

How pirate radio has a field day

... AND BEATS THE DETECTOR VANS

SLIGHT drizzle was spoiling the early Sunday morning. And the solitary woman walking her dog was puzzled to see ten young men threading wire through the branches of the dripping trees.

'Don't worry—we're just recording bird songs,' called one of them. 'It's sort of a hobby.'

That is a standard alibi for the mystery men of Radio Kaleidoscope—one of the rash of tiny but tenacious pirate radio stations which, in defiance of the law, continue to challenge the dominance of the legal stations—long after the end of the pirate boom of the 60s.

Kaleidoscope goes on the air every Sunday—reaching, they claim, an audience of 30,000 or more south of London—with a cheerful mixture of pop, chat and competitions. And, despite their elaborate look-out precautions, they know they could be knocked off the air at almost any moment by Post Office hunting teams.

Impish

There were more than 80 convictions for illegal broadcasting last year—with an average first-offence fine of £20-plus. But Kaleidoscope and her secret sisters, regularly switching their transmission bases, still impishly thrive.

Kaleidoscope, one of the more professional-sounding of the pirate stations, is run by a youngster who is known to his fans as Pat Eddison.

He treats it as an escapist hobby, a complete break from the humdrum routine of his routine daily job, which he prefers not to discuss.

All programmes are produced in his private studio—a partitioned-off section of his back bedroom in an ordinary-looking semi-detached house.

His £1,000 of equipment, which he has built up during Kaleidoscope's four years on the air, includes sophisticated 'fade-in' and 'fade-out'



gadgets. Programmes, with himself and his friends as the star hosts, are recorded on a cassette player.

He told the magazine *New Society* recently: 'We want to show the public that good radio can be made without thousands of pounds and Lord Whatnot on the board.'

They took their cassettes to a field about 40 miles from London and lashed up their transmitter for their usual five-hour Sunday session.

'Next time it will be a completely different field.'

Keeping one jump ahead of the detector vans—that is the essence of the game.

Radio Concorde, with a scattering of secret bases in London, is one of the few pirate stations which has tried to influence opinion on political issues. They have plunged into controversial territories such as the situation of Northern Ireland, deserters, and squatters in North London. They have even been critical of the Queen.

However, most pirates are in the game for the fun and the excitement—and for the euphoria of being 'stars'.

And, even through the blizzards of winter, the Kaleidoscope boys continued to trudge the soggy fields to lash their wires through the trees.

'This is an all-seasons service,' they say. 'We can't disappoint our fans just because of the weather.'

LESLIE
WATKINS

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