

DIGITAL VIDEO HACKS™

*Tips & Tools for
Shooting, Editing,
and Sharing*

LOCATION

TAKE

SOUND

DATE

SCENE

DIRECTOR

O'REILLY®

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HACK
#27

Mount Your Camera to Your Car

There are some elaborate rigs for attaching a camera to a car. But when it comes to “build versus buy,” one product makes building a solution a tough sell.

There are certain shots that are difficult to acquire, particularly those that are shot from a moving vehicle. Instead of building some elaborate apparatus to mount your camera to a car, you can purchase a heavy-duty suction cup, with camera mount, called The Cleat. It is manufactured by PowrGrip (<http://www.powrgrip.com>) and can be purchased online at <http://shop.store.yahoo.com/cinemasupplies/cleatsuccamm.html> for \$75. Using The Cleat, and a camera that weighs less than 10 pounds, you can capture great shots from a moving vehicle, or from just about anywhere there’s a smooth surface.

Mounting The Cleat

Essentially, The Cleat is a well-designed suction cup, with a particular set of uses in mind. To attach it to a surface requires the surface to be smooth and nonporous. The area you are attaching to should also be clean.

When you have located and prepared the area on which you want to mount The Cleat, place it and then pump the grey plunger. Continue pumping until the red indicator no longer shows. The plunger is spring-balanced, so you can expect a little resistance while using it.

Quite possibly the best feature of The Cleat is the red indicator on the plunger. When you can see the red indicator, it means that your suction is weak. To make it stronger, you simply need to give the plunger a few good pumps. [Figure 3-2](#) shows The Cleat without a good vacuum seal, while [Figure 3-3](#) demonstrates a good seal. If you see red, don’t attach your camera.

Knowing that you have a good vacuum seal will provide you peace of mind that your expensive digital video camera isn’t going to take a nasty tumble.

Attaching Your Camera

After mounting The Cleat, attach your camera using the threaded screw on the top of the unit. For security, you should also tighten the knob just below where you’ve mounted your camera. You can then proceed to adjust the arm of The Cleat, so that you can frame your shot as you’d like to record it. [Figure 3-4](#) shows a camera mounted to a car using The Cleat.



Figure 3-2. A bad seal

Recording Your Shot

How you physically get your camera to record will depend on the make and model of your camera. If you have a remote control, the process will be easy. If you do not have a remote control, you will need to start your camera manually. This will probably require you to capture more footage than required, but it shouldn't cause too many problems. [Figure 3-5](#) shows a frame of video, as captured from the car-mounted camera and then [rotated \[Hack #42\]](#).

If you are not taking part in the scene, or driving the vehicle, you should attempt to [view what's being recorded \[Hack #11\]](#). If you are shooting the interior of the car, you might be able to hide in the back seat and provide direction from there. Otherwise, you can attempt to do so from another car using wireless communication.

Removing the Camera

When you have completed your shot, first remove your camera from the mount. This is purely to be safe and ensure your camera doesn't topple when you release the suction cup's vacuum. Then, to remove The Cleet, all you need to do is firmly pull on the tab on the suction cup. [Figure 3-6](#) shows the pull tab on the suction cup.



Figure 3-3. A good seal

Hacking the Hack

Due to its small size, The Cleat can be used much like a tripod. Additionally, it can be mounted in unusual or difficult locations, providing for similarly unusual shots. For example, you could mount your camera to the outside of a second story window and shoot into your house.

You can also use multiple mounts and shoot a multicamera scene using a limited crew. Imaging trying to shoot using three cameras inside a car *without* The Cleat; it would be quite difficult. There are a vast amount of opportunities for creative use, and by purchasing The Cleat, you'll free up a lot of time to discover them.

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Figure 3-4. A camera mounted to a car



Figure 3-5. Video captured at 35mph



Figure 3-6. Pull on the tab firmly to release the vacuum