

Fiesta Launch to Lights and Movement

Ford's UK dealers witnessed a special feature of the largest number of Vari*Lite's ever run off a single console when they attended the recent Fiesta launch at the new London Arena in Docklands. John Offord retrieved the background story from Richard Knight.

I'd heard a few rumours about this 'show', but it was a private event and kept under wraps. And you couldn't buy a ticket. But it had all the elements of many major public entertainment events: lead names at the helm, massive expenditure and all the latest in lighting, rigging, sound and co-ordination of control. And all for a seven minute 'reveal' that would send Ford's dealers back to their showrooms singing the praises of the presentation and, hopefully, the car too.

What really set this show apart from so many others was the fact that everything moved. No less than 16 10 metre square screens and 192 Vari*Lite's were called into spontaneous action - the biggest rig this side of Genesis.

The presentation was the concept of Gary Withers of Imagination and lighting designer Andrew Bridge. Withers' proposal was that the show should be based around automated lighting, instead of adding it in as 'window dressing'. "The lighting came first, both in terms of design and budget," said the man behind the programming of the Vari*Lite's, Richard Knight.

He now takes up the story. "Vari*Lite's were created essentially for the rock and roll industry, prior to this show their use in industrial theatre was more or less limited to 16 or 32. The request to Vari-Lite Europe for 192 caused an international stir. Some parts even had to be flown from their HQ in Dallas.

"Vari-Lite's management were very helpful," continued Richard Knight and supplied an excellent crew headed by Tom Nulty. "One outcome of this particular show is the possibility of 'Nulty' becoming a household name (if you live in a house full of lighting trigs), but more of that later."

The other key player was Steve Colley of Arrow Rigging, who was responsible for the moving screens.

The design, as developed by Gary Withers and Andrew Bridge, centred around the sequential movement of 16 screens, in four rows of four, suspended from 7.5 tonnes of trussing from the auditorium ceiling. Twelve of the screens carried 16 Vari*Lite's attached to the trussing and run off one Artisan control console. In addition, some 400 custom

gobos were specified to produce additional effects. Each screen was moved by four motors controlled by a unique computer system, developed by Steve Colley. In all, some 82 motors were used throughout the show, either alone or in sync.

It turned out that it wasn't only the brief that was unique. This was to be the first show in the new London Arena in Docklands. In fact, the venue was not due to be completed until April and the get-in date was continually postponed. What's more, the Vari*Lite's had to be hung in a very special way; in-between the cords of the Telestage trussing so that the upper enclosure did not project beyond the cords, thus spoiling the lines of the frames. The solution was Knult plates.

Knult plates were spontaneously invented by Tom Nulty and Richard Knight (hence Nulty's possible chance at lighting immortality). "We used a pair on each Vari*Lite," explained Knight, "thus producing a four point hang. This was important as the screens were to perform a great deal of movement." In response to further questioning, he added



Ford's UK dealers witness the biggest-ever 'private' Vari*Lite show at the new London Arena in Docklands.



192 Vari'lites, 400 custom gobos, and 16 10 metre square screens helped launch the latest Ford Fiesta.



that it's also possible to use Knult plates as singles and hang the 'lites' diamond fashion between truss cords, producing a two point hang.

Rehearsals for the show were held over four days in an aerodrome hanger in Essex, complete with cars and transporters. Richard Knight remembers it as a "cold, but exciting" experience, during which a menu of Vari*Lite 'looks' were programmed for later adaptation on site. "You can imagine my relief," he said, "when we finally got on site and I found that what I had pre-programmed actually worked."

On-site, the programming continued, aided and abetted by Andrew Bridge who was otherwise occupied lighting Andrew Lloyd Webber's new musical 'Aspects of Love'.

"Andy was invaluable," continued Richard Knight, "both as another pair of eyes and as an inspiration. He could move around and see the effects from the audience's viewpoint, and has a complete vernacular of onomatopaeic terms to describe tempii and effects. Terms like: 'big & bold', 'chunker', 'breaks into twinkles' and 'flyover whoosh!'"

Working to recorded music, the pre-programmed sequences and looks were broken into 'big bold space users', 'screen looks' and 'car/transporter looks'. Knight worked in rotation with Steve Colley and his rigging team from Arrow. "When I programme, they stop working on the rig. When I break after three hours, they do tech work up in the air," he explained.

He has a great deal of respect for the riggers, particularly J.T. and Ian, the Vari*Lite riggers known collectively as 'The Dangerous Brothers'. They performed all the high altitude work changing bulbs and replacing broken units.



The new London Arena in Docklands.

"It was very much a team effort, and everybody was pleased with the end result, although I must admit that one of my fondest memories was when the techs broke into wild cheering one night around 3.00 am when the screens and Lites performed a really great sequence," Knight said.

"The end result was enjoyed and applauded by everyone who saw the show. The Vari*Lites proved to be more reliable than conventional lighting systems, and from the point both of reliability and effectiveness, the choice of them by Withers and Bridge was heartily endorsed. They were not the entire show: there was neon on the back wall, assorted aircraft lights and upstage dazzlers - they all looked terrific. But they were the add-ons, the window dressing. The 'show' was the automated lites and the moving screens," emphasised Richard Knight.

Equipment

212 VL2 Vari*Lite luminaires consisting of 192 active and 20 spares.

3 consoles. One active, one back-up, one for on-site technical workshop.

8 150' console control cables

5 ACS racks

3 bucking transformers

3 test racks

28 repeater boxes

59 100' trunk runs

13 60' trunk runs

2 50' trunk runs

37 30' trunk runs

33 50' lamp runs

101 20' lamp runs

101 12' lamp runs

89 6' lamp runs

3 100' 3 phase mains runs

3 30' 3 phase mains runs

8 10' 3 phase mains runs

3 200 amp 3 phase mains disconnects

Vari*Lite Europe personnel:

Operator/consultant: Richard Knight

Crew chief: Tom Nulty

Full time crew: Aiden McCabe, Mark Payne,

John Teahan, Marco Van Beek.

Additional crew: Mark Cunniffe, Bruce Ramus.

$$C = \pi d$$

(Archimedes: 250 B.C.)

$$I = E/R$$

(Ohm: 1827 A.D.)

$$F = M.a$$

(Newton: 1687 A.D.)

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