

LETAL E BIG TOP

cm Billy Smart's 'family'
utomotive entertainment
otographs by Stan Papior

es later he's back again, this time on the
of a truck. The bike is stationary but the
wheels are spinning while Marie casually ca-
vorts over it — sitting backwards, lying, stand-
ing — one slip-up and he'd be under the
heels of those demented drivers, sniffing at
the heels of the truck.
But it's all in a day's work to Marie. Later,
after another poetic stunt by the Brazilians, he's
back — this time in a beaten-up car with a
massive dent in the bonnet and wooden plat-
form on the roof.

circus, she tell me your wife open for a rev-
lution in big top entertainment. Gone are the
days of a patronising ringmaster presiding
over his spangles and sawdust. Now, in the
'90s, the French troupe Archaeos have chewed
up and regurgitated the tradition, replacing
glitz and glamour with ripped clothes and
suffed boots, lions and tigers with mutant
mechanicals, trucks and motorbikes.

Set amid the industrial landscape of mud-
dy Manchester, the site itself is reminiscent of
a *Mad Max* set. The big top rises from the
puddles like some huge post-apocalyptic
temple. Paying homage around it are various
lorries, dilapidated buses and caravans, inhab-
ited by an equally motley looking crew. Surely
this derelict lot weren't capable of eliciting the
obligatory 'oohs' and 'ahhs' from the throng-
ing masses?

If I'd have had a hat, I'd have eaten it.
Taking its inspiration from Roman Arenas,
the Rio Carnival and American Monster
Truck Shows, 'Metal Clown' is not just some-
thing you go to watch, it's a complete sensory
experience. Bar pound from revving engines,
nostils quiver at petrochemical fumes, skin
glows from heat of fire, and mouth hangs
open at the sheer spectacle of it all.

From the moment a man on stilts strides
into the arena, gas mask on face, skimpily
dressed in rubber and swathed in polythene,

its obvious Archaeos ain't no Billy Smart. The
show aims to encapsulate both the delight and
destruction of 20th-century urban life and
does so by its bizarre, jarring juxtapositions.
Rock rhythms are combined with ancient
Brazilian beats and mutant machinery is pit-
ted against the grace of human performance.
A crane stands ominously in the middle of
the arena. Suddenly the silt walker returns
with four nubile young men on a leash. The
crane opens out like a Meccano fan and the
'slaves' are climbing high, transformed into
Adonis of the trapeze. End of act one. A lorry
rears up and tucks the crane out. But the petro-
chemical anarchy is just about to begin...

As soon as the door closes, another opens.
A host of bizarre-looking cars controlled by
equally demented looking drivers whizz into
the arena, career around and disappear. The
audience has already reached the edge of their
Box office 081-900 1234.
October to 24 November.
Wembley Arena from 29
Tues-Sun 8pm-11pm. Adults
£15, under-16 £8,
OAP/UB40/student £12.
£3 reduction on Sunday

