



As told to Business Screen by Producer-Director Ted Sack

At left: film scenes show Captain Hanson and crewman boating a rough

How to Catch a Porpoise on Film

Sea-Borne Reela Film Crew Joins the Porpoise Hunters to Bring Home Award-Winning Film for the Miami Seaquarium

SIXTEEN DAYS spent on a 72 foot yacht cruising emerald-green, sub-tropical waters off the coast of South Florida with professional porpoise hunters is something to remember!

To this exciting adventure add the extra thrill of underwater photography of 600-pound porpoises in their natural habitat, plus aerial photography so high that the yacht is but a white speck in a vivid green sea which is clear enough to see, twenty feet below the surface of the water, eelgrass growing on the ocean floor, swaying with the ebb and flow of the water. That is something you can't forget.

Seaquarium Commissions Series

This was the experience of the Reela Films' production unit that made *To Catch a Porpoise* for the Miami Seaquarium, an outstanding, world-renowned attraction in South Florida.

In March 1964, Burton Clark, Director of the Miami Seaquarium, commissioned Reela Films, Inc., Miami, Florida, to produce five films: two documentaries, one to be half-hour and one ten-minutes, both to be 16mm color, sound on

film; also three 3½-minute short subjects in 16mm color, silent — for retail distribution.

All subjects were to differ in specific scenes, but all had the same subject matter: the capture and training of porpoises for entertainment purposes.

All of the films were for promotion of the porpoise show at the Florida Pavilion at the World's Fair in New York, which was produced by the Miami Seaquarium. The ten-minute show was to be finished in time for the opening of the Fair, the end of June 1964. This film was used for closed-circuit television within the Fair.

F. F. (Ted) Sack, Vice President and General Manager of Reela, immediately traded his "Vice President" hat for his "Producer-Director" hat and called a production staff meeting. This was too juicy a production to let pass.

Four cameramen were assigned to the production, temporarily called #1159. The Reela staff cameramen were Ralston Princee and Roberto Insua, Seaquarium staff cameramen were Michael Davis, long-time marine-life pho-

tographer, and Don Renn, underwater photography specialist. In addition, Sack assigned Marian Kley, Supervisor of Production at Reela, as supervising editor, with Raul Corvison as chief sound engineer, Grip, electrician, and assistant cameramen completed the crew.

Kley, veteran of many years of production, wrote a tight shooting outline. The finished half-hour show is almost scene-for-scene the same as the outline . . . a rare accomplishment considering the animal stars are quite unpredictable and completely undirectable in their wild state.

The yacht "Seaquarium", official collecting boat for the Miami Seaquarium, is skippered by Captain Emil Hanson, Hanson, a man bursting at the seams with energetic and never tiring knowhow, was invaluable on the production. The boat itself, although officially registered as a yacht, is actually a work boat, comfortably and efficiently appointed for its purpose . . . to transport a crew of three and huge quantities of marine specimens.

They Aren't Easy to "Shoot"

There are several factors in porpoise hunting that make photographing the entire catch very difficult. Porpoises are wary and very intelligent. They are caught in a type of nylon net — three quarters of a mile long and weighing well over a ton. When this net is played out over the stern, the speed of the boat is "wide open". When the net has porpoises in it, the net is shortened and pulled around into a pocket. Porpoises are hauled

out of the ocean in the pocket and put into a skiff by three professional porpoise hunters working a team.

This action must be fast work or the porpoises can be killed. Once the porpoise is boarded, it is docile. But the actual boating of 600-800 pounds of thrashing animal is very exciting and, until #1159, was photographed from a skiff along the boating skiff. If the sea was rough the hobbing of the boat made filming nearly impossible.

Camera Platform Really

Captain Hanson was consulted on the possibilities of building a special camera platform to be extended from the side of the collecting boat near the stern, so that in a rough sea — scenes of boating of the porpoises would not have the eyetearing, p-a-down motion.

Hanson and his crew built a platform strong enough to support the camera crew's needs with the camera crew's needs would support the weight of the cameraman, assistant, battery, reflectors and/or other gear, the director.

This platform made it possible to photograph every step of exciting moments of the net and capture, from the moment the net was played out, at top speed to the transfer of the porpoise from the skiff to the deck of the mother ship.

Tight Schedule and High Hopes

Shooting began April 19, 1964, dockside scenes of the yacht "Seaquarium" being loaded with supplies, etc. Reela had a tight schedule and high hopes: yachtsmen

In the picture below, made during the filming of "To Catch a Porpoise," trainer Jimmy Klue is working a porpoise through a high jump. At right: Reela Films' crew included (left to right) cameraman Ralston Princee; grip Bill Cabana, producer-director Ted Sack (pointing); cameraman Mike Davis.



to Catch a Porpoise:"

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 51)

There is no place in the world like the Bahamas for underwater photography. The ocean is light aqua blue and crystal clear. There is no turbulence in movement whatever that the photographic results are fantastic. Twenty or thirty feet down, the light is excellent. I had written a sequence into the script in which Captain Wilbur Gray, Director of Collecting at the Miami Seaquarium, would catch a porpoise because of fighting that marred its appearance. Obviously, this was to show that perfect specimens would be available for the Fair. Kley was in no doubt whether this was his job — to find a peculiarly beautiful porpoise in the great At-

Captain Gray, veteran of 25 years collecting marine life, told us that we could find just what we needed: a porpoise. Good to his promise, he brought a porpoise, evidently the result of a fight with a shark, caught in the net and Captain Gray rejected it for shipment to New York. The scene was shot as

Throughout the latter part of the filming scenes, the porpoises were not afraid of the cameras and crew, but the stars of the production unit became one happy family. Even when they were made from the bucket "cherry picker" directly over the big animals were expected to make an 18-foot leap out of the filming pool, they exhibited no fear. Every member of the unit, from the director to the grip, fell in with the cast of the show. When the training complete, they were transported in large custom-made boxes to the airport and so on to the World's Fair. Always docile, they offered no photographic problems. They did not rebel too much against the confinement of the boxes. On board the cargo plane to

New York the scenes presented a photographic problem because of a misunderstanding with the airline regarding power for the lights. There was nothing to do but shoot color with available light. However, this was acceptable enough to show the conditions under which the porpoises travelled to New York: First class — with a plane to themselves — courtesy Eastern Airlines.

The last scenes were shot at the World's Fair and it was very cold. The people who came to view the porpoise show at the Florida Pavilion wore overcoats, so odd shots and cutaways of the audience could not be made.

However, before our film was edited, with the sound, etc., we were able to send a staff cameraman back to get the necessary scenes. It was ironic that, with the difficult scenes we had made in the open sea, simple audience reaction scenes were so much trouble and so expensive to make.

We must come back to the original commission Burton Clark had given to Reela — five separate films to be made. Before shooting was completed it was suddenly decided, on a Friday morning in June, that an additional promotional film would be needed.

The editor, sound engineer and director-producer Sack came back to Reela that Friday night and put together a 3½-minute promotion film that so pleased Clark that he subsequently made a Spanish version for Latin America.

It was a short, steep pull, but six months after we finished all subjects we were rewarded in receiving a 1965 Cine "Golden Eagle" and an Educational Film Library Association "Blue Ribbon" for the half-hour show, *To Catch a Porpoise*. And — we are proud — all of us, including the director, cameramen, sound engineer, editor, grip and — no doubt, the porpoises would be proud if they knew about it! •

Below: Ted Sack uses bull horn to kibitz crew on masthead . . .



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