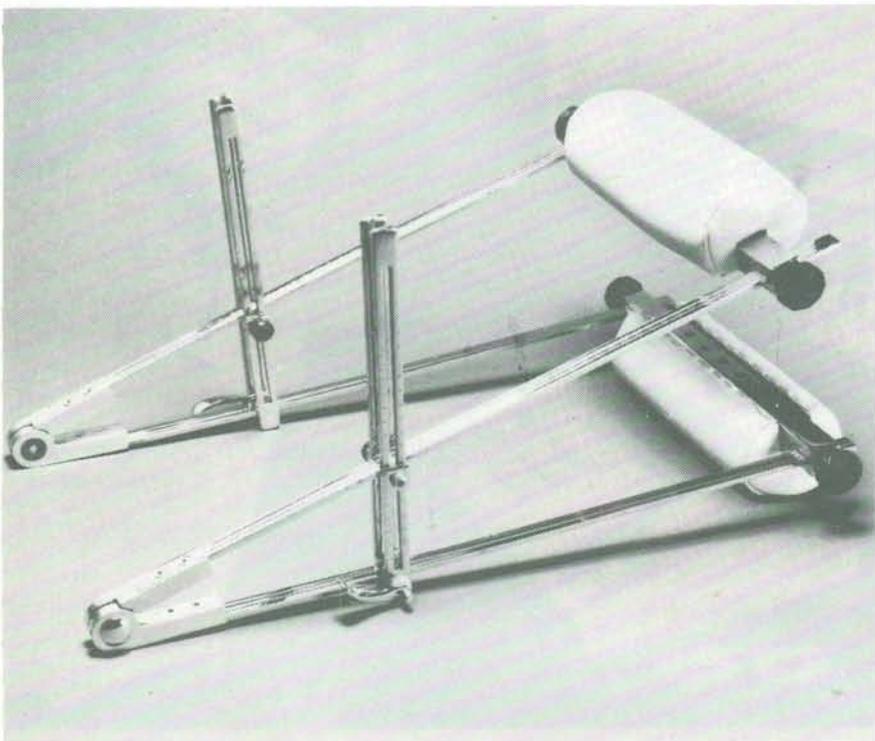


A Student's View of the Competition



Above: An Amphibious Stretcher. Seen here is Philip Moreland, Finham Park Comprehensive School, Coventry, demonstrating his amphibious stretcher which he designed to take mentally-handicapped children into the hydrotherapy unit at Leamington Spa swimming baths.



I must admit, when at school I always presumed the bell system to be fully automated. Not once did it occur to me that, as was the case, the secretary had to abandon whatever she was doing every forty minutes to relieve us of our toils.

Better informed, however, were three Worcester schoolboys, upon whom, as bell monitors, this arduous task actually fell. "BRAT", a bell ringing automatic timer, assembled in the sitting room of one of the boys' homes during their spare time, is now a full operational and reliable part of the Blessed Edward Oldorne RC Secondary School secretary's office.

The timer was also a prizewinner in the 14-16 year old section of the National Schools Design Prize competition.

Indeed, my overwhelming impression was of the simplicity and practicality of the ideas behind all the winning designs. Take, for example, Richard Thompson's automatic fish-feeder, designed to overcome the problem of getting a 'fish-minder' whenever he went on holidays, or Bob Worrall's 'Rucktent', a one-man tent that packs up into a standard rucksack.

Particularly impressive were the efforts to make life easier for the physically handicapped. Innovations included an amphibious stretcher designed for taking handicapped children from the changing rooms and down a slippery 1:5 slope into the hydrotherapy unit at the Victorian Leamington Spa swimming baths; a braille teaching aid; a set of audio-visual aids for visually handicapped children; and a portable exerciser for post-operative physiotherapy treatment.

Twelve projects won prizes ranging between £100 and £200 out of a record entry of 200 submissions, making this the most subscribed prize scheme of its kind in Britain. However, in his introductory speech, the Chairman of the judges panel, Stephen Bragg (Principal of Brunel University) was quick to underline the appallingly low status afforded to design education in Britain's secondary schools, in relation to analytical subjects. He cited the example of the headmaster who, on showing parents round the metalwork shop comes to a particularly impressive object and says, "Surprisingly, this was made by one of our less able pupils". Obviously one of our less able headmasters!

A Portable Gymnasium fit for production

This device is called a portable gymnasium – so named because of it can be used to exercise almost every part of the body and can be adjusted to varying degrees of difficulty. It was designed by an eighteen-year-old schoolboy, Howard Calvert, of Orange Hill School. Howard already had manufacturers queueing up to produce his product.