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classic gear

Martin MAC500 | Rob Halliday . . .



Anniversary years sometimes provide judicious prods to the *Classic Gear* memory - in this case, a reminder that it is some 20 years since Martin Professional's MAC500 moving spotlight arrived on the scene, making quite an impact on the industry around it.

This was a time, remember, when the world of moving head automated lighting was still dominated by Vari-Lite, and while the company had softened its stance a bit (you no longer needed a Vari-Lite supplied crew, the newer lights could run from DMX), their lights were still rental-only from exactly one supplier - Vari-Lite. Plus, you needed the special cables, smart repeaters and power racks to make everything work. Or you could buy DMX-controlled moving lights from other manufacturers - but the moving spotlights were often moving mirror fixtures rather than the moving heads many were coming to prefer.

Martin was one of those moving mirror manufacturers, from the RoboScans up to the enormous PAL1200. In 1996, the company made a first foray into moving heads with the big and rather underwhelming MAC1200 - MAC from 'Moving Automated Colour Changer'.

A year later came the MAC500 . . .

Just by looking at it, you could tell this was a game-changer; its clean, precise moulded plastic body quite a contrast to the metalwork almost everyone else was still using. It felt designed rather than just engineered; intended to be built in quantity, to be sold to just about anyone, to be rugged, reliable and practical wherever it ended up. Details like the rubber feet on the top box for floor-standing use and the versatile menu system that included the ability to invert the display itself made it easy to plug-in, set-up and configure - at least,



once you'd learnt the cryptic MAC language of 'dLOFs' and 'LERRs' imposed by the four's character display!

More importantly, it could do a lot. 440° of pan, 306° of tilt - smooth, precise movement without having to worry about speed channels or other tricks. Twin colour wheels with interchangeable flags, able to spin and do split colours. Both fixed and rotating/indexing gobo wheels - the former a cunning all-in-one metal wheel, the latter taking either glass or less expensive metal gobos. Edge focus. Iris. A prism that also helpfully made the beam (available in 17° and 23.5° versions via interchangeable lenses) a bit wider. Built-in effects, for when you were doing that kind of show. That unfortunate thing

where you could easily reset all your lights while trying to find the perfect strobe effect . . .

All these things (except the last!) sound completely normal now. They weren't then.

And because this was a package anyone could buy - or could buy and rent to you, if you preferred to rent - the MAC500 and its companion wash light, the MAC600, were very quickly everywhere. Despite concerted efforts by Vari-Lite to stop them on patent infringement grounds.

20 years on and long out of production, they still crop up all over the place. By modern standards, their 575W MSR lamp means they're not super bright, but for many things they are bright enough. They've worked hard. And their influence can

be seen everywhere, not just in every Martin moving head light since, but in all the precisely formed moulded plastic cases that now make up just about every other moving light around. ☒

MAC500 at Martin: [//plasa.me/mac500](http://plasa.me/mac500)
A Prototype MAC500:

[//plasa.me/mac500prototype](http://plasa.me/mac500prototype)

Rob has been working in and writing about lighting for more than 25 years, on shows around the world. He wonders if this makes him a classic... or just old!

gx range

power to respond.



See the new gx range at PLASA - White Light stand: L50

