



Britannia rules the woods!—a Radio Britannia operator prepares for transmission.

Guerrilla radio

LAST Thursday was the second anniversary of the Marine Offences Act's effective closure of the seaborne radio pirates. But although the Act killed the stations out at sea, it merely scotched the pirates themselves—many of them simply took to the land.

Today, in Trafalgar Square, a demonstration ends "Free Radio Week". Throughout the day, this new breed of guerrilla pirates will be on the air again.

There are stations in many parts of the country, operated by small groups of enthusiasts who are constantly dodging authority in the shape of "the Gippo"—the G.P.O. In London, the peak of 30 stations reached some months ago has been trimmed to about 10, partly by the Gippo, partly by mergers to form more powerful units.

"We make all our own transmitters," a Radio Britannia man informed Mandrake, "from parts anyone can buy in a good radio store. Our gear is light and very mobile—rather like a suitcase spy radio."

The pirates are usually young and tend to be still at school or university. But a group can easily afford to set up shop. "For under £100 we bought or made a set to give good transistor reception over a ten-mile radius in average conditions," said Radio Britannia's organiser. "If we could afford a second-hand van we'd have a quicker means of getting away from the Gippo than our bikes. But we've been operating for over a year without trouble, so perhaps it would be a luxury."

A Radio Free Caroline (named after the pirate ship) operator estimated that it costs each mem-

ber of that group £1 to 30s. a week to run an outfit. They broadcast by using a number of transmitters operating in different locations. As one closes down, another takes over.

"We have already put out quite a lot of advertising—the local coffee shop, record store and classified stuff like flats for rent or cars for sale," said their advertising manager. "But though we charge 10s. for 30 seconds' air time, our income doesn't cover our costs yet."

This afternoon, then, pirates will be setting out for secret locations in houses, woods, car-parks, telephone kiosks, providing pop and light music for an audience of some thousands. Radio Britannia's local ice-cream roundsman will be glad to hear them. "The first time we advertised him was the first day he sold out completely," said a beaming pirate.