

The main tent skin itself weighs 1½ tons, and is not easy to manoeuvre. Four sixteen-week seasons render the tent useless and it is an expensive item to replace.

The company again needs the opportunity to expand its work, improve its facilities and to meet a demand for an increase in audience capacity. Accordingly, Bubble commissioned Pentagram Design to carry out a feasibility study for a new theatre that would allow for the much needed expansion and would resolve many of the problems encountered in working with the Tensi-Domes. To this end Pentagram produced initial plans and costings for a unique and revolutionary inflatable structure. This new design is for a mobile theatre, tailor made to meet the Bubble's needs and is built around the expertise of the architect research into other experiments with inflatable buildings, and the Bubble's considerable experience of presenting a high standard of professional theatre in the other two portable structures.

The fundamental principle of the new structure is the same as that of the pneumatic tyre. It consists of a series of tubes that when inflated form a rigid, free-standing structure. There would be no necessity for any additional system of internal or external support. The only extra requirement is for a method of anchoring the structure to the ground.

The structure consists of three distinct elements. There are three primary high-pressure ribs that are the main structural ribs, and together create the central internal space. These are supplemented by smaller ribs that form half domes to enclose the



*First Structure – (Polyhedral)*

open ends of the space created by the main ribs. The open areas between the ribs are filled by low pressure air cushions. Similar elements will be joined up to make the theatre's foyer and dressing rooms. The structure is given its overall shape by the main ribs which are vertical to a height of two metres and then curve in a semi-circle across a 16m span, and by the smaller ribs, again vertical for two metres and then forming the half domes at either end. This will give an internal height of 9 metres and a

floor area of 416 square metres. The structure would seat a maximum of 350 in a chair and table arrangement. It offers a vastly improved lighting ability. The additional height allows for better angling and focusing. To take full advantage of this facility the present power input will have to be upgraded, as well as the distribution, the operating board and many of the lights which would be too weak to deal adequately with the increased distance and area to be lit. Much of the Bubble's success can be attributed to the unique visual effect it makes. The new structure is certainly more striking and will have the effect of being an immediate attraction in any community. The traditional colours of blue and yellow can be retained to produce a startling striped effect and will help to continue introducing more and more people to the unique style of lively and exciting theatre which is the hallmark of Bubble Theatre productions.

Sadly, the wonderful, custom-designed new inflatable Bubble has still not proceeded beyond the drawing board stage. Inevitably, the company has found it extremely difficult to raise the large amount of money required to realise the project. In 1979, the Bubble purchased a new Tensi-Dome and it is this tent which is in use during the current season. For the 1980 season it was decided to concentrate on improving the facilities within the Tensi-Dome instead of gearing everything towards the new structure. These facilities are limited due to financial and practical restrictions. The entire Bubble operation is packed away every move into two trailers and three small vans. The main tent, the bar tent, the barriers and the protective fence fit into a 34' trailer, with the 1½ tons of tent skin being raised on a tail lift. All the staging, seating units, sets, lighting and sound equipment travel in a 40' trailer, which is converted into a dressing room during the week and is linked to one of the side entrances to the tent. A caravan serves as a primitive green room and base for the



*Putting up the Bar Tent*