

There's no money in it

HUNTING radio pirates is a non-stop operation for Post Office investigators in and around London.

There were 86 prosecutions for illegal broadcasting last year, 59 in 1973 and 152 in the two years before that.

But despite the penalties—a fine of up to £400 and/or three months in jail—the pirates proliferate, particularly in London.

They are certainly not in it for the money. The Marine

Offences Act in 1968 made it illegal to advertise on pirate channels. Hence the prompt fade-out of such well-known stations as Radio Caroline, Radio North Sea International, Radio Veronica and Radio 390.

The people who inherited the pirate channels of the 60s are students, schoolboys, and people who want a platform for minority views or entertainment.

A Post Office spokesman

said: "These people use a great deal of trouble.

"Frequencies are very overcrowded and there is a queue for new wavelengths, including emergency services. If we did not control the airways there would be chaos."

Just who are the pirates in London and where are they hiding?

The Evening News tracked down one group calling themselves Radio Concord ("No 'E' because we're very British") and tuned into their activities.

Radio pirates

on wrong wavelength

THE "STUDIO" is up a draughty staircase in a crumbling London tenement shared with squatters. Nothing glamorous. Nothing remotely elaborate.

Just five young men with way out pseudonyms, plus a £15 tape recorder and a collection of valves and wire worth maybe another £10. This is Radio Concord setting up shop for five hours non-stop, after-dark broadcasting from what the "staff" hope is a safe pad.

It says "Home Sweet Home" on the studio door. A pirate disc jockey swigs beer and a pair of legs dangle from a loft above. "Don't bother about him," says one of the men. Apparently, he is the lookout—through a hole in the roof—for the Post Office detectors.

Almost every weekend for the past four years Concord has pumped out its message for listeners north of the Thames.

The transmitter is a plastic-coated wire slung from window to window along the back of the building.

The show, all pre-recorded, comes from the tiny cassette recorder resting on a saucepan lid—to screen it from interference," says a technical expert.

The Concord men explain it is "incredibly simple" to produce for anyone with even slight electronic knowledge.

PACKET OF TEA

"We used to do live shows, but it cost us a fortune when we were busted by the investigators," says a Concord producer.

"They confiscated all our equipment, including 300 records, six record decks, two transmitters, several microphones . . . and for some reason a packet of tea."

Pirate broadcasting is a hazardous business with the Post Office liable to zero in at any time on a wavelength intruder.

But the Concord people, and a group south of the Thames called Kaleidoscope, have survived longer than most.

So it is on with the show . . . 225 metres medium wave with King Kong (he's the disc jockey).

Sagittarius and John the Baptist help out with a selection of news, views and what they call minority music.

The Beatles belt out Yellow Submarine across North London. Someone sends out for takeaway Chinese food.

And Sagittarius, a 24-year-old electrical engineer, explains: "It's a question of the quick and the dead in this business. And let's say we've been quick."

Like the time they broadcast from a nunnery—after telling the Mother Superior they were students studying the atmosphere.

And when they used an old van in the middle of a common, only the transmission was poor because they had too little power. They used a flat at the

Picture: CLIFFORD LING

top of a tower block—but a woman hauled down their aerial wire when it clipped against her bedroom window. "We used the atmospheric studies excuse to talk our way out of that one," said King Kong.

Then they tried stringing the aerial 100ft up among the trees along a street . . . "no mean feat on a wet and windy night."

"We keep people on Post Office look out on the roofs of neighbouring buildings, or in cars along the street," said John the Baptist.

"And we watch local police stations. The Post Office people have to go to the police to get a warrant before they can bust us."

"We know what most of them look like so if we see any going into a police station it's time to be on our way."

Why take risks? Why go to so much trouble for a nil cash return? Quite simply because we believe in what we are doing, say the Concord crew.

There is a pirate audience somewhere out in the darkness of north London.

SINCERE BELIEF

El Supremo, another pirate disc jockey, said: "We had a phone-in programme, but we had to give it up because the number was too easy to trace. We got a big response while it lasted."

"We are NOT subversives, anarchists, or even left-wingers," says John the Baptist, a 22-year-old science student who has been with Concord for several years.

"And, contrary to some reports, we don't broadcast things like the latest drugs prices.

"But we sincerely believe there is plenty of room for much more local community radio. We picked our way



Essential equipment for pirate radios—a ladder for a lookout watches for the Post Office through a hole in the roof.



"Simmer down, Marmaduke—we'll walkies when I'm ready!"

COME AND SEE:

- Arnold Palmer [US]
- Bob Charles [NZ]
- Ben Crenshaw [US]
- Lanny Wadkins [US]
- Tom Shaw [US]
- Rod Curl [US]
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