

## Self Imaging

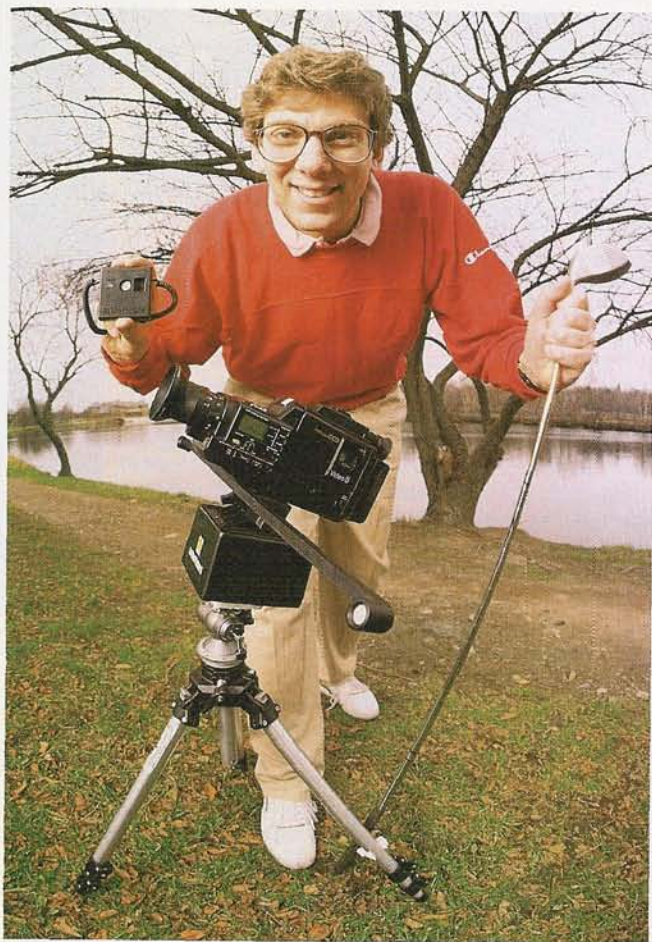
Joseph Sieber planted his feet, fixed his grip around his six iron, and took a long look down the fairway at the Newton MDC golf course. He raised his club, poised to swing. That was when it hit him. Inspiration.

Sieber, you see, was bedeviled by a quirky swing. He was a solid golfer, but he dreamed of being a contender—at least on the MDC-golf-course scale of things. He had poured good money into private lessons, but his swing still came up lacking. Then on that fateful day on the Newton links, he was struck with a vision: he would get it on video. And in his fit of revelation, he decided that he would do something more: not only would he put a camera onto his swing, he would put some swing into his camera. He'd figure out a way to make his camera not merely sit still atop its tripod, but follow his every move.

For most of us, this is the sort of casual whim that strikes suddenly and is just as quickly forgotten. But for Sieber, a man of firm intentions and not inconsiderable finances, the passing fancy soon grew into a pressing fixation. "It's one thing to get an idea," he says. "Everyone gets ideas. But it's something else to go out there and do something about it."

Tough talk from a driven golfer. And so it was that Sieber's epiphany on the fairway spurred him to action. Today, after two years and hundreds of thousands of dollars in research-and-development, he has finally brought his fancy to fruition in an East Cambridge warehouse.

His brainchild is a sophisticated gadget called *In the Picture*, just out on the market and priced at \$249. It's a motorized tracking device that al-



Joseph Sieber's camera knows where the action is.

lows would-be cinematographers to guide their cameras from afar—and get out from behind the wrong end of the camera lens. Sieber's company compares its technology to that used in the U.S. military's surface-to-air missile systems. Presumably, the spare parts come cheaper.

You can now get a single shot of everyone at your family reunion; *In the Picture* is the video equivalent of the still camera's self-timer. The video *auteur* (and star of every scene) wears a small, self-powered transmitting device that clips onto a belt or pocket. The tripod-mounted motor

system uses two ultrasound "hearing" pods to home in on the transmitter, constantly pivoting the camera toward the signal. Sieber claims that the device can not only follow his puttering on the links, but also his (admittedly languid) fast break on the basketball court.

Faulty golf skills notwithstanding, Sieber had already made his mark as a successful entrepreneur and president of his own multimillion-dollar manufacturing company (not to mention the holder of an MBA from Harvard) before he decided to reinvent home video. But he still needed some help. Fortunately, he has long

enjoyed easy access to a computer-robotics engineer: his brother Jonathan, a first-generation MIT computer hacker. Years ago, Jonathan offered to pool his tech know-how with Joseph's business savvy. Together, they've been a hi-tech sibling Dream Team.

They've always had a knack for making oddball gadgets. The brothers' first venture was a product and company called *Inscribe*, which introduced the world's first computerized calligraphy system. *Inscribe* is a robotic printer that can actually hold a fountain pen and write in any of 70 different styles of *haute* penmanship, each created for the company by a renowned professional calligrapher. It was no mean feat of engineering, especially considering that the Siebers built the enterprise quite from scratch, starting out in Jonathan's living room without so much as a bank loan. They have since built *Inscribe* into a multimillion-dollar business. Among their most loyal customers: the White House.

After building a million-dollar business from the ground up, selling two presidents on computer-perfect penmanship, and pursuing the perfect golf swing to the very heights of hi-tech derring-do, what's an all-American dreamer to do next? Why, head for Hollywood, of course. Joseph Sieber is currently negotiating contracts to design an industrial-strength version of *In the Picture*, which will handle high-speed action and big-budget stunt shots deemed too dangerous for mortal cameramen. The souped-up product will be built to withstand sudden impacts and fiery explosions—and, presumably, the wildest of golf strokes.

—Alexander Wright