

Jean-Marie Lavalou

9 March 1946 - 15 July 2022

Obituary

The film industry has lost a legend

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Jean-Marie Lavalou, co-creator of the world's first remote control camera system for use in the motion picture industry.

Jean Marie was born into the 'La Fromagerie Lavalou' family in Bourg Saint Leonard, Normandie, France. With a passion for film at an early age, he travelled to Paris to attend the Ecole Nationale Supérieure Louis Lumière film school, graduating in 1968 before entering national service.

It was during his national service in the French navy film department that Jean-Marie's life path would change for ever when he met his inventor partner Alain Masseron. Together, they created never seen before camera movements while making a film inside a submarine by attaching the camera to the end of a wooden pole and tracking through the narrow vessel.

The young inventors then brought their device to camera rental house SamAlga Cinema in Paris. Chief engineer Albert Vigier immediately seeing it's potential introduced them to David Samuelson of Samuelson Film Service in London. With the combined teams of engineers and the eureka moment of combining the device with the in-development video assist system that Joe Dunton was working on at Samuelsons, the first remote head for motion picture film making was born.

The story of the LOUMA is well documented and it was Jean-Marie who brought the many talented engineers together that made his and Alain's vision possible. Many would say he was obsessive – and he was. The Louma and the magic of cinema was his passion which he relentlessly pursued. He lived his dream of working with the likes of Polanski, Spielberg and was forever in awe of Directors and Directors of Photography striving to bring new equipment for them to use on set.

Receiving the Academy Award of Merit in 2005 with his co-inventors was an undoubted career highlight, but for Jean-Marie, he probably got most pleasure from his 'world' tour thanking the people that he had worked with along the way. Many crew members around the world who have heard the sad news are regaling the time that Jean-Marie paid a set visit with his enthusiasm and dedication.

In later years Jean-Marie, alongside the development of the Louma 2 telescopic crane, was also responsible for bringing the Spydercam system to France when he designed the stadium roof fittings and pulleys on which the wires are attached. He was a mentor and friend to many, and they all recall fantastic evenings of storytelling, raucous laughter accompanied by the finest of finest of wines.

What little time spent away from his desk, Jean-Marie liked walking with friends in the Pyrenees and spending holidays with his family in Brittany. On Sundays he could be found in the library at the La cité des sciences et de l'industrie, Paris' Museum of Science and Industry.

The L O U from his surname combined with M A from Masseron became the name of the world's first motion picture remote camera system. It always will be that and Jean-Marie will never be forgotten.

He leaves, too soon, his two families. His sisters, nieces & nephews plus his film industry family of colleagues and film crews around the world who will continue his legacy.

Famille Lavalou & Loumasystems

July 2022