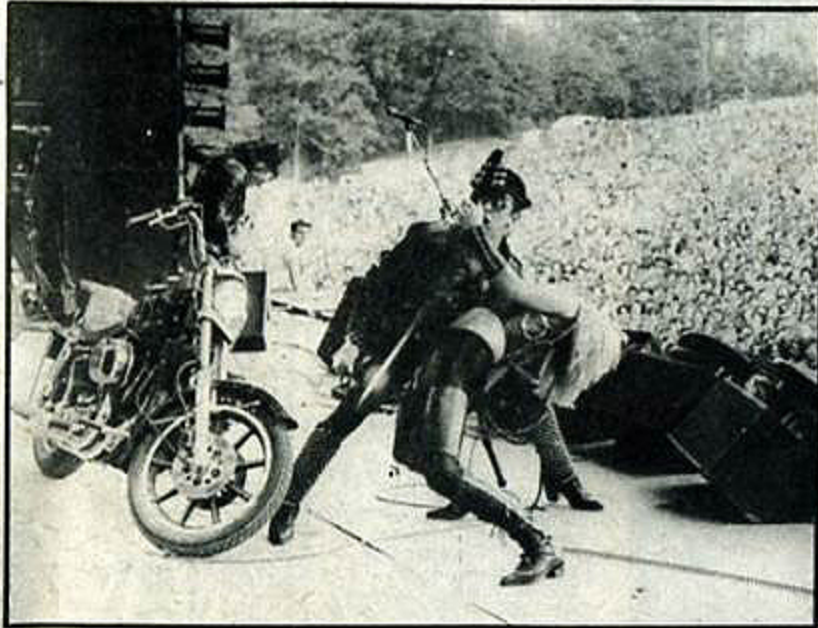


## ROADSHOWS

## STORMING THE CASTLE

MIKE NICHOLLS reports from the moat



JUDAS PRIEST: best of the day

**RAINBOW/JUDAS  
PRIEST/SCORPIONS/APRIL  
WINE/SAXON/RIOT/TOUCH  
Donington Park (Nr Derby)**

A WATERSHED in festival history? Undoubtedly. Seven acts appealing to the same kind of audience and Number One finally flipping the switch that turns on the endless light.

The promoters had done their homework, too. Apart from the sound being as near perfect as dammit on this great wilderness of a race-track, vision was enhanced by a gradual incline towards the stage.

Of course, they weren't to know that He'd be taking a long and leisurely shower for several days beforehand. So not only was there mud, there was a great deal of mud, particularly upfront, courtesy of the slope. So the more you wanted to see the bands, and the closer you got to the stage, the muddier you got!!

I got well muddy and not just on the ground around my knees. See, there were those that might have wanted to see but preferred not to stand up to avail themselves of the opportunity. They delighted in binging large clods of stinking earth at those unsociable enough not to bask in it themselves.

A water-bed in festival history? Indubitably, and one from which Touch were unable to rouse the silent majority.

Sharing the same manager as Rainbow obviously assisted their UK debut, but apart from some plodding pomp pieces were generally worth the opening slot. Marshalled by singer / song-writer / guitarist / keyboard player Mark Mangold, they knocked out 30 minutes' worth of restrained metallic grandeur notwithstanding a surfeit of castrato vocals.

Due to the somewhat unorthodox Press arrangements, these ears were denied the pleasure (?) of Riot. All, er, facilities were situated half a mile from the site with a shuttle service promised back and forth between acts. Indeed, there was a six-seater van laid on for the 200-odd members of the legging fraternity, but more pertinently, ALL THE GROUPS WENT ON ON TIME!!!

Now since when has sticking the schedules had anything to do with rock festivals, eh? Actually Blackmore, not unpredictably, broke this short-lived tradition by an hour but if it's of any consolation to Riot fans, they got an encore, which is more than can be said for the third and fortunately last of the Transatlantic participants, April Wine.

Their hopelessly unoriginal

catalogue of hard rock clichés climaxed — with a drum solo which put a whole new complexion on the word "dull". As if they weren't bad enough in their own right, the accumulating crowd suffered the indignity of watching them follow local boys (give or take the odd 30 miles) Saxon, the first band of the day to generate an appreciable amount of headbanging.

A late addition to the bill, they still secured the third highest fee, precisely what they deserved. Igniting with 'Motorcycle Man' and the usual roar of engines, they blitzkrieged their way through the truncated support set which until recently they've been obliged to play.

'Somewhere To Boogie' featured a champion solo from Graham Oliver whose box of tricks included some dervish axe rotation and engaging in some bizarre stage antics with Biff, the purpose of which was to show he could play just as well blindfold.

He's barely let down by the rest of the gang, each of who do their deed ruthlessly. Drummer Pete Gill provides an aural blueprint for how solos ought to sound while Biff has got the range to match his gargantuan appetite for volume.

Though you'd expect hit single 'Wheels Of Steel' to be saved for dessert, there are enough strong songs from where that came from for it to be despatched early on, leaving t'other guitarist, Paul Quinn, plenty of scope to demonstrate his skills.

His Flying 'V' was the first of many to appear, a fashion - for - the - day pioneered jointly with that of the stage - managed encore - leaving stage 10 minutes before their allotted time so the kids could get the "more" they'd inevitably demand.

So following the enticing '747 (Strangers In The Night)' and the groans that accompanied the announcement that 'Stallions Of The Highway' would be the last, back they came for a mighty 'Machine Gun' which emphasised more than anything that however much the term heavy metal is disliked, to deny that this is what Saxon play is missing the point entirely.

Hard as they tried to eclipse all memory of the Wakefield wonders, The Scorpions damn near scuppered themselves with their ineffectual prancing and ludicrous guidebook shape throwing that was enough to put anyone off their beer, let alone the music.

The latter began with the rasping 'Don't Make No Promises', Klaus's vocals booming loud and clear and Rudolf Schenker — possessor of two Flying Vs — showing that what he lacks in technique is made up for in ostentation. 'The Zoo' is another



SCORPIONS: ludicrous



SAXON: mighty

rocker, highlighting the thump thump as opposed to metallicly OTT side of the Germans' style, whilst the repertoire also includes some almost tasteful ballads.

During the latter stages they were unable to resist the temptation to play some extraordinarily drab boogie and resorting to stock HM clichés, some of which, to be fair, they probably invented themselves, since they have been around since '71.

Between acts the surrogate Peel tones of guru Neal Kaye patronised us with gems like 'uh — if there's one thing today proves it's that rock people stick together.' To be honest it was the mud which did most of the sticking, though by the time Judas Priest took the boards, much of it had been champed down, until there was none left to throw.

Whatever, it was a good distraction to be without since the arch fetishists were bang on form. Halford's discarding of biker accoutrements following the swift exit of the machine itself illustrated that however infamous Priest are for their image, it takes a strict back seat to the music.

Rob is too nervous an individual to indulge in excessive showmanship but his voice and blood-curdling screams are magnifique. The set will have been familiar to fans, combining favourites like 'The Ripper', 'The Sinner', 'Running Wild' and their stage-managed encore, 'Tyrants', with most of the 'British Steel' album.

Though the set faltered before the end, as a band they were the best of the day, not to mention the perfect foil for the headliners. Whereas Priest manage to fuse each of their skills into impressive team-work, Rainbow are very much an amalgam of separate soloists with scarcely



RUDOLF SCHENKER: lacking technique

any common sensibility either musically or visually.

True, the band is essentially a vehicle for Blackmore's ego, but since this extends to him laying on a sensurround PA and simultaneous split-screen live footage, a certain amount of acceptability does attach itself to this factor. The ugly side of it is the haphazard self-indulgence of much of his guitar-work.

Always one to rely on his tremolo arm, it's a wonder the bloody thing didn't drop off. This particular grievance was most manifest on 'Lost In Hollywood', the 20 minute version of which also took in Cozy Powell's much-publicised last drum solo plus individual bouts of tedium from the others. Don Airey proved he has the same undisciplined affinity for classical music as Blackmore and out of all of them, Graham Bonnett alone showed that he can be trusted to let rip.

There are those who consider him to have rock's best-ever voice and, if quality and soulfulness are the criteria, I'm inclined to agree. Simply, he held much of the set together, both in the early stages — 'Love's No Friend Of Mine', a brilliant 'Since You've Been Gone' and 'Catch The Rainbow' — and later when he graciously met

Ritchie's request for an unaccompanied version of Goffin-King's 'Will You Love Me Tomorrow'.

Apart from his total vocal control, his humour and personality counterpoint Blackmore's terminal moroseness. Its odd how this quality should delude the guitarist even more in the eyes of his fans, but at least the devotion is mutual. How else can one account for the bewildering firework extravaganza that accompanied the, gasp, second encore, 'Long Live Rock 'n' Roll' where Blackmore finally got round to immolating his guitar.

Incidentally, the "Long Live Rainbow" announcement at the end had a definite air of 'Rainbow - Are - Dead - Long - Live - Rainbow' about it which fanned already flaming rumours that it's not just Cozy who's leaving the group.

Bearing in mind the guitarist's speculated future plans, it would be fair to say that if this gig was Rainbow's final curtain, the band wouldn't be missed as much as the unlikely non-appearance of this festival next year. It would take more than a stick-in-the-mud to deny its success.