



in the *field*

Camera Supports for DSLR Shooters

Mark Von Lanken



This is the Cinevate Uno with handgrips positioned up close to the camera. Note how I can focus while holding on to the Uno.

I love the organic look and feel of solid handheld footage. On the wedding day, the flexibility and freedom that comes with shooting handheld has big advantages over shooting on a tripod or a monopod.

Now, there are certainly segments of the day when shooting on a tripod has its advantages, such as at the ceremony. However, during the prep and the reception, shooting handheld has many advantages.

Bringing that philosophy into the DSLR world introduces new challenges. Everyone who has shot with a DSLR knows exactly what I am talking about. Shooting handheld without image stabilization really requires your A game, and when you do get bumps, the image jiggles around like Jell-O, thanks to the CMOS sensor.

One solution is to implement a camera support device—not a Glidecam or a Steadicam but a tool that provides support for shooting handheld when standing still.

There are literally dozens of support devices on the market, in part, due to the DSLR revolution. The challenge for all of us is to decide which support device will best fit our needs. Reading an article or visiting a website about the choices available can help.

My goal is not to steer you toward one particular model or to tell you which one I prefer, but rather to explore three different models—covering both the good and the bad—and give you better insight into each model.

CINEVATE UNO

In my book, the Cinevate brand ranks right up there with the best. When mentioning the company's name, I think of

quality and innovation. Dennis Wood, CEO and founder of Thunder Bay, Ontario-based Cinevate (www.cinevate.com), seems to really care about our industry. He makes a wide range of products. Dennis talked to—and, more importantly, listened to—event filmmakers and created products that meet our needs.

With such a wide range of products to choose from, I chose the Cinevate Uno for this comparison. I do not use my DSLR with a follow focus, matte box, or rails, so I was

looking for a simple and streamlined approach. As the name Uno implies, it uses a single 15mm solid carbon rod. From that single rod, up front it supports one or even two handgrips and offers a choice of two different mounting brackets for the camera. At the back, it comes with a choice of two different body braces. The stock body brace is very small and was not very comfortable to me. I greatly prefer the upgraded shoulder brace and found a couple of different ways to use it.

First, you can use the brace as a shoulder support, which adds a lot of stability. I found that this mode positioned the camera too high for my liking. Second, you can adjust the shoulder brace at an angle so it rests against your shoulder instead of on top of your shoulder. This technique was much better for me as it positioned the camera in the perfect location for my style of shooting.

When looking at the Uno, it's amazing to see how Cinevate was able to mount two handgrips, a dual-support bracket for the camera, a moveable 1/4" 20 thread for mounting to a tripod or other support device, and a shoulder support to a single 15mm rod. On top of all of that, every piece can be positioned in a countless number of ways, all without using tools. Each piece has a kip handle, which is a hand-adjustable wrench that makes it quick and easy to adjust the rig.

I know this may seem like a small thing, but the quick-release mechanism is a huge improvement over the Bogen quick-release system that I used previously. Cinevate's quick release uses the same Bogen 577 quick-release plate, but you no longer have to line the mechanism

up with the plate, slide it in, and then lock it down. With the Cinevate quick-release plate, just angle one side of the plate to the mechanism and then slide it forward or backward to find the right spot; then, press down to lock it in place. This system is much faster and easier than the Bogen 577 quick-release system.

My personal preference is to have both of the handgrips pointed up and in close to the camera. This allows me to keep one hand on the left grip so I can zoom, focus, and adjust exposure. Most of my lenses are vintage manual focus lenses with a physical aperture ring. My right hand is on the camera to start, stop, and make other adjustments. I then have the option to pull my right hand off the camera and hold the second handgrip. All of these techniques are further explored in the Von Real episode that appears online (see the note at the end of the article for more information).

All in all, the Cinevate Uno is a very well-designed and well-built stabilizer. It's lightweight, yet it feels solid in your hands. It's a very versatile piece of gear that will fit a large variety of body sizes and shooting styles.

DVTEC DSLR EXTREME

First up, full disclosure: I have been a reseller of the DVTEC MultiRigPro for more than 3 years. The DVTEC line (www.dvtec.tv) was developed by Danny Natovich in Israel. Danny does not have the interaction with the event filmmaking community that Cinevate's Wood does. What I can tell you about Danny is that for the 3 years I've been selling his products, I've found his customer service to be excellent. Whenever I had a client who had a problem with a DVTEC product, which hasn't happened that often, Danny immediately fixes it. On the few occasions that an issue has arisen, I've been very impressed with his customer service.

The DSLR Extreme takes a very different approach from the Uno. The DSLR Extreme is big and heavy, but that can be a good thing. It uses a dual-bar system for adjusting the camera forward and backward. It has two hand grips that have a very solid feel, but these are not adjustable. On top of the dual

handgrips are accessory shoe mounts. These can come in handy for mounting a monitor, a mic, and so on.

On top of the rig is DVTEC's own quick-release system. It is very similar to Bogen's 577 quick-release system, but it has a longer quick-release plate. The length allows for more versatility with positioning the camera forward and back.

In addition to using the dual-bar system, you will find two other ways to adjust the rig. Right below the camera mount is a knob that allows for the pivot angle of the rig. You can lock it in place or leave it a little loose for some flexibility. Then, further back on the rig is a second knob that adjusts how low or high the rig sits. This is a very simple but effective system.

The shoulder support is very robust and well-padded. With the DSLR Extreme on your shoulder, the camera feels very solid, which is the name of the game in camera supports. At the back end of the shoulder support is a bracket to mount accessories such as wireless receivers, batteries, or even just counterbalance weights.

Probably the biggest difference between the Uno and the DSLR Extreme is the support pod. The support pod is a spring-loaded rod with a flex tip at the end. This really takes the load off of your arms when supporting the rig. The support pod has a quick release at one end, so it is very quick and easy to attach or detach it from the rig. The other end of the support pod rests in the holster of the DVTEC Velcro belt that you wear around your waist. This approach allows for long takes and literally hours of handheld shooting. You can use the DSLR Extreme without the



The DVTEC MultiRigPro with handgrips positions up close to the camera. Note how I use the right grip to hold on to the rig and the camera at the same time, leaving my left hand free to focus.



Left to right: The DVTEC DSLR Extreme (\$649 as shown), the DVTEC MultiRig Pro (\$529), and the Cinevate Uno (\$875)

support pod, but I would not recommend it for long takes or prolonged shooting. But, of course, this will depend on the strength and stamina of the shooter.

DVTEC MULTIRIGPRO

I reviewed the DVTEC MultiRigPro in April 2008. You can read an in-depth review of the rig at <http://bit.ly/9Ukue7>. When comparing the MultiRigPro to the Uno, the approach is drastically different, but the end results are strikingly similar.

The MultiRig does not come with a quick-release plate system. I added my own. The MultiRig does allow for numerous adjustments to adapt it to various shooting styles and body sizes. The two front arms and one rear arm are fully adjustable. They do not have the finesse of the Uno, but surprisingly, I am always able to find just the right spot to position the arms.

The MultiRig also has the spring-loaded support pod with flex tip that mounts to the Velcro belt. This approach is totally different from the Uno. It does greatly extend the amount of time you can spend shooting, but only you can determine if it is right for you.

In my own testing, I did one thing that turned the MultiRig from a video camera support into a DSLR support. By adjusting the two front arms upward and bringing them back, I am able to position them near the lens and body of the camera, giving me the ability to control the camera while stabilizing it at the same time. This is huge for me because it addresses one of my biggest complaints about the DSLR Extreme. It comes down to shooting style and personal preference. I just like to have my hands on the camera or, at least, close to the camera.

The shoulder support on the MultiRig is probably the weakest link, especially when compared to the DSLR Extreme and the Uno. But at the same time, it does its job, just not as comfortably.

PRICING

Obviously, one key point of comparison between these products is price. The Cinevate Uno can be customized to your personal preference with prices starting at \$875. The premium version, the Ultimate Uno (not reviewed here), comes with a shouldermount and counter balance and runs about \$3,067.

The DVTEC DSLR Extreme ranges from \$429 to \$649. The DVTEC MultiRig Pro with padded Velcro belt is \$529. Since the DVTEC line comes from Israel, shipping to the U.S. is approximately \$90 for the Extreme DSLR and \$50 for the MultiRig Pro.

CONCLUSION

This has been a difficult process to describe. I urge you to watch the Von Real clip on EventDV-TV and on the page where this article appears at www.eventdv.net to see a demonstration of what I've discussed in this article.

I highly recommend trying out as many camera supports as possible. This may be difficult, depending on where you are located. Network with other shooters, ask around, check out trade shows, and get your hands on as many different models as you can before purchasing. Finding the right support device can make a world of difference in getting solid handheld work from your DSLR.



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