

THE CHARGER

The military type appearance of the charger was due to a long arm protruding out through large steel plates, which gave it a look much the same as a field gun, the plates providing the driver with his only protection from the blistering heat of a fully open furnace door. Looking through a narrow slot in the top of the steel plate protection, the driver could see to travel the machine in both directions along the entire length of the stage, the low, flat chassis which from a distance made it look like a crab had a flanged steel wheel at each corner, two running on each of the rail tracks set flush with the surface of the stage, one either side of the whole width of the floor spanning approximately 30 feet. The complete turret in which the driver had to stand to operate the machine seemed to be totally surrounded by huge electric motors and could move forwards and backwards across the massive rolling chassis allowing it to cover the whole width of the stage, it could also rotate continuously clockwise or anti clockwise and raise or lower the arm whilst continuously revolving in either direction, very similar to the turret of an armoured military tank. Multiple combinations of these movements were possible at the same time. The charger was quite a remarkable machine despite its apparent basic construction. There were however no safety features or audible warnings to safeguard the working crews, but the mechanical noise and general shaking of the whole building made it was pretty obvious when it was on the move. Personal safety was therefore entirely up to each individual to keep clear of it when it was operating, as the driver did not have the luxury of time to keep a watch for anyone straying into his path.

Malcolm Mowbray 2015