

## Chapter 2

### Test Transmissions.

The years following the close down of Radio Caroline, 1969 and 1970 were similar to the dark ages. People at that time, didn't have radio to listen to, either.

I was still working as an electrician for a neon sign company. However, there was no point in taking a transistor radio to work, anymore, or switching the van radio on either, when I was on road.

There were several, so called, local stations that could be heard in the Liverpool area, but I wouldn't listen to any of them on principle. Why should people be forced into listening to these amateurish stations Imposed on them against their will, by a government, hell bent on steamrolling the Marine Offences Act through parliament, without putting it to the vote with a national referendum. Public opinion at the time the MOA became law, was very much in favor of the Offshore stations continuing to broadcast. The government would certainly have lost the vote, had it held one. As it was, the government, that had legislated against the pirate stations, in 1967, was defeated in 1970, by the huge, 'young peoples' vote'. Now, people of 18 and over could vote in elections. They now had a means to rebel against this infringement of their listening pleasure. During the run up to the 1970 election, Radio Caroline's owners teamed up with the owners of a Dutch Offshore station, Radio Northsea International. (RNI). The station, transmitting from the ship Mebo II, had an audience of millions in Holland and Belgium, and could be heard in this country, although the reception in the NW wasn't very good. In a joint operation, both owners, and a number of other people mounted a huge election campaign against the governments vindictive MOA, and contempt for the peoples wishes.

So good, was the campaign waged by Caroline/RNI, that the government completely misread public opinion, and spitefully, began 'jamming' the broadcasts from RNI, transmitting from the Mebo II. The government establishment responsible for the jamming, tried several versions of 'whining' noises to try and blot out RNI. This infuriated the thousands of people, who had transistor radios, now having to put up with the noise, which interfere with their listening pleasure. Tempers got so frayed that the government was warned that if they didn't stop the jamming of RNI, many listeners would set up their own powerful transmitters and start jamming BBC Radio 1.

Not only was the jamming of RNI illegal, because the ship was in international waters, and therefore not under the jurisdiction of this country, it was also disgusting behavior from the government. An opposition MP, with strong sympathies towards the pirate stations, was quoted as saying, 'Never, except in times of war, has any nation resorted to the jamming of radio broadcasts, as a way to suppress the freedom, of the people's right to listen to, radio broadcasts of their own choice'.

There was such a public uproar over the jamming, that the government capitulated, and within hours ordered the switching off, of the illegal jamming transmitters. I have to admit that, these unfolding events annoyed me so much; I would have gone to London to take part in the Offshore, 'Free Radio' campaign. However my work had to take priority, and anyway, there Wasn't much I could do about it, so I had to subdue my anger at the vile MOA, and get on with my everyday life.

At least work was interesting enough, and I had recently moved out of a dingy bed sit to a small shop, with upstairs flat, that had become vacant. A few months earlier,

I had done some electrical work for the previous occupier. He had decided to move to larger premises and knew I was looking for somewhere better to live, so he put in a good reference for me, to the landlord. Consequently, I signed on the dotted line, and was given a rent book. The building was a bit dilapidated despite having been rebuilt, I believe, in 1895.

It consisted of a one-roomed shop, with a fair sized, enclosed, shop window display, with glass shelving. There was a shop counter with rear wall shelving. At the back of the shop was a small storage room. Stairs led from the rear of the shop to the upstairs flat, which had a nice living room, which had been used as an office. There was also a bedroom, kitchen, and a toilet that looked like it had come from a Thomas Crapper catalogue.

A few years later, this shop was to become familiar, to many Offshore 'Free Radio' fans, from all over the country. Not forgetting the interest, also shown, by Offshore radio's adversaries. The address was 4a Prescott Street, near the city center of Liverpool. The shop was one of three, sited within yards of the traffic lights, at the junction of Prescott Street, London Road, Moss Street and Daulby Street. It was right next to a very busy bus stop, which was served by several bus routes. People were alighting all the time at this stop. And if the traffic lights were on red, sometimes six or more buses would be backed up the street, one behind the other. With some thought, I figured that the shop window had great advertising potential, being only 10 feet from the bus stop. Have you ever noticed the habits of people on a bus? Most of them stare out of the windows, with blank looks on their faces. I often became the center of attraction, when buses were held up at the lights.

Each time I arrived at the shop, and turned my back to them, while I put the key in the lock, I would turn around to find a sea of faces, all gawking at me. 'Good', I thought. If the passengers find it interesting watching me opening a door, they might also read any large adverts in the window.

So I did some serious thinking about what to put in the shop window. It crossed my mind to get a friend to do a 'moony' at the passengers. His picture would probably have made front page of the Liverpool Echo.

My first idea was to advertise for repairs to portable appliances, which I could do in my spare time, using the shop as a workroom. It had an existing shop counter, and fitted rear shelving, which could come in handy for component storage. I placed some, 'Portable Appliance Repairs' adverts in the shop window and waited. Bus passengers certainly read the adverts, when the buses were held up at the traffic lights, because I used to peep out of the front window of the upstairs flat, to see if the 'ads' were having the right effect, which they were. Unfortunately, on one or two occasions, I would carefully open the window curtain, to have another peek, only to see about 50 pairs of eyes

all shift their gaze, to gawk at me, instead. I had forgotten that the top decks of the buses were at the same height as the flat window.

Living upstairs in the Prescott Street flat was far from quiet. At night I had to contend with the wailing, 'Banshee' noises, of drunks, hailing taxis, after spilling out of town clubs usually at 2am in the morning.

In the morning, I would be woken up by the squeal of brakes of the first buses of the day, stopping outside at the lights. Then there would be the rattle of badly fitting engine covers. The roar of engines as several buses moved off together. Then there was the smell of diesel exhausts. Oddly enough, the racket didn't seem to bother me. In fact, all the noises and smells were, in some strange way, a sort of constant companion, keeping the oppressive silence at bay.

The window advertising however, didn't have the desired effect I had in mind, as only a few people bothered to bring in their faulty appliances. I think the reason was to do with cost. Even now, it is often cheaper to buy a new item, than to have it repaired. I also found, that the cost of ordering component parts, plus labour charges, was too much. So I reluctantly abandoned that idea.

One of my work friends, Ken Roberts, who was married and lived on the other side of the River Mersey, in Birkenhead, was talking to me one day, in the works canteen. He jokingly suggested putting a red light in the

shop window. I presumed he was joking, I think. Another suggestion was, turn it into a record shop, or run a disco from it. The disco idea did appeal to me, but not to run one from, but a place to keep one. We then talked about running a disco. I thought about a disco with a nostalgic theme. One, on the lines of the late Radio Caroline, might be a good idea. Perhaps we could call it, the Radio Caroline North Roadshow. The more we talked, the more enthusiastic we became. The neon sign company I worked for in 1970 was only across the road from the shop, in a nearby side street. Therefore it was very convenient for Ken to call over after work. Further plans were discussed in detail, over the following days. Ken was all for the idea of impersonating Jack Spector, the American DJ, who used to record a popular program for Radio Caroline North in the 60s, called the 'Jack Spector Show', "From New York City". Ken was very good at taking him off, but of course realized he couldn't use that name. Ken opted instead for 'Jake'. Either 'Big Jake Spade', or, 'Jake booby', (baby). Hilarious, I thought. He even started practicing his American accent over the microphone, which caused a few laughs.

We finally decided to start up. There was just one small problem however; we didn't have a disco. I had loads of electronic components, including parts of tape recorders, and record players, so I had a sort out, to see if I had enough 'junk' to build one.

I had an old decorators pasting table, which sagged a lot in the middle. This would be ideal for putting the decks and everything on, because it was portable. After fitting some strengtheners, I then made a folding hardboard panel, to clip onto the front of the table. This would block the view of anybody seeing under the front of the table. I didn't fancy the thought of people looking at our legs. As far as I know, I don't have 'knobbly knees', but I can't speak for Jake's. Seriously though, the 'rig' looked like a 'Heath Robinson' setup, with the unpainted hardboard panels hiding a multitude of secondhand parts. Two old record players and a tape recorder

sat on top of the table. A homemade 100watt amp would have sat there too, but it caused the table to sag dangerously in the middle. I couldn't afford to buy expensive disco gear, so there wasn't much I could do about it.

By 1971 we had took the disco out to the odd wedding or two, and 21sts etc. But in my opinion the rig just wasn't good enough for anything else, because of its state. A further problem was Ken's family commitments, and the distance he had to travel. Eventually, near the end of 1971,

Ken finally told me he would have to call it a day, because it was causing problems at home. In a way I felt relieved. The disco was a load of old junk, literally. It caused me embarrassment whenever we took it out, so I stowed it all away at the back of the shop, except the trestle table, which was scrapped.

The next day, I reluctantly decided to remove the disco 'ads' from the shop window case, but even that simple task couldn't be done discreetly. The moment I opened the access panel to the window, and leaned in, a busload of passengers, held up at the traffic lights all turned their heads to gawk at me. I was in two minds whether to drop my trousers, and do a 'moony' at them.

I saw Ken from time to time after that, and we both agreed, that the grandiose ideas we had, for reviving the memory of Radio Caroline, just seemed to evaporate into thin air. At least, the idea was good in theory.

The little shop in Prescott Street began to look uninhabited, because of the empty shop window display, and a layer of dust covered the 'mothballed' rig. As time passed I couldn't help feeling something should be done, to try and salvage it. The roadshow obviously couldn't be used any more, in its present condition. Also, I needed another DJ, now that Ken had left for good. It wasn't long after Ken had left, that I had grandiose ideas for a huge Radio Caroline Roadshow. This time however, it wasn't going to be a, 'Man in a Suitcase' disco, but something spectacular, and worthy of the name of the great lady, Radio Caroline.

I drew technical diagrams of a new, more professional roadshow. The design was to incorporate a scaled down replica of the forecastle section of the *MiAmigo*. However, instead of it being an artistic impression of the ship, painted on a hardboard panel, like before, this was to be a three-dimensional 'V' shape construction, like the bow of a ship.

Once the shape was laid out on paper, sizes were calculated for the fitting of all the equipment. This would include, two record turntables, two tape deck 'jingle' machines, an unusual design, four channel mixer unit, and double preamps for all the sound gear, including microphones.

Only one of each, of the duplicated pre-amps would be used at any one time, the spare ones acting as backup, in case the others failed. There would be provision for mounting a three sectioned, scaled down, ship's mast, on the front of the bow. The mast sections could be joined together, to fit any ceiling height, up to 20feet. It would have lots of miniature bulbs inside the perspex front of the mast, all wired in a 'chaser' format, so that, viewed from the front, the effect would be, to represent the radio signal radiating from the mast, which was in fact, the ships transmitter antenna.

There would be a miniature 'yardarm' on the mast, with scaled down rope ladders stretching down to the 'Port & Starboard' of the 'foc'sle'. These also acting as guy ropes for the mast. Miniature handrails were to be added to each side of the bow section, which would have portholes, and a scaled down anchor chain. All of this construction was to create the effect, when viewed from the front, of looking straight at the bow of the Radio Caroline ship, *MiAmigo*. A painted bow wave was to be added for extra effect. The sound system was to have a minimum rating of 500watts, with provision for adding to this, at larger gigs. The whole electronics system to be powered from dual DC power inverters, one being kept for emergency backup. The whole 'kit and caboodle' was to be built by me, at the Prescott Street 'Studio'. 'Think big' was my motto. It became a standing joke later on, when the roadshow lads thought it also applied to my taste in women.

For transportation of the 'rig', somebody, jokingly suggested using a 'low loader', or better still a tank transporter. Very funny, I thought. Still, not a bad idea, but what about the crane to lift it onto the transporter? After the jokes finished, I thought of a simpler idea. Construct the 'bow' shaped 'rig' into three sections.

The centre, bow section, would house the mixer unit, clock, and temperature gauge. We will even be able to tell everybody the time and temperature. The bow section would also have a strong base plate fitted, to mount the separate mast sections on. These would be joined together on site.

The 'Port' section, would house the tape 'jingle machines', and lighting sequence controls. The 'Starboard' section would house the record turntables and other controls. The whole lot simply, 'push fitting' together, with interlinking electrical plugs and sockets. I could see all of this was going to cost me a packet to build, but as I was working, I could buy some parts each week. This was an advantage actually, because it meant

I could spend more time on each part of the rig, so that everything would fit together properly.

I started to use the shop window again, for advertising purposes, now that the work on the rig had got under way. The window now had lots of 'Free Radio' posters and stickers on show. This began to attract the attention of Offshore radio fans everywhere. Eventually when the rig was built, and had made its debut at a few smaller gigs, we began to get more publicity. I started to get letters asking about the new roadshow, and even a few 'Free Radio' magazine writers contacted the '*Studio*', (the new upmarket name, we had now given the shop).

During the second half of 1971 John Shannon, Eric Day, and Carl England joined the team. Another interested party, was Mike Leonard from West Derby, Liverpool. He was editor of the local Offshore radio magazine, '*Breakthrough*'. Mike was able to give us the address of the Liverpool branch, of the Don Allen fan club. The late Ann Fogg from her home address in Fazakerly was running this, at the time. This eventually led to a meeting with Ann, and ourselves. She got in touch with Don Allen, and her other friends who ran the fan club in Bradford.

A meeting was arranged for us to meet Don at his annual fan club dance, at the Tower Ballroom in Blackpool, in May 1971. Don invited the roadshow lads up on stage, to tell all his fans about the new Radio Caroline Roadshow, and our attempts to revive the memory of the Pirate Stations. It was a great night, and Don promised to meet us again in Liverpool.

Up to that time, Don was doing a Saturday morning show on Manx Radio, in the Isle of Man. Unfortunately we didn't listen to it, because it was called, 'The Country & Western Jamboree', and I'm afraid neither of the lads liked that kind of music. It was also around this time, that he started working on RNI, (Radio Northsea International), which was broadcasting from the ship, Mebo II, anchored off the Dutch coast. To get out to the ship, he used to fly into Liverpool Airport, from the Isle of Man, where he then lived. He had to stay the night in Liverpool, because there wasn't a connecting flight to Holland until

the following morning. The problem of hotel accommodation was solved for Don; when we suggested he stays the night at the studio, then get a taxi to the airport the following morning. He stayed over several times after that, when going out to the ship. During his programs on RNI, he often mentioned the roadshow lads, and even made me a set of RNI jingles. He also introduced, RNI Dutch service DJ, and friend, Peter Timmermans to us, during one of his programs. We became good friends with Peter in the early 70s, but lost contact with him when RNI closed down in 1974. He then moved address, which meant we couldn't get in touch with him on his old telephone number in Holland,

Letters of encouragement started to arrive at the Prescott Street studio. We now had contacts with several Offshore Radio organisations. People from as far apart as, Blackpool, Yorkshire, Isle of Man, and the Midlands, began writing to the studio asking for information on the roadshow. Some wanting to know where the roadshow was appearing, others from disco DJs, looking for a job. In the meantime, we decided to advertise for an Offshore Radio DJ, in the 'Disc' music paper. This brought responses from as far afield as London. They must have thought that there was loads of money to be made anyone who has ever worked

for Radio Caroline, will tell you that church mice are rich by comparison. We also placed an 'ad' in the *Liverpool Echo* in 1974. The 'ad', which I still have a copy of, reads: '*Radio Caroline Roadshows require experienced Jock. Part time, over 21. Must be extremely dedicated to Free Radio. (Radio 1 and IBA styled Jocks need not apply). -Phone 709 2943 11am -5pm for details No personal callers, please*".

Not one of the guys who rang in, or answered the 'ad' in the *Disc* music paper, knew the first thing about Offshore radio, so we had to manage with who we had. A Birmingham offshore radio fan made models of three of the 60's pirate ships. *MiAmigo*, *Mebo II*, (RNI), and the *MV King David*, (Capital Radio). All of the models were superbly made, and were complete with tall aerial masts, excepting the *King David*. This ship had an unusual aerial, which was a huge circular frame projecting out over both sides of the ship. The centre of it was fixed to the top of the ships mast, and looked like a giant opened parasol, or umbrella. The model ships were placed in the shop window, along with various Offshore radio stickers. We then had Radio Caroline Roadshow billheads printed, to make our correspondence look more professional. The start of 1972 also saw the return of our old friend, the *MiAmigo*, which was back at sea, off the Dutch coast following repairs to the aerial mast. At first the transmissions were spurious and the only radio identification that could be heard, was the occasional voice saying something about, 'Test transmissions for Radio 199'. This name later became Radio Seagull, with Steve England, Bob Noakes, Mike Hagler, and one or two others. Then finally, the secret was out. The test transmissions were now coming from Radio Caroline International. The timing, of the return to the airwaves, for Radio Caroline in that year, also fitted in perfectly, with the return of the roadshow. Now we could promote the famous radio station's return also. By mid 1972 Caroline was operating on 259 metres, Medium Wave, (1187 khz). The signal reception in Liverpool was poor however, sometimes 'fading out' for several minutes at a time. Some days it was off the air altogether, but I was able to get some short recordings. Also, it was only possible to listen to the station in the evenings. Its reception was similar to that, of the now defunct Radio Luxembourg.

Now, at last, the *MV MiAmigo* was back at sea and broadcasting again after 4 long years. This time though, the Radio Caroline ship at sea, now had a twin sister, the Caroline Roadshow, on land. It was time now, to get to know each other. *MiAmigo* after all, means 'My Friend'.