

Talkingheads

Special effects specialist Machine Shop has proved horribly successful in the film world

THREE MEN DRINK PINTS in the Grand Junction Arms, Harlesden. "I've got to drown a horse," says one.

"Try getting a Ford Escort to accelerate from 0-47mph in six feet," says another.

"Well I've got to decapitate three men in one go, with one swipe of a sword," muses a third.

The crew from the special effects company, Machine Shop, must tackle such projects every day and the company has completed more than 600 weird and wonderful jobs in the past five years.

Recent projects have included an advert for PlayStation, a stretch glitter Mini for the Brit Awards, and a mass of gory effects for Poland's biggest-ever feature film, *By Fire And Sword*.

Six full-time staff and an army of specialist freelancers create a vast range of special effects for feature films, commercials, pop promos, exhibitions and theatre productions. And in five years the Machine Shop has built up a staggering client list.

The crew has worked on stage shows for the Spice Girls, Tina Turner, Michael Jackson, U2, Blur, the Bee Gees and Diana Ross. It has also created adverts for Volkswagen, Weetabix, Cen-



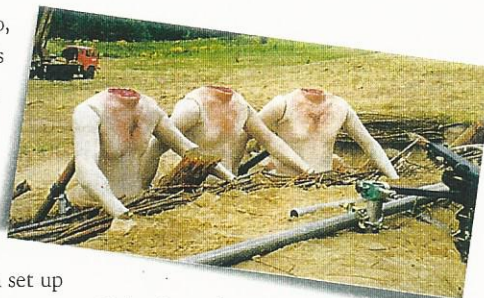
Above: Paul Mann with model friends

ter Parcs, Gordons Gin, Esso, PlayStation and Smirnoff. And it is now moving into feature films, with the appointment of a models and miniatures expert whose credits include *Terminator 2*, *Batman Returns* and *James And The Giant Peach*.

Managing director Paul Mann set up the Machine Shop in 1993 after nine years in the BBC's visual effects department. He says he had "no clients, no money and lots of enthusiasm", but the work has rolled in.

The team has to be highly inventive to recreate a client's vision and there is often only one chance to get it right. For the 1997 *One Foot In The Grave* Christmas special the team had to propel a Ford Escort from 0-47mph in just six feet and fling it off a cliff.

The Machine Shop has expanded, without ever needing to advertise. Initially Paul set up in Acton



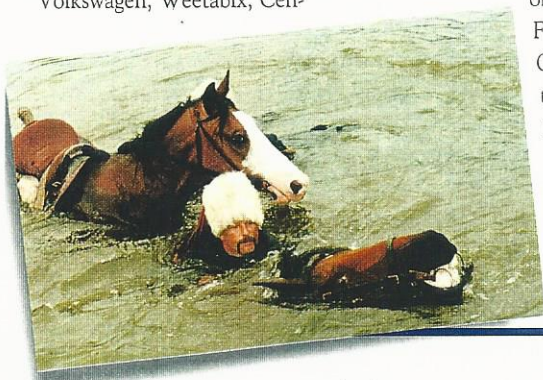
Left: Clever model-making skills head off the competition

Vale but the company quickly outgrew its offices and, attracted by the location of the Park Royal Estate, he bought and refurbished an old theatre on Acton Lane.

Another advantage of Park Royal, says Paul, is the number of suppliers in the area – but the crew has become particularly friendly with staff at a nearby Polish cafe after revealing the Machine Shop was working on the Polish film.

To see a sample of the Machine Shop's latest work, look out for a Salon Selective advert where a girl with swirling hair falls gently backwards to the floor. But spot the hydraulic rig created to support her fall and Paul will be disappointed.

Far left: Horses in the Polish film had been paddling around quite happily with a highly convincing model horse, complete with mane, but when the model was plunged underwater, the horses raced out of the lake in a blind panic



i INFORMATION
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