interest. I've also tried to get an independent view of each console from someone with experiencing of having used it.
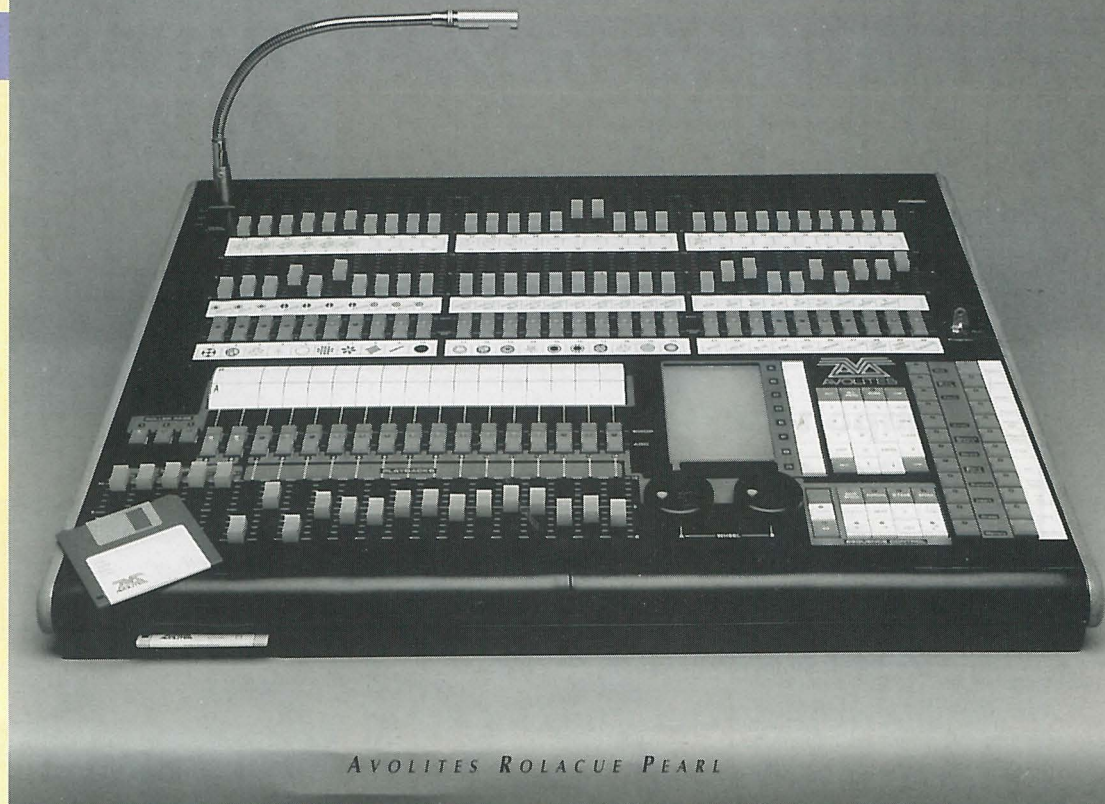
AVOLITES ROLACUE PEARL

The Rolacue Pearl is the latest from Avolites. It has extensive moving light control, whilst still keeping a conventional layout for easy playback at showtime.

It has 512 channels and 450 memories, the latter being arranged as 30 pages of 15 cues. Channels can be allocated as HTP or LTP, and by using a disk-based personality system, as on the Sapphire and Diamond, patching of moving lights is as simple as patching a dimmer. Programming is simple too, the Add and Swap buttons giving instant access to position, colour, gobo and intensity preset focuses without the need to touch a wheel or fader.

Moving light programming uses the Avolites Three Dimensional Intelligent Tracking System, allowing follow spot type operation of a number of instruments, which will track each other in real time. This is particularly useful when programming, as one instrument can be positioned on the stage and others requested to point at the same position. This can be implemented by using an inexpensive Graphics Tablet as an interactive stage plot.

Mixing of HTP and LTP channels means that replaying memories and chases with dimmers as well as instrument control channels produces the results you would expect. Memories, chases and sequences can be linked to appear on different pages. Sequences can be replayed as a simple chase, or as 'theatre playback' allowing access to any step in a sequence. Steps are numbered in theatre style, with inserts allotted point numbers e.g. 10.5. Steps can be linked, run out of sequence and smoothly terminated whilst running.

AVOLITES ROLACUE PEARL

AVOLITES ROLACUE SAPPHIRE

This is basically the same desk as the Pearl, but physically twice the size, with 120 channel faders and 20 cue masters, and thus able to handle up to 60 moving lights.

One important point to raise about both desks is how easy it is to use units from different manufacturers simultaneously, with the desk knowing the personality of each.

Both boards can playback to time code (EBU and SMPTE) and MIDI, and back-up to inexpensive PC format diskettes.

USING THE SAPPHIRE

Nick Jevons has been designing for six years, working with The Grid, Kingmaker, Chumbawamba, Neds Atomic Dustbin and Carter USM, these bands often taking out lots of assorted lights and effects.

"I like the Sapphire because it's an easy desk to work with, and you can control all types of lighting — generic or intelligent — there's no need for separate desks. (Patching of both dimmers and moving lights is simple.) Every function button is clearly marked and easily accessible.

For controlling PAR cans, the desk operates like any conventional desk; recording memories just two button pushes away. But the desk really comes into its own when controlling moving lights, the personality of most fixtures available making patching a doddle — simply tell the desk what type of lights you're using, and it automatically places the colour, pan/tilt etc onto the correct preset bank.

Using the Preset Focus really makes programming quick and simple; preset focuses can be used for any parameter you like. So for a Golden Scan for example, you can have presets for positions, colours, gobos, different iris sizes, index positions for rotation and shutter/strobe, with virtually no need to actually touch a fader or wheel. There are 60 preset focuses available for each parameter, the desk being able to handle 24 parameters for each instrument.

Obviously, using preset focuses for building up cues and chases means that when you're touring, all you have to do each day is update the focuses, and all the cues and chases are updated. For this, I really like the desk!

It's easy to copy or duplicate a cue or chase already programmed onto another cue fader, either on the same page or any of the other 20 roller pages (soon to be extended to 60!) Channels can be quickly copied and ganged between themselves, for example when using colour changers, or a whole group of changers can be altered simultaneously via the fader or speed wheel on the desk. The speed wheel is a quick and efficient way of updating focuses for moving lights, or you can plug in a mouse or trackball if you prefer.

I've still got a long way to go in finding the boards full potential, but the more I use it, the more I like it."

AVOLITES GRAPHIC TABLET

The Avolites Graphic Tablet is an interactive stage plan. It alleviates the need for button presses and enables the lighting designer to map out the stage and focus positions as desired. Thereafter, lights can be moved or tracked across the stage, in real time, by clicking on and moving a pen around the Graphic Tablet.

The Graphic Tablet makes it simple to move large numbers of lights instantly, as opposed to using the more time-consuming process of pan and tilt wheels. The fixtures will move upstage-downstage and onstage-offstage, regardless of the positions in which they are hung. This is achieved with Avolites 'unique' three dimensional mathematics, which converts the ➤