

Gaumont Mirror – History

The Gaumont Mirror began in January 1927 as a partner to the already established Gaumont Graphic newsreel. It was described by Gaumont as a ‘Screen Periodical’¹ advertised with the slogan, ‘Reflects Everything New and Novel’. Novelty, however, was not the Gaumont Mirror’s sole preoccupation. Women were their prime target audience and many of the subjects covered were intended to be of ‘special interest to women’, for example, women in sport, fashions and hints for the home. Gaumont seem to have intended the Mirror to be in direct competition with both of Pathé’s popular cinemagazines. Not only was the series aimed at women, but it was also advertised as a ‘Pictorial Review’, a title that suggests similar appeal to the Pathé Pictorial.²

Gaumont Mirror’s editor was R. S. Howard, a man with vast journalistic experience, previously associated with the editorship of the Gaumont Graphic, a fact that illustrates the closeness of these two stable mates. Indeed, Howard became editor of all Gaumont periodicals in November 1930. However, although the cinemagazine and newsreel were frequently advertised together, there is no indication that cinema patrons were obliged to take both.³ Also, unlike Gaumont Graphic, the Mirror was released weekly, and in only one reel.

Very early on in the series, Gaumont Mirror launched its animated star, Dismal Desmond. He was already an established character ‘seen in every toy shop and ... extensively advertised in the press’ and thus a tried and tested investment.⁴ These cartoons were shown at the end of the reel, and intended to please both children and adults. In addition, they provided Gaumont with plenty of opportunity for merchandising, with toys and novelty items available from the cinemas as well as toy shops. The survival of such items today indicates their popularity. In 1928, the Mirror ran a competition to establish the relative popularity of the various items of interest included in the reel each week. The results, sadly, are unknown.

In keeping with their declared interest in novelty, the Gaumont Mirror was the first British cinemagazine to be released in sound, beginning on the 29th September 1930 at the Capitol, Haymarket, in its guise as the Gaumont Sound Mirror. The sound technology was provided by British Acoustic Recording for Gaumont. This ‘De Luxe Sound Magazine’ was run alongside its silent original to cater for those houses that were reluctant to adopt the new facilities. It is unclear whether these issues, released simultaneously, were made up of the same stories and footage.

As an incentive to patrons to take the risk of adapting to sound, the Gaumont Sound Periodicals offered free insurance policies to subscribers against loss of takings due to

¹ Bioscope, 28/10/1926

² Bioscope 29/12/1927

³ Indeed, one advert in the Bioscope suggests just the contrary. Bioscope, 31/12/1930. page unknown.

⁴ Kinematograph Weekly, 4/11/1926

technological faults in the sound equipment. In April 1932, this was extended to cover all equipment in the cinemas covered. Due to the interest in the Gaumont Sound Mirror, its silent sibling lost a lot of coverage after the beginning of 1930. However, it does seem likely that the silent Gaumont Mirror continued to be produced into the middle of 1930. Gaumont Sound Mirror continued to be popular as more and more cinemas adapted to the new technology, and the final issue that we have recorded was issue number 78 in late March 1932.