

MAKING LIGHT OF HEAVY METAL

When top-selling rock band *Iron Maiden* takes to the road, a specially-designed touring rig, featuring Strand luminaires, moving lights technology and controls, goes with them.

The touring rig was designed by Paul Devine, Ronan Willson and Geoff Benson of Borehamwood based hire company Meteorlites. As Geoff Benson says, 'Providing the lights for a tour takes you into a completely different dimension. You have to think of literally everything.'

This is partly because with a rock tour, the venues may range from a medium-sized theatre right up to an outdoor arena. No matter where the band is playing, the light show has to remain similar. The fact that at some of the venues there may be no suspension points for lighting means that such eventualities (plus, of course, unknown quantities of additional cabling) have to be taken into account by the hire company in the very early stages.

The other factor is a familiar problem for anyone who has to take a show on the road.

'A lighting problem is posed. They want something which looks like a million dollars but they have a fixed budget and crew to work with it and in any case, everything must fit inside a given truck space.'

Finding the answer to such problems has been the key to Meteorlites success over the years.

Acts and shows the company has been responsible for lighting have included Jason Donovan, the now-legendary *The Wall* concert in Berlin, Phil Collins, Joan Armatrading, the *Proms* at the Albert Hall, the *Antiques Roadshow*, Fleetwood Mac, Chris de Burgh, the Beach Boys, Prefab Sprout and numerous television productions.

Geoff Benson, one of Meteorlites' production managers explained, 'In general we specialise in 'event' lighting. If there is a quantity of lighting equip-



■ *Iron Maiden* — taking to the road with a Strand-influenced touring rig.

ment, you can hire it to a variety of different markets. We don't just restrict ourselves to one market.

'In our type of business there is a great deal of cross-fertilisation going on and this originates from the demands of the clients. The client wants to achieve a certain effect and it is up to us to come up with the equipment to allow him to obtain it. Occasionally this will mean combining components in a way which I am sure the manufacturers never foresaw.'

In the case of *Iron Maiden*, the lighting designer was Paul Devine, who has had a close working relationship with Meteorlites for many years.

The touring rig devised by Paul Devine and Ronan Willson for another client, *Marillion*, employed a good deal of Strand's moving lights technology.

This included Parscans, Parscrollers, two Cadenza profiles with colour changers, Iris colour changers and a specially-developed 'Proscan' hybrid profile spot, based on a Parscan.

Geoff explained, 'They wanted a dynamic show and the show that was developed was really stunning. There were so many 'looks' available from the rig.'

When it came to the *Iron Maiden* project, this was expanded to include over 100 Parscans, 68 Parscrollers, also aircraft 'landing lights' with colour changers and some other colour changing devices, all controlled by two Taskmasters.

'What we have done is to take Strand technology and add on to it. The cabling and distribution system for the Strand equipment is customised to

integrate with Meteorlite's lighting rigs.'

One of the secrets of a successful touring rig is the basic flight-casing.

Geoff said, 'We look at how you flight-case something and we have special flight-cases built if necessary. If you don't flight-case something properly it will be damaged.'

'Also, when you are sending a rig off on tour you have to take repairs into account. How easy is it to repair? Is the device so unreliable that you need a spare one, just in case it breaks down?'

'And once you get into colour-changing technology you are in a new area of repair altogether.'

'You also have to develop cabling routines and systems to enable you to isolate any faulty items. There is also the added problem that different products have different failure rates. For example, a Mark II Parscroller has had significant improvements which resulted in increased electronic and mechanical reliability.'

'Like all other branches of the lighting industry, you have to work on the assumption that if something can go wrong, it will.'

'One point which is often overlooked is that in lighting, every job you do is unique. No two jobs are ever the same. People do expect a great deal from their lighting company. They expect us to solve a lot of their problems.'

'It is in the lighting designer's brief to do things that haven't been done before. Everyone wants something new.'

'And of course a rock band will take a great deal of interest in its lighting. What our industry comes up with determines the quality of their show.'