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Robe Lights World's Largest Mirror Ball

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This is one of the new lighting features for the world famous Blackpool Illuminations and their newly launched "Festival of Light" concept, which was switched on for the 2005 season at the weekend by Chris Evans.

The 20 ft diameter rotating mirror ball, is named "They Shoot Horses Don't They" and has been in residence since 2002. It was created by artist Michael Trainor and is synonymous with the culture of ballroom dancing, for which the town is also historically renowned.

A new Icon for the Blackpool Illuminations

McLennahan was commissioned to transform the glitter ball into a "new icon for the illuminations". Apart from that brief, received from Illuminations' Festival Director Philip Oakley, he was given a free hand as to how he achieved the goal.

His aim was to make it contemporary, cool and fun as well as a memorable visual sight that brought a distinct touch of luminescent glamour and sophistication to the sea front.

The six ColorSpot 1200E AT's are mounted on customised 5 metre high posts, with special domes on top to protect them for the weather - being directly exposed to the Irish Sea it can be an extremely hostile environment. The posts were designed and supplied by Blackpool Council's Illuminations engineering department. They are force air cooled to extract the heat of the fixtures from the small space.

Robe - Dressed to Impress

The Robe fixtures were supplied by leading rental and sales company HSL from Blackburn.

McLennahan had not used Robe before, and he was considering his moving light options when Robe UK's Bill Jones turned up and demonstrated the powerful ColorSpot 1200 fixture in situ.

That was it - as soon as he'd seen the units in action he knew it was the light for the project, "*ColorSpot 1200 is a fantastic piece of kit*" he declares, "*The optics and effects are amazing, the brightness and smoothness are awesome and they gave me all the scope to do everything I wanted with the installation. Apart from all that functionality, they are also incredible value for money!*"

Philip Oakley adds, "*We were simply so impressed with the demo that we decided there and then to purchase them!*"

Living Light Sculpture

In addition to the lights being pointed directly onto the ball and changing colours, effects and gobos on its mesmeric, shimmering surface, the lights have been programmed by McLennahan to wander out into a small arena immediately around the Ball, making patterns in the floor and engaging in 3D animations and projections. All of this draws people in to enjoy the work as a living light sculpture. Control is from a ShowCAD Artist system located in the Solaris office building over the road from the sea front. Power is sourced locally, and data is transmitted via wireless DMX. The Artist is programmed to start up, run and then shut down at predetermined times each night.

Local and visitor reaction to the new look mirror ball has been wholly positive. *"People are constantly E-mailing in - already - to say how much they like it"* says Oakley - and the Illuminations have only just started.

HSL also supplied another four Robe ColorSpot 1200E ATs for the top of Blackpool Tower for the opening week of the Illuminations. They are being used to perform aerial effects and to project light beams and logos onto the clouds.

A Note on Blackpool Illuminations

The 2005 Illuminations will shine non-stop for 66 nights. The cable and wiring stretches for over 200 miles and the amount of electricity consumed is worth approximately £50,000. The switch on is always 'live' - when the button is pressed.

Holidaymakers first tripped the 'Light Fantastic' in 1879 when just 8 Siemens arc lamps bathed the promenade in 'artificial sunshine'. 126 years later, the idea is very much the same - although the style, scale and professionalism of the operation have stepped on massively with history and technology!

The first 'modern' display of lighting technology at Blackpool is generally reckoned to have been in 1912, marking the first royal visit to Blackpool, which saw the Promenade decked out with over 10,000 festoon bulbs! 2005 is also the commemoration of the 125th anniversary of Edison's patented Electric Light Bulb.

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