

Chapter 1

Radio Friends.

After the huge response to Radio Caroline by the millions of people in 1964, listening to radio took on a whole new meaning. Transistor radios sold like hot cakes, and sales of LPs and 45s rocketed. The music industry began to make huge profits, thanks to the huge success of the Offshore stations. These days though, the music industry is in a serious decline. Could this have anything to do with the demise of Offshore radio in this country?

I clearly remember the first time I heard Radio Caroline; it was on the Easter weekend in 1964. Being an electrical engineer by trade, my main hobby was building or repairing electronic devices, such as audio amplifiers, and radios etc. In the 50s and early 60s, transistors had not long been 'invented', if that is the correct term to use, and there weren't many transistor radios available in the shops. Most of the radios and TVs etc, in those days, contained plug in, glass enveloped, thermionic valves, or 'tubes', as they were sometimes called, instead of the modern transistor devices. Remove the back, off any of the old wooden, 'table top', or 'Bakelite' radio sets, and you would see a row of glowing valves. They glowed red because of the internal heater filaments, which were necessary for the electrons to flow within the valves, and make the radio operate. Not wishing to get too technical, suffice it to say that if a valve weren't 'lit', the set wouldn't work.

Even now, more than 50 years since the advent of the transistor, 'valve' type audio amplifiers are generally more popular with guitarists, and HiFi enthusiasts. This is because of the richer bass response and good, overall tonal

qualities, of valves over transistors. I myself prefer valve equipment for these reasons. Valve amplifiers create a special sound that transistors cannot match. However, the improvement in sound quality wasn't a problem in those days, because the average small 'tranny' radios had little speakers in them that sounded 'tinny' anyway.

Not all, old fashioned 'steam radio' sets were large heavy tabletop models. In fact, manufacturers in the 50s saw a market for 'portable' valve radios, using a new type of miniature glass valve, which was a smaller version, of its larger tabletop cousin. Obviously, nobody could carry radios around with hot valves inside so the new types used 'black heat' filaments, which remained cold when, witched on. Also, unlike today's transistor radios, which are powered by various small size batteries, such as; PP3, AA, D, etc, etc, which last longer, the older valve radios usually required 2 separate types of battery. One was an LT, (Low Tension), 1.5v battery, to operate the special 'black heat' filaments within the glass mini valves. The other battery was a HT, (High Tension), which was either a 60, 90, or 120volt size, depending on whose make, it was. Unfortunately, if either battery 'ran down', the radio wouldn't work. Furthermore, these batteries didn't last as long as the modern day equivalents, because of the rather heavy drain on them. One of the tricks some owners did, to extend the life of the batteries, was to put them on a warm stove. The heat apparently revived them for a short period. After a few attempts at this method however, the battery finally gave up altogether. Sometimes the sticky electrolyte paste from the battery would leak all over the stovetop making a right mess.

In the 1950s, I knew of instances where some houses still didn't have an electricity supply connected, and was still on gas lighting. To run a tabletop radio here entailed connecting the set to 2 cumbersome batteries. The LT 'accumulator', to give it its correct title, was a clear glass; square shaped, storage type jar, roughly half the size of a standard sweet jar. It was full to the top with diluted

sulphuric acid, in which metal plates, (electrodes), were submerged. It had a stout wire-carrying handle, and weighed quite heavy for their size. The second battery, the HT battery, was made up, of a total of 80, C or D size flashlight cells, all connected together to add up to 120volts. This battery was also cumbersome, being roughly the size of 2 house bricks laid side by side, and weighing nearly as heavy. All this excess weight, just to operate a radio set. Worse still, was the fact that, the 2volt accumulator needed recharging quite frequently, depending on how often the set was switched on.

I remember when I was only about 10 years old, (a recent memory), carrying one of these accumulators full of acid, to a special radio shop about half a mile away from where I lived in Liverpool. This shop was one of several that opened, with facilities for accumulator charging. I remember seeing a lot of shelves, full of accumulators, like the one I was carrying. They were all making a 'fizzing' noise, which, I learned, was because they were on charge'. The man behind the counter took the 'dud' one off me, and passed me one of the recharged one's from off the shelf. I think it cost about 6d, in old money, (2.5p), for the service. The big problem was carrying home, a battery full of sulphuric acid, (which had been filled through the top filler hole that had a screw on cap). The acid sloshed around in the jar as I walked along. Sometimes the cap didn't have a good seal and the acid would seep out of the filler hole. Needless to say it splashed onto the short pants I was wearing, which then became 'shorter' pants. Then my parents went mad, because clothing was still in short supply after the war. No, not the Boer war, that was before my time. What a hassle it was trying to listen to radio then. It makes me think now, with only the BBC to listen to, in those days, why anybody ever bothered.

As technology improved, with the advent of the transistor, these faithful old valve radios, which had been a lifeline to older people during the war years, became obsolete. It was the end of an era for these magnificent sets; some of them

built into expensive wooden cabinets of walnut etc. However, their passing was good news for me. I didn't have to carry any more acid batteries, and consequently no more burn holes in my pants. Good news for me also, because I had started to wear long trousers.

Not every one threw away their old valve radios, in fact many people in the 50's & 60's didn't like the new, modern looking transistor radios, preferring to keep their favourite walnut encased versions because they looked like, part of the furniture. Especially the 'mains' types, which didn't need batteries. Also, there were millions of the portable, miniature valve radios still being used. Alas, the twin batteries required to operate them became, more and more obsolete. By 1964 I had decided to buy a mains type transistor radio. It was a Grundig shelf top version which, believe it or not, only got thrown out in 2001, because the press button wave change switch mechanism broke.

By the time the Easter weekend of 1964 had arrived, I had decided, travelling on public transport everywhere was very inconvenient, so I bought a ridiculous looking moped to get around on. Living on apprentice electricians' wages, it was all I could afford at the time. Totally unaware, that a radio revolution was about to erupt, onto a BBC brainwashed public, I rode off into the dusty winding lanes around Liverpool. Throwing caution to the wind, I opened the throttle to its maximum, and sped off at a breakneck speed of 15 mph. 20mph, if I assisted, by pedalling.

A couple of joggers hailed me, as they passed by. They were going my way too.

The worst thing about this bike was, it went even slower, the further I travelled along the road. This wasn't funny, when two little old ladies, with their zimmer frames, actually overtook me. It was embarrassing. The problem with the bike slowing down was due, apparently, to the exhaust pipe gradually getting gunged up with soot and slime, thus preventing the exhaust gasses from escaping.

I decided to go and visit some friends in Whiston, a suburb of Liverpool. Little did I realise that a radio revolution was happening on that very day, as I arrived at the Caravan Park where they lived. I think the journey from my flat in the city centre, took over an hour, on that contraction.

After a refreshing cup of tea, the topic of conversation turned to the caravan's old-fashioned gas lighting fittings, and how they were waiting for the contractors to run an electricity supply to the site. They had their own car, and were able to use a spare 12v-car battery to power a recently bought 12volt-television set. One has to remember, that TVs were quite cumbersome objects in Those days, and tended to 'eat' batteries. Luckily, they always had a spare, 'charged up' one. It was a tedious job changing the car batteries over regularly. At least, until the more efficient, compact, transistorised televisions became available, that didn't use as much power. Or, until the new electricity supply was installed. Whichever came first.

Even the portable radio in the caravan, was one of the older, miniature 'glass valve' types, which used two different size batteries. There was even an LT battery 'cooking' nicely on the old heating stove, as they tried to coax some more life from it. But when you lived 'day to day', in a caravan in the 50s & 60s, these minor inconveniences were normal. The transistor revolution wasn't that far advanced then. Living in a caravan meant that radio and television were constant companions because of the limitations of local entertainment. But on that Easter weekend in 1964 their portable radio decided it wasn't going to work. They had tried new batteries but it was still off, so they couldn't listen to Radio Luxembourg at nighttime. I borrowed a screwdriver and proceeded to take the back cover off.

My own listening habits in those days, were limited to Radio Luxembourg on 208 metres Medium wave, which kept 'fading in and out', and could only be heard at night. Anyway, there wasn't anything else to listen to, unless you

wanted to be turned into a 'zombie', by listening to the BBC Home Service, or Light programme. At least, Radio Luxembourg catered for the younger listeners, and had a 'Top 20' format. Sometimes, I also tuned into two American radio stations that could be heard at night. V.O.A. (Voice of America), and AFN, (American Forces Network). During my 2 years National Service at the end of the 50's I listened to Luxembourg quite a lot. I remember how several other lads, from the Liverpool area, and I used to come home on weekend passes from Catterick camp. After our short visit we all had to meet the coach, taking us back, at the Pier Head, by the Liver Buildings on Liverpool's waterfront. If you weren't there by 11pm on the Sunday night the bus would leave without you. The only consolation to this Sunday night ordeal was that, the coach radio was always tuned to Radio Luxembourg. Just as the Liver Building's clock struck 11pm and the driver started up the coach, the 'Top Twenty Show' was just beginning. At least it alleviated the boredom for the next hour, during the long 4hr run back to camp.

Nearly everybody used to listen to Luxembourg in those days. It was the only radio station playing decent records. To listen to it, my caravan friends had to rely on their old portable valve radio, because the electrical supply to the caravan park was far from completion. After removing the back off the set I soon discovered a wire disconnected. When the repair was completed I was handed the 'cooked' battery from the stove, which I replaced in the radio. I switched on and started to 'tune around'. Within seconds loud 'pop' music nearly blew the roof off the caravan, and I had to quickly turn the volume control down. As the music playing came to an end a mans voice said something like, "... listening to Radio Caroline on 199 metres medium wave, on our first day of broadcasting." The format was excellent. It was like listening to Radio Luxembourg in the daytime, but far better. At last we didn't have to wait until night-time, which was the only time we could receive Radio Luxembourg. This at last was all day music. Then

came some lively 'jingles' and station ID's, even advertisements for well known products.

After getting over the initial shock of this new radio station, we all stared at each other in amazement. However, I left the radio switched on to this new radio station, and listened intently to the announcements, to try and learn where it was coming from. That was until the revived battery ran down again.

Judging by everyone's enthusiasm for this station, it looked like a large stock of batteries was going to be needed in the caravan. Here at last was something worth listening to that didn't put you in a bad mood for the day. Unlike having to listen to the BBC, which did. It wasn't long before Radio Caroline was heard blasting from nearly every other caravan.

Not long afterwards, my caravan friends were able to scrap their old valve portable radio, with its expensive batteries, for a stylish new transistor radio. The particular model they bought even had Radio *Caroline*, actually printed on the dial. (Only a few manufacturers of radios did this). From that 1964 Easter weekend onwards, there was no need to guess, which radio station everybody was tuned to. The 60s were a time of people's awareness, of a newfound freedom.

A more liberal society began to emerge. People started to express themselves in a way they never had before. And, to this day, I still believe that the new Offshore radio stations, which appeared all around the British Isles at that time, were a great influence on this awareness. People were suddenly happier than ever before. The sunny days in the parks, and on the beaches, brought forth millions of people, with their transistor radios, the entire tuned into 'Pirate' stations. Just as today's 'must have', are mobile telephones and computer games, so a 'tranny' radio, was a 'must have', then.

Radio manufacturers were falling over each other, in their rush to bring out, more stylish, smaller, or larger, and even 'ghetto blaster' type, radios. There were transistor radios of all sizes and shapes, to suit everybody's taste. I recall some bus companies, putting up notices on their vehicles, asking for personal radios to be turned off, whilst people were on board. This was a new phenomenon in 1964. To get around the bus company by-laws; ardent listeners plugged in their earphones instead. Nobody wanted to miss a second, of listening to Radio Caroline, or the many other Offshore stations, like Radio London, Radio England, 270, and Radio Scotland on 242 metres, to name but a few. Another new anomaly preventing the Radio Caroline fan from listening in, was if they happened to be travelling on the Mersey underground railway, or in a vehicle going through the Mersey tunnel. Especially infuriating, if the clues were being read out, for the hugely popular, Caroline 'Cash Casino', just as the car or train entered the tunnels.

1964 was the time of The Beachboys, Stevie Wonder, and The Supremes. Not forgetting Tamla Motown records, wild beach parties, and all the other events that occurred in those 'heady' days of the 60s. And, I mustn't forget the huge range in clothing fashions that became available. People began to wear anything that caught their eye. Some people didn't wear anything at all, which created a lot of laughter, as they 'streaked' across football, and cricket pitches, etc. I was spoilt for choice too, I remember, as there was a huge variety to choose from. The clothes seemed to be made for two types of wearer, who had appeared on the scene, 'Mods & Rockers'. However, you could buy anything, down amongst the narrow back streets of Liverpool's city centre, where the old 'Cavern' is.

Boutiques opened up by the dozens, in converted warehouses, in the little narrow streets. Record shops were doing a 'roaring trade', selling Top 50 chart toppers that people had been listening to earlier, on Radio Caroline. To save on boring 'canned' music costs, some shops used to

leave Radio Caroline playing through the shop's speaker system instead.

One sunny day in 1964, I was working across the road from a record store, in Bold Street, in Liverpool City centre. I was working outside another shop, on the neon sign. It was great being entertained by the music, all day long, which was coming from the record store's 'Tannoy' speakers. The music was actually coming from a radio, connected to an amplifier. The radio was naturally tuned to Radio Caroline's Top 50-chart show. After listening to 'The Searchers' singing, 'Needles and Pins' nearly every hour, because it was in the top 10, I got to like it. Needless to say, (no pun intended), I went over the road, and bought the record before it sold out. Names like 'Baby' Bob Stewart, Tony Prince, and 'Daffy' Don Allen, became part of every day life on Radio Caroline North, which was anchored in Ramsey Bay, off the coast of the Isle of Man. I had recently purchased a reel to reel tape recorder, and began to record some of the programmes. I still have a few of these tapes, which I recorded all those years ago. To listen to them now seems as though they were only recorded recently, because the music of that time is just as popular today. I would like to know how much of today's, so called music, will still be remembered in the next, 40 years. Over the period, 1964 to 1967 Offshore radio's popularity was so great, that the government of the day decided, in it's infinite wisdom, to do every vindictive thing it could, to deny people their right, to listen to whatever radio station they wanted to listen to. They were going to coerce people into listening to, what they wanted them to listen to. A gross infringement of people's liberties and so typical of the government's attitude. Even to this day, this attitude was quoted, in a recent editorial as, 'Don't do as we do, do as we say'. I couldn't print here, the expletives, that many of my friends, and myself for that matter, came out with, when we found out about the proposed, Marine (Broadcasting) Offences Act, to be imposed, on these little ships, doing no harm at all, and against the will of the

people. The government told many lies to try and turn the listeners against the Offshore stations. One of which was that the radio stations infringed copyrights, and didn't pay 'Performing Rights' fees, which was a load of hogwash. The majority of the stations did in fact do so. Furthermore the artists were grateful to the stations, for all the free airtime their records were getting, which of course increased sales. Another mammoth 'lie', was that, the Offshore stations were 'interfering with shipping, emergency distress calls', and using radio frequencies that interfered with shipping navigation, and endangered lives. The reason I know this is a lie, is because; Since the Offshore radio stations closed down in 1967, when the MOA came into force, a lot of various broadcasting frequencies became unused. Except for Radio Caroline, which remained on the air until 1968, the airwaves were silent. If you were to turn the dial on your radio in 1966, for instance, you would find an Offshore station on most parts of the dial. Of course, in practice, you would not hear them all. It all depended on, how far away the ship was, and what power it was transmitting on, not forgetting the atmospheric conditions. They were there, just the same. Therefore isn't it strange that the radio frequencies, that the Offshore stations used to broadcast on, and which allegedly, 'were causing interference to shipping, and endangering lives', are now the same frequencies being used by the BBC and IBA local radio. All of a sudden these frequencies are not a hazard after all, only if Radio Caroline and the other Offshore stations use them. It was all one big government 'Con', to turn the public against the pirate stations.

Both the Caroline North and South ships remained 'on the air', until 1968, but even their days were numbered. Early in that year, they were both, simultaneously towed back to Holland because of a tendering, financial dispute.

As far as myself, and at least a million other ardent listeners, and faithful fans of the Offshore radio stations, were concerned, the air-waves were now silent. You might

as well have thrown your 'tranny' radios in the sea, like memorial wreaths. Perhaps in homage to those great stations, because no way ever, could the new BBC and IBA local radio stations ever take the place of those magnificent little radio ships.