TRIUMPH ACCLAIM —

by Gail Hardman

Telestage, through their associated company, TAS-Stage Limited had an interesting contract a short while ago rather outside their usual world of stage and studio.

We therefore asked Gail Hardman to report on the very impressive launch of the new Triumph Acclaim that TAS-Stage literally engineered.

WE were in a lecture theatre, ten rows of seats in a single block facing a small proscenium stage. The tabs were bathed in a deep red, and the Chairman of British Leyland at the lectern was picked out in a flattering pink.

There was a full house for this, one of about twenty preview shows for the new Triumph Acclaim. 350 people listened politely as Mr Ray Horrocks explained some harsh economic facts of life. The new Acclaim, he was sure, would be a winner and restore British supremacy in the car market. He hoped that he would find our first view of it a moving experience.

He left the stage to a round of applause, and the lights dimmed to blackout. A black-out so complete that I never discovered where the pros. disappeared to! A deafening electronic chord preceded a spectacle which brought whispered comments from those around me — "wonderful", "amazing", "fantastic".

The first glimmers of light shone through billowing dry ice, and the faintest suspicion of a blue disc hovered in mid-air. A multi-layered star cloth sparkled into life, giving extraordinary depth to the scene. The disc approached, its blueness intensifying and shafts of white light piercing the mist from around its edges. A small silver satellite whirled across the stage, the music building to a climax. The disc stopped, close to the audience, and revealed itself to be a globe — earth turning in the vastness of space.

A short film was then projected onto the globe, detailing the history of car design leading up to the wonderful new model that was about to be revealed to us. At the end, the globe returned, and with the music came the feeling of a rumbling beneath my seat. Was this some new form of Sensurround?

Darkness prevailing once more, save the twinkling stars, we began to move forward. It was an incredible feeling, the whole audience being transported into the black void of space, the globe passing onwards and upwards, silently disappearing over our heads. There wasn't even a whisper now from my companions on this strange journey — the "moving experience" was beginning!

Beyond the starts, we found ourselves in the company of a giant computer keyboard, a huge VDU above it spelling out its messages. The Triumph Acclaim trademark was repeated endlessly during the succession of facts and figures that followed, beginning to have an almost menacing effect as the computer told its story. It was a relief when the whole keyboard opened up to reveal nothing more harrowing than four competitor's cars, and a witty exchange between a super-salesman and a very well-informed lady from the audience, designed to convince us all what inferior products these four really were.

Those cars disposed of and driven away in a cloud of carbon monoxide, the salesman wished us farewell on our journey towards our ultimate goal and we were enveloped in darkness once more. The walls began to glow and pulsate in time to the music. "Performance" they cried. "Reliability", "Economy", "Elegance" they trumpeted. "ACCLAIM" they repeated, in dazzling letters six feet high. The dry ice rose and once more we moved forward into the unknown — the walls swung back to admit us to the inner sanctum, and suddenly several PAR Blazers shone out at us, so that we could but dimly discern a revolving mist-enshrouded silhouette — THE CAR! With one more thunderous cacophony of sound, the lights on the podium came up to reveal the Acclaim in all its glory, multiplied many-fold by shimmering mirrors on all sides.

This cross between 2001 and Star Wars was certainly a novel way to introduce something as mundane as a motor car. And it made its effect. As the audience tottered from their seats to take a closer look the murmurs of praise were everywhere — "astonishing", "stunning", "fabulous".

BL engaged London Conference Producers Caribiner to execute the concept they had proposed nearly a year earlier and to form the team necessary to stage this extravaganza at the NEC in Birmingham — and what team-work it must have involved! The settings were designed by Paul Staples and Caribiner were also responsible for the film and tape-slide inputs. A bank of thirty slide projectors, in three groups, using soft-edge overlay between the slides to make the joins completely undetectable, simulated the huge computer VDU.

I found it remarkable that the projector bank, housing more than 2,400 slides, had to be struck during the show, and was in fact mounted on a scaffolding truck which slid silently away to allow the audience's final approach to the crock of gold. This makes the perfection of the slide show's registration even more of an achievement.

The globe and its tracking and rigging, and the giant computer keyboard were designed and constructed by TAS-Stage and Telestage Associates, both part of the Rank Organisation. Mike Crisp of TAS-Stage, was closely connected with the project. I asked him whether this was an unusual job for them, or fairly run-of-the-mill?

"Most of our jobs are rather special one-offs," he told me, "So you could describe this one as run-of-the-mill as well! The globe and computer were designed by TAS-Stage and manufactured and installed by Telestage Associates, all in about four-and-a-half weeks!"

Another Rank company, P. Kemp Engineering, provided perhaps the "best bit" of the show — they designed and installed the variable-speed winch and truck which resulted in the amazing "audience-participation" factor. The winch, which moved forty tons of audience 240 feet during the hour-long show, had its chain laid in a duct thoughtfully already provided in the NEC's floor. Its forty horse-power motor was extremely quiet — beyond the slight rumbling sensation I had no idea of how we had been conveyed until Caribiner's Phil Grief showed me some of the mysteries backstage.

With Phil, I went up into the control room at the back of the audience "wagon" — a very simple scaffolding structure approached by a vertical ladder and housing only the stage manager, Mollie Kirkland, the film projector and a small "final sound mix" desk. "The weight had to be kept to an absolute minimum," Phil explained, "So all the lighting control and main sound control gear were kept backstage — even the cable weight was critical." Watching the few essential cables being paged as the monster truck was reset showed me the truth of his words — 300 feet of even one cable is quite an item to pull!

There were 1,200 square metres of blacks, weighing about 3 tons, which were necessary to enclose the 4000 square feet of space inside a building the size of several aircraft hangers. Zenavail were responsible for the rigging and trussing, the lighting was in the hands of Gaslight, who used over 1000 luminaires to cover the spectacle.

And so the credit list continues:— walls and moving partitions by Beck and Politzer, screens by Harkness, scaf-

BEHIND THE SCENES AT McDONALD'S

by Norah McNulty

WHEN Thomas Telford, the great road engineer, visited Birmingham in 1785 he described the city in a letter to a friend as "That place famous for Buttons and Buckles and Ignorance and Barbarism". Never having visited Birmingham before, this description haunted my mind when I was asked by the Editor to have a look at a very unusual Environ Daylight Sensitive dimming contract which had recently been carried out at the Birmingham High Street branch of the famous McDonald's chain.

Late last year, when the scheme for the second McDonald's in Birmingham was under discussion, Strand Commercial Lighting were telephoned and asked whether they could offer a dimmer "that took half an hour to go from 'out' to 'full'?"

A little questioning revealed that what McDonald's wanted was a system that automatically reacted to daylight fading and would gradually turn on the lighting as dusk fell, whether it was Winter or Summer, and would allow for differences in cloud cover as well.

As with so many lighting control problems Strand Commercial Lighting already had the answer.

It all lies in the simple little daylight sensitive cell shown in our photograph. This clever device notices how much daylight is available and automatically and continuously adjusts the ENVIRON dimmers controlling the lighting so that as night falls the lights gradually increase in brightness to come to full as the last glimmer of sunset leaves the Brummagen sky.

The ENVIRON daylight sensitive dimmers installed are controlled by four preset pushbuttons. The first pushbutton gives full brightness, the second pushbutton holds a predetermined intermediate level, the third button brings the daylight sensitive cell into circuit to control the dimmer and the fourth button turns the lighting off.

Special circuitry is included so that the dimmers do not suddenly re-act to, say, the shadow of a passing aeroplane crossing the photocell or one small cloud crossing the sky although, I am not convinced that should a large bird roost actually on the cell this would not turn on all the lights! Strand's answer is that if this became a problem a second cell would be installed, as statistically the chances of two birds roosting simultaneously on two rather uncomfortable looking (from the bird's eye point of view) cells within a few yards of each other at the same time are highly remote.

As will be seen from the photograph, the lighting consists of decorative 25W tungsten opal lamps which are fixed at about four inch centres around the roof beams and in the central lanterns.

The dimmer cabinets are installed in the plant room in the basement.

It is giving away, I hope, no secrets to dwell for a moment on the amazing amount of plant and equipment installed behind the scenes of this typical fast service establishment. As in a well designed theatre, there is literally as much space backstage (or in this case in kitchen, storage and plant rooms) as in the area occupied by the public. There is a very comprehensive air conditioning apparatus which, in fact, occupies virtually the whole of the roof space of the building.

Behind the scenes downstairs, as well as the actual kitchen there are enormous freezers and even a large washing machine for washing the many cloths used by the staff as they continually clean the stainless steel equipment in the kitchen, as well as the surfaces in the customer areas.

One sign that amused me was the designation for what would normally in this country bear the rather forbidding