

# Rule Britannia— with a local flavour

FEW Caterham residents realise they may be listening to their own local radio station when they tune in to an "unknown" programme on Sunday afternoons.

Two "secret" radio stations which are operating locally are Radio Britannia and Radio Helen, who put out half-hourly programmes which include some requests, pop and light music, and some advertising.

Since the Marine Offences Act effectively killed off the activities of sea-borne radio pirates, these enthusiastic "amateurs" have taken to the land with even more gusto.

Although some months ago there were as many as 30 radio stations throughout the country being operated in defiance of the GPO, there are now only about 10, for some have been caught, while others have merged to form more powerful units.

Naturally, their biggest need is for secrecy. To ensure this, they change their times of broadcasting frequently, as well as their methods . . . sometimes operating from houses, caravans, cars, woods — even telephone kiosks!

The majority of the operators make their own transmitters, their gear being naturally light and mobile. Many of these secret stations have in fact been started by schoolboys, who have clubbed together to purchase parts from a radio store at a cost of under £100, and have found themselves able to transmit over a ten mile radius in good conditions.

While Radio Helen is said to be operated by members of a previous station which closed down, Radio Britannia is also so far proving very successful, with about 23 transmissions to their credit.

Many of the enthusiastic amateur disc jockeys enjoy operating purely for the fun of the thing, and the fact that it is illegal, but for others it is a serious business.

They feel strongly that local people appreciate their own local radio stations "so why shouldn't they have them."

As a local man claiming to be the publicity officer of Radio Britannia said this week, there is a commercial radio station operating successfully in the Isle of Man, with no objections. "Why should the BBC have the monopoly in radio broadcasting?" he asked, while pointing out that Radio Luxembourg takes about one million pounds a year from Britain's economy in advertising revenue.

Radio Britannia, he feels, does a good job. "They", the unknown operators, broadcast appeals for charities, also for Reedham School and Dr Barnados Homes, and in fact have a successful scheme running for co-operative advertising between their station and an ice-cream roundsman . . . "The first time we advertised him, he sold out complete!" said another spokesman.

"Our main aim," said the publicity officer, "is to keep the public informed of what is going on, and naturally, we hope to keep going, so security is a vital factor."

Although recently Radio Britannia gave out a Coulsdon address over the air which could be used for requests, this address, it appears, has no connection with the operators.

Next Sunday, and they hope for many more to come, the "secret suitcase operators" will be packing their bags and setting off to the woods or wherever that day's transmission happens to be planned, ready to flash out over the air their signature tune, "Rule Britannia."