



◀ The tilt mechanism under test.

Seats have to be available in differing widths. This is not, gentle reader, simply to accommodate audiences who vary in size from elfin to elephantine but rather so that the differing lengths of row to allow for staggered seating, curved rows and tapering auditoriums can all be accommodated.

Any new range of seating has to be able to accommodate an acute curve — in the case of this new range a radius of as little as three metres was achieved.

Then there are the various choices of construction. In the happy days of the super cinema, to which I return in my thoughts as often as is possible,



Len Holme explains details of the construction of Horizon chairs to the Editor.

cast iron was an important material, being universally used for the seat standards and frames. A moment's thought will give the average intelligent TABS reader an idea of the number of moulds that must have been kept in stock by the companies who catered for the Odeons, Granadas and Savoyes of the 20's and 30's. Not only were there cinema circuit badges or art nouveau floral designs to incorporate but the castings had to cater for up to a dozen different rakes in various cinema and theatre floors. And castings are of their very nature heavy and thus very costly in freight charges. This is especially important now that we export seating to so many corners of the world. It was therefore decided that for the new range — by now named Horizon — the metal work of the chair frames would have to be fabricated from steel. This eliminated the question of any stocking of metal components, each job being made up to suit the rake and seat widths required.

For the frame of the back and of the seat timber still holds sway. For Horizon seating good quality plywood is used, although rumour hath it that some competitive products, particularly from overseas, have been known to use chipboard. Rather revealingly this product is known in the furniture trade as Weetabix — not to any disparagement at all of that excellent comestible but to give an idea of the strength of chipboard as compared to that of quality plywood.

Now to the actual springing medium itself. Returning briefly to my ideal era of the thirties, coil springs were universal. Twelve springs per seat in the provinces, sixteen springs per seat in the West End! But it is an expensive form of construction and for practical purposes more modern materials have now taken over.



BEYOND THE BLUE HORIZON

OR RED, OR LEATHER, OR TWEED

by The Editor

ALL sorts of factors contribute to one having a pleasant visit to a theatre or a cinema.

Could one hear what was being said? Could one see what was happening? Was the auditorium too hot or, more likely, too cold?

And was one comfortable? Obviously all these factors affect one's enjoyment but, I submit, the actual comfort of the seat one is occupying has a very important influence on the pleasure of the occasion. Your Editor recollects going to his local theatre a few years ago to see Emlyn Williams doing his one man Charles Dickens show. It was a superb but flawed evening. When I came to resume my seat after the interval — oh the agony. I was sitting in the fourth row of the stalls and unfortunately in this particular theatre the front rows of seating are not only uncomfortable in themselves but even worse the actual seats are mounted on a kind of curb formed in the auditorium floor. This means that it is impossible to put one's feet under the seat immediately in front. This in itself would not be too bad if the space between the rows was sufficient for anyone but a

dwarf but, alack and alas, it is only the same distance — or pitch as we seating experts say — as the rest of the auditorium.

All of Emlyn Williams enormous talent and charm were insufficient to distract at least one member of the audience from his own tortured carcass. I walked into the theatre as upright and as beautiful a physical specimen as Olivia Newton John and emerged looking — and feeling — like Quasimodo.

When I was told by Len Holme, the Manager of the Strand Seating Factory, that his latest design had been honoured by being selected by the Design Centre, I thought I would look a little further to see how a new auditorium chair comes to be born.

Len Holme, who runs the Seating Factory, is a man totally devoted to seating, whether it be football crowds in their stadia, schoolboys in their classrooms, congregations in their churches or, of course, audiences in theatres or cinemas. If more than ten people gather together for a common purpose, Len will do his best to seat them.

When Len gets down to design a completely new range of auditorium

seating many cigarette packets and HB pencils are used before ever a formal drawing sees the light of day.

Let us consider the factors that have to be taken into account. Today an auditorium seat is almost certain to be not only tip-up but actually self-tipping. This is a requirement of many local licencing authorities and is so that in an emergency an audience can clear a building quickly and easily. Still on the safety theme, all auditorium seating must be fire retardant and must pass some pretty severe tests to prove this.



Horizon chair prior to upholstery.