

Questions asked to Paul O'Connor, projectionist and co-founder of Sol Cinema
Please call 07973 298359 if you have any other questions.

How long did it take to make Sol Cinema?

The Sol Cinema took a full year to build after one year of head scratching and working our way through many different designs. We began as a mobile projection box before we realised that it would be more fun if the audience could actually be inside the projection box during daytime showings. Then we thought about including the vintage decor, the plush seats, smartly dressed usherettes and of course the popcorn. Getting the solar element just right took the longest to work out.

What materials did you use?

We used mostly recycled materials, including the caravan itself of course. We recycled carpets from a wedding marquee hire company. Our LED projector housing is a former 1920s theatre light. The curtains were donated by an antique collector.

Who came up with the idea? Why?

The concept was a collaboration of artists and a filmmaker. When artist Jo Furlong saw an old Euro-caravan rusting away in a hedge, he knew exactly what he would do. His previous project had converted a small caravan into a touring human sized juke box for his band. The Dukes Box has become a cult favourite at festivals across the UK.

His latest creation would involve Paul O'Connor, a filmmaker and together they created Sol Cinema- the Worlds' smallest solar powered picture house. Paul had been seeking a unique way to show short films at festivals and this was the perfect solution. We wanted to find a way to present short films which went beyond YouTube. We wanted to give an enjoyable experience to honour all the hard work and dedication which video makers put into creating their short videos.

How many people built the cinema?

4 of us created it. Paul O'Connor worked on the low energy technology and Jo Furlong designed the actual cinema. Artist sisters Ami and Beth Marsden designed and created the usherette outfits, the upholstery and the art deco paintwork

How big (or small) is Sol Cinema?

Sol Cinema offers plenty of room for 8 adults but 16 children have been known to squeeze in for a cosy showing.

How much did it cost to build?

Approx £20,000 including the solar system.

How far has the cinema travelled ? How many locations has it been to?

We have travelled thousands of miles and to more than 300 locations. We have performed at the largest music festival in Scotland to the smallest community events in Wales. We have shown videos in a soap factory in Southampton and a street festival in

Dublin. When not at film festivals in London we can be found in shopping centres in Leeds or in the fields of Glastonbury.

How many films has it shown? Could you name some examples?

We have shown hundreds of short films. We have shown movie parodies which have proven popular - Chavatar by Movie Maniacs is one popular one which puts a spin on James Camerons Avatar. We show amazing dance films from the 1940s to the latest Sci-Fi adventures made by up and coming video makers. We show music videos, comedy, environmental documentaries and much more to cater for all tastes.

What reactions do you get from people?

Amazement is the most common reaction. We benefit from the 'Tardis effect' when audiences leave- people outside can't believe so many people can comfortably be seated in the Sol Cinema. Laughter and smiles are generally the all round reaction. We also get caravan lovers drooling over our plush interior. Cinema and film lovers get excited about how we use low powered technology. The Sol Cinema appeals to all ages, nationalities and backgrounds.

How much does it cost to hire, or to watch a film?

We never charge the audience. The event pays for us to perform. Costs depends upon the event so we ask organisers to contact us to discuss.

How many staff work on it at a time?

Usually 3 but sometimes 8 at larges events such as Glastonbury to ensure we can entertain as many people as possible.

Here is a press release with quotes from Sol Cinema crew-

The Sol Cinema has performed to thousands of people across the country, seating 8 at a time for a for a unique cinematic experience.

Paul O'Connor is the projectionist and explained the concept;

'The numbers of people making short videos has exploded over the last few years, thanks to the availability of inexpensive equipment. We wanted to offer all these new videomakers (and audiences) an alternative to watching online- so a minuscule cinema seemed the ideal solution.'

The caravan is the perfect fit as it offers nostalgia and a quiriness. We are also riding a growing wave of caravans being converted into entertainment side shows. Sol Cinema is a proud member of the Alternative Caravan Club, which aims to get as many quirky caravans together in one field to create a wonderful spectacle.

Jo Furlong explained;

'Our caravan is a Euro-Camper, a three-berth 9ft, 8.5cwt caravan, originally designed for the Mini back in 1965. Once it was cleaned up with fake brick, door canopy and roman pillars added, plush seating installed with surround sound and an LED projector, we had entirely transformed it.'

Reflecting the vintage days of cinema, we have smartly dressed usherettes, a ticket booth

and of course plenty of delicious popcorn. Sol Cinema has proved to be the ideal pop up solution for showing short videos at community events, music festivals and even corporate promotions.

In designing our solar power supply system, much attention was given to minimizing the energy requirement to produce the power for our low energy LED projector, laptop and lighting. The solar energy supply system was designed as a low voltage DC system that eliminated the need for an inverter to produce conventional 220v AC.

Our 120W photovoltaic panel receives enough Sunlight to charge our batteries ensuring that we always have power, whatever the weather. It means we can perform just about anywhere.

More details

www.thesolcinema.org