

Backroom boys

Meet your favourite editors. Over the year, we've polled producers from our three major surveys - of commercials, broadcast and corporate production - about who are your top UK film editors. Rob Buckley wades through the nominations to discover what's so good about the five who won top votes from short-form producers, and the five top in the long-form arena

John Smith's agent is a big fan of film editors. "He once told me," says Smith, co-owner of The White House, "that 'when the cast and crew have finished shooting for six weeks, and are sunning themselves in Malibu, you're going to be in the cutting room for six months, holding the film together for everyone.'"

He's not the only fan. Your votes named over 100 such stalwarts - and here are the top ten.

SHORT-FORM WINNERS

Sam Sneade

"What's the collective noun for editors? A whinge," jokes Sneade on a busy Friday afternoon. Anything but, you'd have thought, judging by his own amiability. Sneade, the highest-rated short-form editor who runs Sam Sneade Editing, attributes his win in true award-ceremony style mostly to his staff - "a nice, chilled-out bunch of people."

Sneade is one of the few editors who still gets to work with celluloid on occasion rather than the mouse of an Avid, something he says is "tremendously satisfying; and you just don't forget it." But it's more or less a dead art these days, which isn't altogether a good thing. "It gives you an appreciation of timing and how to edit. Editors don't have the film knowledge they used to, but there are certain



cornerstones of our craft that no amount of nerdiness will replace - like judging performances."

Sneade would love to work on more big features, having cut his first (*Final Cut*, with Jude Law) last year. But there's still something enjoyable about cutting ads when it's "working really well." His main complaint? A certain major kit supplier that "springs unwanted upgrades on us at vast expense, and is trying to turn us into online editors. We're not interested, and I don't need 27 layers for video special effects." Not much whinging at all, in fact.

Steve Gandolfi

Gandolfi has been running Cut and Run for 13 years and is as busy as ever: "we're getting lots of ads and promos; all four of us are busy." His problem (in common with many) is finding assistant editors.

"There are lots of runners, lots of editors but there's a gap in the middle. It's much easier to become an editor now: the learning process has been cut down by a couple of years, but I'm not sure it's for the better. They don't have the fundamental training: you can put people in front of Avid and if they can join pictures together, they think they're editors. It's very important to watch someone: I employ extra staff just so they've got time so sit down, watch editors and get training."

Though he still enjoys editing, running the com-

pany is another matter. "Sometimes I wake up and think 'God, it's giving me a headache.'" His tip for the top? "Smile like you're serving at McDonald's. Keep your head down and meet lots of people."

John Smith

Just returned from editing the Gene Hackman film *Under Suspicion*, Smith (*Leaving Las Vegas*, *Sliding Doors*) knows his job isn't easy. "It takes years to become a good film editor: you're not born that way. Editing is very hard work. You have to learn how the business works and need more than a modicum of talent. You have to learn about rhythms and judging performances: how else can you make an audience of 500 laugh or cry when you want them to?"

Despite his US trip, Smith's commercials profile (from work such as *Double Life* for Sony's Playstation) remains high - even though he admits his original motive for doing ads was to get into features. "I love ads but I like to have the chance to do both," he says. A firm Avid admirer, he still likes working with the raw stuff. "There's something very therapeutic about handling film, something organic and personal, which I don't get from this technology."

Paul Watts

This former Rushes runner might still be there if they hadn't "offered to promote me to librarian; I had to leave after that." Now co-running The Quarry

after stints at Picture Post and Sue Moles Editing, Watts enjoys "trying to keep decisions objective in a room full of people being subjective" - aka editing.

His firm is lucky enough to be busy, Watts says, when - though no-one's budget is dropping, nor are they cutting corners - work is going to fewer people.

Watts likes to be involved in the whole process, down to the online and dubbing, so advises anyone coming into the industry not to book any evenings or weekends off. As a result, his best clients are those "who pay ratecard and bugger off at 6pm."

Rick Russell

The worst recent development for Russell are the hoops promos and ads have to go through to get made. Gone are the days when you'd be commissioned on Monday and on air by Friday. Now "it goes into research, committees go back and forth..."

Russell's firm, The Final Cut, started in 95 out of his desire to run a cutting room his way. He now thinks "more and more of the company, less of personal considerations. That's what excites me more than anything." Another graduate of Sue Moles, he's worked with the great and the good and was even asked by Tony Kaye if he'd like to direct. Not an entirely unattractive offer.

He'd prefer to work on his own script, however, returning to his roots in drama. He also wonders

TOP FILM EDITORS: SHORT-FORM

Voted top by commercials producers

Sam Sneade (Sam Sneade Editing)	1
Steve Gandolfi (Cut and Run)	2
John Smith (The White House)	3
Paul Watts (The Quarry)	4
Rick Russell (The Final Cut)	5

TOP FILM EDITORS: LONG-FORM

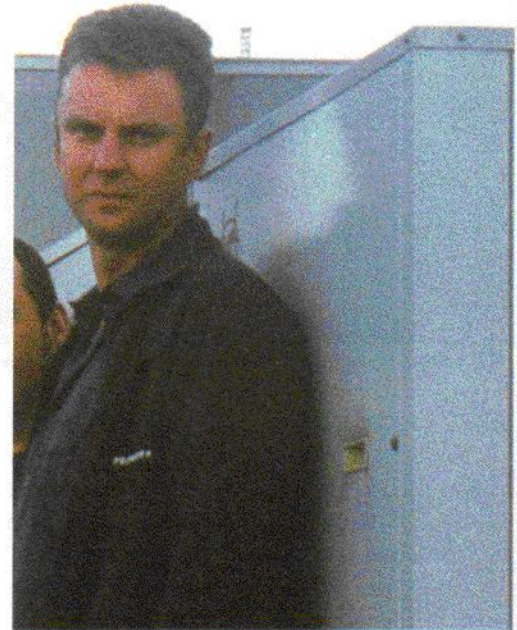
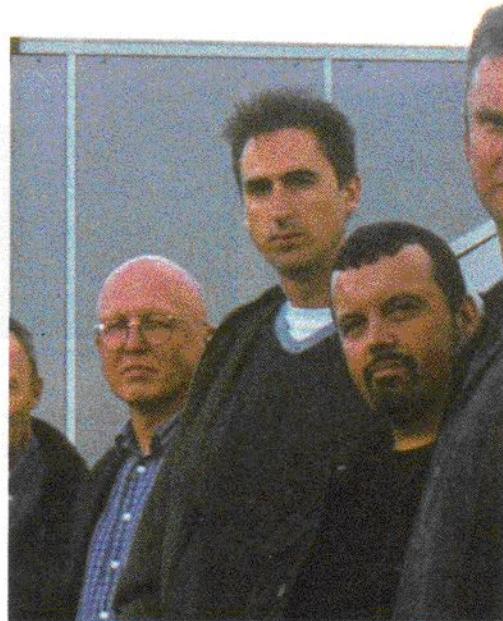
Voted top by broadcast and corporate producers

Terry Rawlings	1
Charles Davies (Chipstead Film Productions)	=2
Ian Farr	=2
Laurence Williamson (Tangram)	4
Vicky Price	5

TOP FILM EDITORS: OVERALL

Voted top by producers across all sectors

Sam Sneade (Sam Sneade Editing)	1
Steve Gandolfi (Cut and Run)	2
John Smith (The White House)	3
Paul Watts (The Quarry)	4
Rick Russell (The Final Cut)	5
Rick Lawley (The White House)	6
Tim Fulford (Red Square)	=7
Terry Rawlings	=7
Charles Davies (Chipstead Film Productions)	=9
Ian Farr	=9
Russell Icke (The White House)	=9
Rod Howick	=12
Gary Knight (Final Cut)	=12
Vicky Price	=12
Simon Wilcox (Wilcox and Wilcox)	=12
Laurence Williamson (Tangram)	=12



Independent producers' top film editors (left to right): Paul Watts, Charles Davies, Laurence Williamson, Rick Russell, John Smith and Sam Sneade

whether editors should direct: "it suggests editing isn't an end in itself. I'm comfortable being expert at what I do. If I were to direct, I'd want to make the sort of material I cut, rather than at a lower level."

LONG-FORM WINNERS

Terry Rawlings

Top of the long-form editors is Rawlings, nearly a legend among film editors, having cut *Alien* and *Blade Runner* among many others. He started in sound, on the very first series of *World in Action*, before being given his break into film editing by Ridley Scott after handling the sound on Scott's debut feature, *The Duellists*.

"It's like a drug: I can't live without it," he maintains. He's tried his hand at directing, but believes producers prefer him as an editor who can "look after new directors." Surprisingly, his last film *Entrapment* was his first non-linear excursion. In Amiel said "try it, you might like it." Heavy-lift works, with its Steinbeck-like interface, won him over, but he says he's too old to learn Avid as well.

Another who worries about how assistants learn their craft in a non-linear world, Rawlings turned his third cutting-room into a big-screen cinema during *Entrapment*. "How can you edit properly if you're more computer-oriented than film-oriented? I don't want to know how my edit system works any more than how my car works. I learnt without realising it, looking over editors' shoulders, so I always bring assistants in to see what I'm doing. Never be too proud to show your staff what you're doing: you need the criticism."

Charles Davies

Charles Davies has done it all. Directed, edited; corporate, broadcast, features. He has been down the Amazon, across Siberia and even worked with Tarka the otter for TV and film. And after all that, he still prefers editing. "You have to work with what's been shot, ignoring what could have been. It's like working with a blank canvas."

Now specialising in documentaries, Davies also has good words to say about corporate. "You have a camera engineer, say, who knows his subject

and has respect for you a film-maker. In TV, everyone's jobs overlap so you don't get that. In corporate (nuts-and-bolts work we used to call it) you offer a service to people who couldn't do what you do. TV has its own rewards, though - more people see it."

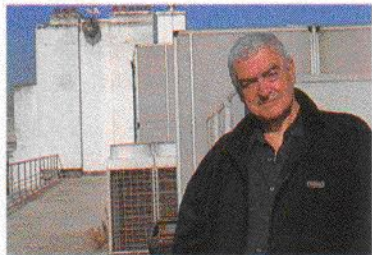
Still working with film - half his workload till a year or so ago - Davies believes "you're not a film editor if you can only push buttons. You have to be able to use both." He learned the art of non-linear from a Molinare techie who knew Macs and Avids backwards and wanted to learn editing. Six jobs later, each had acquired the other's knowledge.

Editors "shouldn't just be another pair of hands for a director. You must be able to offer creative ideas; otherwise why can't the director do it himself?"

Ian Farr

Drama editor and former BBC man, Farr may have once wanted to be a director, but editing is his love now. "The cutting room is where the story's told. The camera's only where it's recorded." The editor's power to bring the audience along a chosen path without them realising it, he believes, means the

THE FILM EDITORS



Top editors picked by producers from TV, corporate and commercials (left to right): Vicky Price, Terry Rawlings, Steve Gandolfi and Ian Farr

assembly is the most creative part of the process.

This extends to improving an actor's ability. A famous (unnameable) actor on an HBO production he edited routinely fluffed his lines; Farr edited the raw material to produce a "tight performance." He's working on getting into features, but "Americans always want you to have track-record. Producers aren't willing to take risks any more."

Laurence Williamson

25 years an editor, Williamson also has the distinction of being a former pupil of Davies. He's been running offline firm Tangram out of the same Soho office for nearly 14 years. A TV documentary editor by trade, his work is mainly for BBC and C4.

He firmly embraces the new. Non-linear editing? "Wonderful, absolutely wonderful." New-gen-

eration editors? "There's a firmly-held view people aren't learning to edit very well. Hopefully, they'll learn at college; we've had a few people in on work experience and they've been extremely good." Digital video? "Revolutionised documentary-making as much as 16mm film did. For some kinds of programmes, DV is wonderful. From an editing point of view, it's also great to have a 200:1 cutting ratio because video is so cheap compared to film."

His only doubt about the boom in documentaries hitting the new channels is whether "they're good enough to spend time watching."

Vicky Price

The best thing about editing, says ex-Granada editor Vicky Price, is that every project is different. The only woman in the top ten (but by no means the

only one nominated), freelance Price specialises in TV documentaries, preferring "programmes that tell a story in a half-an-hour to an hour. As a documentary editor, you're creating much more than on a drama, working to further a director's ideas."

She has also taught C5 reporters and researchers to edit. "We gave them shots, all moving, and told them to cut them together. There was nothing there unworthy of being transmitted. It was when they were shooting that they came unstuck." Falling budgets mean that production secretaries and assistant editors are a thing of the past for documentary editors, but Price almost prefers that. "In a way, the editor becomes more responsible for making everything work - with no fanfares. It certainly makes life easier." ■