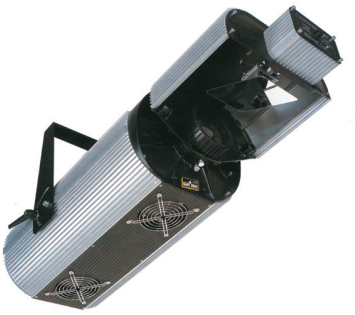
Classic Gear: Clay Paky Golden Scan

Rob Halliday takes a nostalgic but instructive look back at the tools that have shaped the industry . . .



You can make a product by iterating an existing design - take an entertainment spotlight and stick motors on it to make it move, for example. Or you can - how did those ads put it? - think different. So, maybe keep the light itself still and just add a motorised mirror on the front to manoeuvre the light beam around the stage.

Various people had tried this over the years, with Peter Wynne Willson's Pancan and the French Telescan, both classics for another day, available from the early 1980s. In 1986 two Italian manufacturers in quick succession built integrated fixtures taking the same approach. Coemar were first with the Robot. But the other made a bigger mark on the industry - in v4 it's still available almost three decades later. It came from Clay Paky, and it was called Golden Scan.

The company's route into entertainment lighting wasn't through the theatre or television or concert routes of other players. They proudly came from the world of disco, specialising in creating products that offered unique new visual effects (an approach actually still serving them well to this day with the likes of the Sharpy). Golden Scan built on the success of Astrodisco, Astroraggi and others.

Free from the complications of having to move the optical train and its fragile components, Clay Paky filled the Golden Scan with features not found in moving head lights of the period - a bright, white 575W or 1200W HMI lamp rather than a 350W projector lamp, six dichroic colour filters, a three position gobos wheel, an iris (ultimate beam size defined by the choice of standard or wide-angle lens) and a really fast strobe. All that, combined with the incredible speed of movement a tiny, lightweight mirror allows, made the Golden Scan a popular choice for discos and clubs. And raves.

The Golden Scan made another important contribution, beyond the lighting effects it could create: it was a product, available to anyone to buy. Clay Paky sold to customers they wanted to keep happy, rather than renting gear complete with a support crew to maintain it. They'd made an earlier light, the Brilliant, which used servo motors just like every other moving light of the time; finding them untrustworthy they switched to stepper motors for the Golden Scan. It was the first light to use this technology; it has become the standard way moving lights are made.

The Golden Scan just pre-dated the commercial availability of DMX, but its Pulsar-designed electronics allowed it to be controlled digitally using an RS232 signal, or using traditional 0-10V signals; Pulsar had controllers to offer, their innovative classic, Oska, partnering Golden Scans at many trade shows of the era. Direct DMX control came with the Golden Scan 2 in 1990.

Ever pragmatic, Clay Paky soon launched a cheaper sibling, Crystal Scan ('reaches the venues happy to settle for a close second'); over the years the Golden Scan 2, 3, 4 and HPE added new features - notably handles on the side to help deal with the ever-growing bulk. Others learnt from the innovations - Clay Paky's US distributor, High End, falling out with the manufacturer then launching their own Intellabeam.

Moving mirror lights - 'scanners' - seem a bit overlooked now; somehow the get-anywhere beam and more organic-feeling movement of moving head lights has come to dominate. But every time you throw up a rig of either kind of lights, plug them in to your console of choice and trust that they'll (for the most part) just work - say a quick thank you to the Golden Scan.

Golden Scan in Clay Paky History:
> www.claypaky.it/en/company/history