Peter Davison faces another menace as “Dr. Who.”

By Rick Bentley
Town Talk Channels Editor

NEW ORLEANS — One of the most unique exhibits at the National Association of Television Program Executives (NATPE) meeting held here recently was housed inside a brightly painted trailer parked outside the New Orleans Convention Center.

It was the traveling exhibit for the “Doctor Who Celebration and Tour” which will be touring the United States between now and the end of 1987.

The exhibit was built by the BBC in support of the television series (distributed by Lionheart Television) which is in its 24th year of production. That makes it the longest running science fiction show in television history.

Inside the trailer, visitors can wander through a series of exhibits featuring costumes and props from the show and even chat with “K-9,” a robot puppy who was a regular on the show for a time.

Visitors enter the exhibit by walking through a Tardis (the Doctor’s time traveling device which looks like a police call box). Inside is a mockup of the ship’s control panel plus creatures like Marshman, a Dalek, the Ergon and the Malus.

Also featured with the exhibit is “Bessie,” the 1953 Ford Popular used by the third (Turn to Page 54).
Continued from 29)


NATPE visitors also got an additional tour feature as Peter Davison, the fifth Doctor Who, was on hand for interviews and autographs.

Over the 24-year run of the series, five different men have played the title character in the English series. Before Davison, William Hartnell, Patrick Troughton, Pertwee and Tom Baker saved the world from countless perils as the "Time Lord" Dr. Who.

Davison's appearance here was the first time he had traveled with the exhibit. He was at the dedication in May in Washington, but had not ventured any further.

"I have done several conventions around the United States but never with the exhibit," Davison said.

Dr. Who conventions have become major events both here and in the United Kingdom. Fans gather each year to share tales of the series, buy the new merchandise associated with the show and view old episodes again and again.

Concerning appearing at the conventions, Davison said, "You have to try and keep your feet on the ground or otherwise you get the impression you are the greatest thing since sliced bread. You walk into a convention center and there will be 50 or 60 people there dressed as you as the character. It is quite an extraordinary feeling."

When Davison took over the role in 1982 he became the youngest actor to handle the role. Because the series has been on television so long, Davison was quite young when the series originated.

"I was 12 when it started," Davison said. "I watched the first two Doctor Who regularly and then stopped when I went to college. I started watching again when I knew I was going to do it."

Davison replaced Baker who had been Dr. Who for six years and is most recognized with the role. A lot of the recognition came from the fact Baker was Dr. Who when the series came to the United States.

"The difficulty was accepting the part. It was an extraordinary thing to be offered because I had grown up watching the series," Davison explained. "I took several weeks before I decided. Then, strangely I didn't think about it again. It didn't occur to me what I was really doing until I did a 'Five Doctors' special and the nostalgic experience really made me realize what I was doing."

The switch drew a lot of attention because Davison was such a sharp contrast to the offbeat character Baker had played so long.

"When I took over the character, it was on the 9 o'clock news," Davison said. "It was the top story over in Britain over Ronald Reagan who had just won the presidency of the United States. It is a British institution and the shock in the United States is the fact the fans have taken it up so much."

Davison said he had never dreamed of playing Dr. Who. As an actor he played a host of light comedy roles and appeared in several British television series including "All Creatures Great and Small."

"I never thought I would get a character like this because I always got roles as shy, awkward people and never imagined being a devil-may-care girl chaser. It is a great part and it just took off," Davison said.

While "Dr. Who" is up to its Tardis in fantasy and science fiction, Davison sees it more as an action, adventure series. He likes the scripts written by science fiction fans because he feels those are closer to the feel of the series.

"The series is funny when it needs to be and serious when it has to be and that is its strength," Davison said.

In the United States the syndicated series is often shown on local public broadcasting stations. The Louisiana Public Broadcasting network showed the series until a few years ago, but is currently not financially able to show the series now. Station officials are still keeping hopes the show will return to the Louisiana air waves but there are no definite plans at this time.

Fans who want to see the traveling "Dr. Who Show and Celebration Tour" will either have to make a long trek or wait until November when the tour comes the closest to this area again.

On Nov. 14 and 15 the exhibit will be in Dallas and then on Nov. 28 and 29 it will move to Houston.

On Dec. 9 the tour gets its closest, stopping in Baton Rouge and then moves to New Orleans Dec. 12 and 13.