been offered this great job and he replied, 'yes, I know, your union ticket will arrive in the morning.' It turned out he'd been keeping his eye on me all the time which was fantastic."

When the TVA crew eventually upped and left for another top commercials outfit, James Garrett [with whom Harrison would work very productively some years later], he was asked if he wanted to go along but he declined, upgrading instead to focus puller working on ads for another company with the veteran DP Gordon Dines before going

freelance fulltime. Through commercials he'd first meet Nic Roeg and Alex Thomson, who was also just beginning to light films. When Thomson got *Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush* after Roeg had turned it down because he was starting to direct, he asked Harrison to be his focus puller, the start of what would be a very fruitful collaboration across several films including *The Best House in London* and *Alfred The Great*.

The eventual transition from focus puller to DP was only briefly interrupted by some work as an operator. Harrison remembered he was on a commercial for pork pies at a country mansion near Guildford.

"I have to say I didn't think I'd done a particularly good job for Arthur Ibbetson. Anyway, at the end of the shoot I went up to thank Arthur telling him how much I'd enjoyed it. He replied that he couldn't say the same, adding, 'I think you're the worst operator I've ever had in my life. Goodbye!'

"That probably confirmed in my mind I should go straight to lighting and bugger the operating," laughed an amused Harrison.

In fact he got his actual 'break' lighting more by default when, following a "ruck" between the DP and director Graham Stark on *Simon Simon*, an almost silent short comedy, he as operator took over followed the next year by Stark's feature debut, *The 7 Magnificent Deadly Sins*.

When, late last year, he returned to shooting main unit for the first time in over 12 years, since, in fact, Sharp and he had last worked together on *RPM*, a French-based action comedy, he didn't feel greatly fazed at all.

"*Tracker* was quite a laid-back kind of film and Ian's one of those great directors who leaves you to get on with it. I chose Fujifilm [which he had used before on many commercials and *Castaway*] for the reason of NZ having such a wonderful big country look that I felt the stock would do all the landscapes justice with its rich intensity of colour.

"I used three different stocks. ETERNA 250D for all the day scenes, ETERNA Vivid 160T for Day for Night and evening scenes, and the new ETERNA Vivid 500T for the night scenes and interiors.

"I wasn't disappointed. The weather conditions were interesting to say the least; we had everything thrown at us, but the film handled my interpretations absolutely perfectly. I also felt I could manipulate it more to look like an old Western."

The intensity of what is essentially a two-hander - a Boer War guerrilla veteran tracking a



Maori accused of killing a soldier - couldn't have contrasted more with Harrison's more typical 2nd Unit work on, say, a sprawling actioner like 2008's Burma-set *Rambo*.

Said Harrison, who is currently developing himself, what he will only say is a "big period epic", was directing and photographing second unit in Thailand for Sylvester Stallone.

"Stallone kept saying to me, 'make it more violent.' So I did these scenes where they were burning a village, bayoneting babies and slinging them in the fire. After watching the rushes, Stallone called me up, complaining tongue-in-cheek, 'Harvey, you're f\*\*\*\*\* sick.'

"But you said you wanted more violence," Harrison protested. Cue some judicious surgery in the cutting room. That, of course, is what they call "politics". **QUENTIN FALK**

■ *Tracker*, to be released later this year was originated on 35mm Fujicolor ETERNA 250D 8563, ETERNA Vivid 160T 8543 and ETERNA Vivid 500T 8547