

Trends in 70mm Projection Equipment

By GIOVANNI BOZZI

IT IS OUR purpose to discuss some of the problems connected with 70mm films which now exist and which may affect the future of 70mm from the European and more specifically from the Italian point of view.

Today the 70mm projector no longer presents a technical problem. There are many manufacturers of 70mm projection equipment. The main problems remaining after the field practice we have all had in recent years are price, installation and servicing expenses. Our situation is considerably different from yours. We are some 8000 miles from Hollywood and almost our only contacts with the 70mm film-producing companies are through their local branches. These contacts are very often unsatisfactory because of the limited facilities and service available. Since we in Italy are directly affected by this situation, our point of view may be of some interest.

Presented on May 9, 1961, at the Society's Convention in Toronto by Giovanni Bozzi, Cinemeccanica S.P.A., Viale Compania 23, Milano, Italy.
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Small Number of Installations

In the past, correspondence with the producing companies, notwithstanding our 6000 customers throughout Europe, Asia, Africa and South America, was practically nil. Recently we have found it necessary to increase our files and our English correspondence in order to answer inquiries from producing companies which have been making continuous and repeated requests for up-to-date lists of 70mm installations. These pressing requests show, no doubt, that one of the bottlenecks preventing the success of 70mm is the small number of installations available. Certainly 70mm can be considered an important step forward in our field, and anything that can be done to improve this situation will help the entire motion-picture industry from producer to exhibitor.

We all know the history of CinemaScope and in my opinion a great deal of guidance can be derived from it. I remember, that in Italy, following the introduction of CinemaScope, its reception was very unenthusiastic until the day when second-run theaters became interested. From that moment, the requests for CinemaScope installations increased at a hectic pace and in less than two years we had in Italy

more than 1000 CinemaScope installations. That avalanche rhythm probably had something to do with our Latin mood; but anyway we feel that when the cost of 70mm projection equipment comes within the reach of second-run theaters, the sluggish progress of 70mm toward success will be considerably accelerated. As more theaters become equipped for 70mm, correspondence between cinema equipment factories and Hollywood producers may no longer be of such urgent necessity, and the best of exhibiting possibilities will raise the level of 70mm film production.

Of course we are not so simple-minded as to believe that the problem of equipment installation and servicing cost is the only one to be solved for the future of 70mm films, but this is an area within which we can do something and so this problem is the one requiring our immediate attention.

American Installations Older

I believe it is necessary to point out some differences between American (and British) installations and installations in continental Europe. To be frank when, a few years ago, I visited some American booth installations, I received a very bad impression. Not only did the age of the American installations seem generally older than that of comparable European installations, but in America I noticed, quite frequently, assemblages of pedestals, amplifiers, speakers from different sources, different ages and with adaptation brackets, plates and bolts. To assemble so many heterogeneous parts of assorted vintage would require much skill, but in my opinion this would make for very good operating results.

European Installation Practices

In Europe, each manufacturer generally provides a complete line, from the pedestal to the optical head, from the mechanism to the speaker, and when an installation is changed, a completely new unit is installed. In such a situation, the manufacturer can take the whole responsibility of the equipment, and we think this ensures better and more reliable installations. Therefore, if only one company supplies the equipment, that company can arrange for a step-by-step procedure so that 70mm can be simply and intelligently achieved, starting from a normal 35mm optical installation.

It is a most disappointing development that in Italy, as well as in other countries, despite the considerable effort and expense undertaken by manufacturers and exhibitors to provide 70mm facilities, we received very few 70mm prints, and in the case of the long-heralded spectacular, *Ben-Hur*, only 35mm prints were distributed.

You can understand that this was a particularly bitter disappointment.

Prospects and Plans

In this respect, should we not try to solve the riddle of "which comes first, the chicken or the egg" by asking the following question: could we assist in this problem by introducing a 35mm optical equipment, comparable in price to American 35mm projectors, which will provide for

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changing from 35mm optic to 70mm magnetic very easily by interchanging parts resulting in a 70mm projector meeting the highest standard of the industries?

I think such equipment would be enthusiastically accepted by those exhibitors who need replacement of equipment or who are contemplating new theaters.

With the situation now prevailing in respect to 70mm film release, exhibitors are afraid of investing money in some useless gimmick or of putting into the booth some equipment which would become obsolete in a few years. If realistically priced equipment, with interchangeable sections, were available, theater owners could be assured of a permanent installation for their investment. We believe that marketing such equipment is the only way to provide projection facilities for a more substantial production of 70mm films and for a complete utilization of the prints.

Such equipment would also make it easier to extend 70mm projection facilities to drive-in-theaters, which are particularly in need of 70mm film for improving their projection standards, which are presently very low for lack of definition and of brightness.

We believe that we are on the right track and we are presently developing this type of equipment. We hope that our work will result in the very near future in the deserved success of the 70mm film. Three of these units are presently being tested in regular theaters, one in Italy, one in France and one in Switzerland. By the end of the year we expect to be making regular installations.

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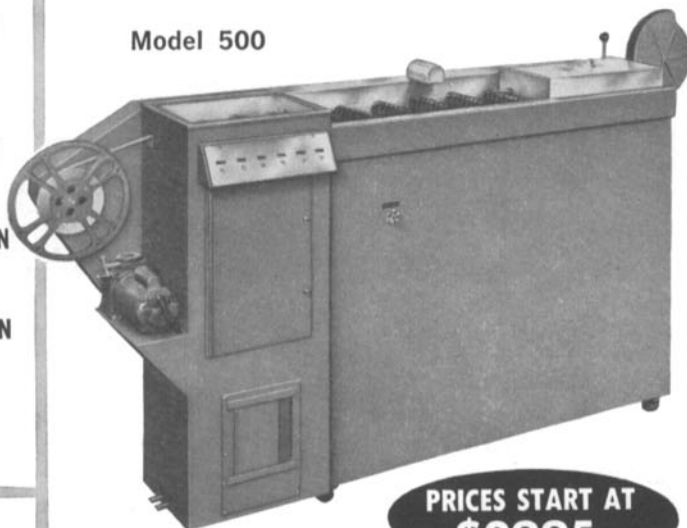
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