

THE HISTORY OF *ROADRUNNER* (1978-83)

By Donald Robertson

Synopsis

This is the story of how an Adelaide punk fanzine blossomed into a well-loved national music magazine that chronicled the glory days of Australian post-punk and 'pub rock' music in the period 1978-83. The do-it-yourself ethos espoused by the UK punk movement in the mid-1970s was strongly felt in Australia and inspired bands to form, play live and record and release their own records. The concurrent expansion of live music venues across the country (mainly pubs) meant more bands could live, work and play. *Roadrunner* was also very much a product of this do-it-yourself ethos. From the bunch of evangelical music fans and writers who initially came together, some left and others joined and as those involved became more technically proficient the magazine developed and grew. With no financial backing (until the final despairing issue), *Roadrunner* survived for five years due to the combination of a posse of enthusiastic (and usually unpaid) contributors, a creative and understanding production crew, a sympathetic printer, the support of key music industry personalities and—perhaps most important of all—a small but dedicated readership. In 2017, the University of Wollongong in New South Wales made all 48 issues of *Roadrunner* available in a digital archive (at <http://ro.uow.edu.au/roadrunner/>).

Introduction

When Martin Sharp, the internationally acclaimed Australian artist, died in 2013, I read that the University of Wollongong had created a digital archive of the Sydney and London *Oz* magazines that he was such a part of. I remember having a look and being impressed—not only that someone had put in the time and effort to do it, but that it was freely available to all. Then when Sharp’s friend and *Oz* colleague Richard Neville died in September 2016, the archive was mentioned again. I had coffee with former *Roadrunner* art director Geoffrey Gifford that same week and told him I was considering getting in touch with the university to see if they’d be interested in digitising *Roadrunner*. ‘Do it,’ Gifford said. So I did.

Michael Organ at the university was most encouraging and so I arranged to drive my collection of *Roadrunners* down the Princes Motorway from Sydney to Wollongong. I also contacted Lucy Spencer at the Arts Centre Melbourne, which held a copy of the only one I was missing—the final issue, dated January 1983. Lucy was kind enough to send the copy to Wollongong for scanning.

Michael Organ set up [a page from which all the issues could be accessed](#) and included a link titled ‘Roadrunner history’, which led to a short post on my Roadrunnertwice blog. I felt the post didn’t adequately tell the story, so over the summer of 2016-17 I dug out the letters, sales figures, financial records and other documents I had kept, consulted the issues I retained and wrote a personal history of the magazine that is presented here.

Magazines don’t just happen. They are created, they have a lifespan and (usually) they die. I talk a little below about the life cycle of magazines construct developed by a Dutch academic and how it could be applied to *Roadrunner*. But I think it’s also interesting to consider the magazine as a product of its times.

The punk/new wave music explosion of the mid-1970s and the accompanying do-it-yourself ethos was the inspiration. The burgeoning live music scene in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney provided the exposure for new homegrown talent—bolstered by airplay on ‘alternative’ radio (including 2JJ in Sydney, 3CR and 3RRR Melbourne, 4ZZZ Brisbane and 5UV and 5MMM Adelaide). As CBS Australia managing director Paul Russell—an Englishman fresh from New York—put it in an interview in the June 1980 issue of *Roadrunner*, ‘This country has a sort of rock and roll farm system where the venues and the geography spawn these acts who can play and make money and live. If people want to rise to the top, they’ve got a better show, more lights, more money to help them get there.’ And in every mainland capital, *Roadrunner* was up the back busily taking notes—all through the glory days of Australian pub rock.

But developments in technology were also important in making the means of production available—even to a bunch of penniless South Australian public servants, Uni students and music fans.

For *Roadrunner's* first five issues we sneaked into Adelaide University's radio station 5UV at night to use its [IBM Selectric](#), or 'golfball' typewriter. This enabled us to set columns of justified type and by using a range of 'golfballs', to access different fonts and sizes. From issue 6 onwards, we switched to another new technology—photo typesetting. This was slightly more expensive, but provided a much greater range and sophistication of typescript. From that same issue, in September 1978, we switched printing format. For print runs in the thousands, offset printing on newsprint at Bridge Press in the SA regional town of Murray Bridge was quicker and cheaper than the Empire Times sheet-fed press at Flinders University.

Those technologies sustained *Roadrunner* through its lifespan. The demise of the magazine in 1983 was not down to changing technology—which is not to say that the pace of change slowed at all. The following year saw the launch of the Apple Macintosh personal computer, then in 1985 the Apple LaserWriter printer and Aldus PageMaker software. Desktop publishing was born—and in 1986, US computer magazine .info became the very first desktop-published, full-colour, newsstand magazine.

No, the main external factors that contributed to *Roadrunner's* expiration were changes in the media mix and the music scene itself. The early 1980s saw *Roadrunner's* advertising base under pressure from all sides—from below by free street press titles such as *On The Street* and *tagg*, from new similar titles like Melbourne's *Virgin Press* and *VOX* and from above by the new commercial FM music stations. And in the UK—where music trends continued to be set—we watched the torch of cutting edge rock journalism pass from the weekly 'inkies' (*New Musical Express*, *Melody Maker* and *Sounds*) that had trumpeted punk and new wave, to the colour glossies (*The Face*, *Smash Hits* and *No.1*) that were riding the New Romantic boom. *Roadrunner* actually made the change to a glossy with its final issue, but was unable to sustain the transition.

Looking back, *Roadrunner* provided the best publishing apprenticeship one could possibly hope for. I learned about writing, interviewing, reviewing, editing, sub-editing, typesetting, photo reproduction, bromides, layout, printing, distribution—oh, and a little bit about managing a small business! These were skills I was able to employ when I moved on to *Countdown Magazine*, Fairfax Magazine's music education series *Roll Over Beethoven* and then as publisher at the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.

A brief word about the life cycle of magazines construct I have used to describe the stages *Roadrunner* went through. Dutch academic AJ van Zuilen formulated the construct in 1977 in a thesis looking at US mass-market magazines in the period 1946-72. Although *Roadrunner* could never have claimed to be ‘mass-market’, the five stages van Zuilen identifies seem to fit *Roadrunner*’s life cycle (March 1978 to January 1983). Rather neatly, each stage also corresponded to a year of the magazine’s life.

David Kent applied van Zuilen’s life cycle to *Go-Set* magazine in his 2002 thesis on ‘The Place of *Go-Set* in Australia Rock and Pop Music Culture 1966-74’, which is how I became aware of it.

I would summarise the stages as follows:

1. **Development stage.** The objective is to test, introduce and make the reader (and advertiser) aware the magazine exists.
2. **Growth stage.** Sales of the periodical tend to increase at an accelerated speed. At this point the magazine has found an initial acceptance on the part of the reader and the advertiser.
3. **Maturity stage.** The audience at which the magazine is aimed has largely been contacted and circulation starts to level off. The magazine may become indistinguishable from other publications and may lose its earlier exuberance.
4. **Saturation stage.** Heavily increased expenditure on promotion is needed to keep the magazine going. Reduction in editorial budgets often results in a turnover of staff and a drop in editorial quality.
5. **Declining stage.** Circulation sales tend to show a strong tendency to decline and advertising sales also drop. This stage eventually leads—often after a prolonged struggle to survive—to the death of the publication.

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Two years after *Roadrunner* bit the dust I was invited to speak at a conference on the topic of the rock press. Following is part of what I said:

The dilemma faced by any music magazine trying to give coverage to new, original and independent music is simple. It’s how to foster worthy and interesting acts while getting the advertising support of the mainstream music industry. When that mainstream industry hits the financial skids, as it did two years ago, the rock press is one of the first areas to suffer, in the

form of reduced advertising. The independent music industry is not successful enough, at the moment, to support a national music magazine.

A by-product, and an important one, of the demise of independent music magazines, is the lack of outlets for new writers. In the evangelical period of the late seventies, most new writers were fans who had passionate beliefs about the worth of the bands and the music they were writing about. That passion and belief meant that they didn't mind receiving paltry payment (or no payment at all) for their labours. They were part of a movement—fighters for a cause—the new wave overthrowing the old. Where are those causes today? Where are the new music freedom fighters with their pens mighty as any sword? If they do exist, I'm not reading them in any Australian music magazine.

Freedom fighters? Crusaders with a pen? My, those **were** different days! Of course, this was before the Internet and blogging. These days, anyone and everyone can be a rock critic. And the Internet has not just transformed music journalism and criticism. Digital disruption has stretched the music industry as a whole almost beyond recognition.

So, for those who were there and would like to remember—and for those who weren't who would like to find out what it was all about—here is every issue of *Roadrunner* magazine and the story of the people who made it happen.

Donald Robertson
19 April 2017

Part 1: Development Stage (Dec 1977—Jan 1979)

When I returned to Adelaide in late 1977 after two and a half years in the UK I came back with 25 singles—Sex Pistols, Clash, Damned, Elvis Costello, Wreckless Eric, Tom Robinson Band, X-Ray Spex, Rezillos, Slaughter & the Dogs etc etc. I moved into a small cottage in Norwood owned by my old Adelaide Uni friends Larry Buttrose and Donna Maegraith and proceeded to go round to visit all my other Uni mates in an evangelical way—to convert them to this fantastic new music. Most of them looked at me rather strangely and asked if I'd like another cup of tea, but Span, an old school friend from Whyalla, knew Stuart Coupe and introduced us.

Coupe was editor of the Flinders University student newspaper *Empire Times*. We got talking and quickly realised we shared this zeal about the punk/new wave explosion. We used to frequent the go-to import record shop of the day—Modern Love Songs in Twin St—and with the encouragement of the owner Bo and help from the crowd that hung around there we decided to channel the prevailing do-it-yourself ethos and put together a fanzine.

As well as enjoying blanket coverage in the British rock weeklies like *New Musical Express*, *Sounds* and *Melody Maker*, the punk rock explosion had inspired a flush of fanzines. The first and most famous of these was Londoner Mark P's *Sniffin' Glue (+ Other Rock'n'Roll Habits For Punks)*, which first appeared in July 1976 and spawned a rash of imitators.

The day after the December 1977 Federal election that returned Malcolm Fraser's Liberal Party to government, a motley (and hung-over) crew assembled at Modern Love Songs armed with typed contributions, photos and magazines to cut up to put the fanzine together. Apart from Coupe and myself, there was David Walker, Andy Vague and Nick Hope from the soon-to-be-legendary Adelaide punk outfits the Accountants, Chuckie Suicide (who became the Accountants' roadie), Lloyd (who went on to play in Spanish Holiday), Tracey, Alex and David Crowe. On the credits page we name checked the other Australian 'zines we were aware of—*Suicide Alley* (Brisbane), *Pulp* (Melbourne), *Alive and Kicking* (Melbourne) and *Spurt* (Sydney).

We laid out the magazine on the floor of the basement record shop and Stuart got it printed at *Empire Times*. Bo said he'd pay the print bill in exchange for a full-page ad. The bill was never paid. Very punk. The fanzine was called *Street Fever*. Coupe reminisced about the times in [this 2010 interview](#).

Coupe and I enjoyed the exercise so we started talking about 'what if we started a magazine?' At that time there was a booking agency in Adelaide called Sphere, managed by Chris Plimmer, who later became a prominent agent in Sydney and

ran the Nucleus agency. We went to him and he thought it was a great idea to have a local Adelaide music magazine. We agreed to include a gig guide and he got local music venues and shops and bands to buy ads, so we'd get some money coming in. We did the rounds of the Adelaide offices of the major record companies who were generally enthusiastic—particularly Phonogram who had albums from the Ramones, Talking Heads and Richard Hell and the Voidoids and really didn't know what to do with them!

We needed a name. One of the singles I'd brought back from the UK was 'Roadrunner', an unlikely 1977 hit there for Jonathan Richman. A hymn to the power and magic of rock'n'roll, I thought the name was a contender. Coupe obviously liked it too—in *Street Fever* he had waxed lyrical: '... one of the greatest singles EVER—a song about cruising with the radio on and being in electric communion with the modern world, modern girls and modern rock'n'roll.' One lunchtime in the Adelaide Uni refectory, I suggested we call the magazine *Roadrunner*. Coupe only pondered for a second. 'Yeah—that's great!'

Coupe was living in a share house in Torrensville with Alex Ehlert and Mark Burford. He also knew a slightly dotty layout artist at Flinders called Allan Coop (no relation). So with no capital and no assets, but bucket loads of energy and enthusiasm, *Roadrunner* was born. For the first issue in March 1978, the crew was Coupe and myself as editors, Allan Coop on layout and design, Alex Ehlert leading the Construction team, Mark Burford as reviews editor and Chris Plimmer as advertising manager. Larry Buttrose got in touch with his 60s surfing memories for the cover story on the Beach Boys. As well as writing articles and reviews, Jillian Burt got us into 5UV to use their [IBM Selectric](#), or 'golfball' typewriter for the copy. This enabled us to set columns of justified type and use a range of 'golfballs' to get different fonts and sizes.

Coop did the layout in a shed out the back of the share house in Torrensville, *Empire Times* did the printing and we trekked out to Football Park at West Lakes to try selling copies before the Beach Boys concert, cover price 30 cents. Not many were interested, but we weren't discouraged.

Apart from setting up the magazine, I had also been looking for a 'real' job over the summer. In early March I was offered a position in the Unemployment Benefits section of the Commonwealth Department of Social Security—ironically located in Hindmarsh Square, directly above Modern Love Songs. I accepted, but remained committed to the magazine. Coupe enlisted some other contributors. He was in touch with Bruce Milne and [Clinton Walker](#), who had published the fanzine *Pulp* in Melbourne and they thought what we were doing was interesting so came over to help.

The *News* (the afternoon paper in Adelaide) ran a snippet about the magazine on 11 May 1978.

Adelaide's own music mag, *Roadrunner*, looks like being around for a while. The second issue is out and costs 30c from newsagents and record stores. The typos and spelling mistakes are a bit hard on the eyes, but buy it for the interesting "let it all hang out" interview with Molly Meldrum. Also in the issue are stories on Quasar, Clean Cut, Chick Corea, Ry Cooder and the Resident (sic) and Steve Whitham starts a regular "Hi, I'm your local friendly DJ" column.

The content in the early issues was an idiosyncratic and eclectic mix of the local (Young Modern, Riff Raff, Neon Heart, the Sultan Brothers, Warm Jets, Cunning Stunt, Middle Class); interstate new wavers (Sports, High Rise Bombers, Boys Next Door, Stiletto); international tourists (Dylan, Weather Report, John Martyn, Graham Parker & the Rumour, Billy Connolly); retrospectives (Beach Boys, the Monkees, Marc Bolan); think pieces (The Death of Punk, powerpop); and pieces about the music industry (the above-mentioned interview with *Countdown's* Ian 'Molly' Meldrum, 5KA's David Day, the birth of community radio station 5MMM, how to be a rock writer). Plus live reviews, album and singles reviews and an Adelaide gig guide. Advertising support came from the bands, venues, record shops and equipment suppliers of the Adelaide music scene plus record companies (EMI, CBS, Festival and Phonogram), television and radio stations (Seven, Nine and 5UV) and a couple of corporate entities—the State Bank of South Australia and Coke.

In the first year, 1978, *Roadrunner* was only available in South Australia. Record shops and musical hire outlets sold it off the counter and B.J. & K.L. Fuller distributed into SA newsagents. Coupe drew on his *Empire Times* experience, I'd dabbled in poetry magazines while at Uni, Bruce Milne and Clinton Walker had produced their fanzines, but none of us had any real experience in the business of magazine publishing: we all loved the music and liked writing about it and photographers like Eric Algra and Joe Murray approached us and offered photos they'd taken.

Things went well for the first three issues and I guess we were starting to get a bit full of ourselves. A self-righteous editorial manifesto by Coupe in issue 4, July 1978 provoked Rock Australia Magazine (*RAM*) editor Anthony O'Grady into a response. 'Dear *Roadrunner*,' O'Grady wrote, 'Thanx for at least for spelling *RAM's* name right in your July edition. And that's all I'm thanking you for.'

Uh oh.

O'Grady asked us to consider two quotes.

'*Roadrunner* seeks to be a Pop/Popular CULTURE magazine as opposed to a Pop MUSIC magazine. Future issues will focus on books, movies, rock'n'roll theory ...' (Quote 1, *Roadrunner*, July 1978).

'We also know our rock'n'roll generation is more a lifestyle choice and its expression is more than music.' (Quote 2, from the editorial in *RAM*'s first edition, March 1975).

He then went on:

Hmmm. Sounds like neither publication wants to fall into the trap expressed by Quote No. 3: 'The major purpose and I suggest failing of these newsy rock'n'roll papers is that they serve to maintain the illusion that rock'n'roll exists independently of the forces around it.' (*Roadrunner* No. 4 again.)

So it really hurts (maaaaaan) that No. 3 is how *Roadrunner* categories *RAM* in 1978.

So. Guess *RAM* failed the culture test. The *Roadrunner* Culture test anyway.

On the other hand, can it be, (el gaspo!) *Roadrunner* just hasn't noticed all the youth/lifestyle articles on movies, living on the cheap, sci-fi, mysticism (sic), surfing, politics, conservation we at *RAM* have been assiduously including (average over one and a half editorial pages per issue) for the past three years.

O'Grady offered Coupe a staff position on *RAM* in Sydney a month later.

As the year wound down we convened a summit meeting in Torrensville. Coupe had gone. Clinton Walker was back in Melbourne, but still involved as Melbourne editor. The live scene in Adelaide at the time was still pretty much stuck in blues and boogie mode and the recording scene was almost non-existent, so it was no surprise that Bruce Milne had also decided to return to Melbourne. The novelty having worn off, Alex Ehlert and Allan Coop decided, nicely, to take their bat and ball and play elsewhere. So it was only me left standing. Collette Snowden, who had been writing for the mag under the nom de plume Sue Denim (geddit?), attended the meeting and was a strong supporter for continuing.

I decided to carry on. I didn't think the magazine had reached anywhere near its potential and it was certainly more fun than my day job in the Public Service.

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Excitement was building in Adelaide at the prospect of the Progressive Music Broadcasting Association (PMBA) obtaining a community radio licence and what that would do for the diversity of the airwaves. It boded for increased exposure both for the local music scene and the new music that *Roadrunner* was championing. Michael Zerman, who was based at the South Australian Media Resource Centre in the old Sym Choon fireworks factory, off the east end of Rundle Street, had been involved in the launch of 2JJ in Sydney and was providing advice to the PMBA. He also offered invaluable publishing advice to *Roadrunner*.

Zerman had been a key figure in the Sydney office of the collective headed by publisher Phillip Frazer that produced the Australian version of *Rolling Stone*, as well as the alternative magazines *Revolution*, *High Times* and *The Digger*, in the period 1971-75. Frazer founded Australia's most influential music magazine *Go-Set* in 1966, and remained publisher until 1972, when it was taken over by its printer Waverley Press. Zerman recently told me he had actually been company secretary of the Australian *Rolling Stone* publishing company Green Grass Pty Ltd. As *The Digger* was dying in late 1975, under the threat of lawsuits from Norm Gallagher and the BLF, as well as the general decline after the sale of the *Rolling Stone* licence to Paul Gardiner and Jane Matheson, Zerman also took on the company secretaryship of High Times Pty Ltd.

Zerman was production editor on another new Adelaide magazine *Preview* and had already steered us in the direction of *Preview's* printer, Bridge Press in Murray Bridge, an hour out of Adelaide on the South Eastern Freeway. Bridge Press was an offset printer that was cheaper than any of the printers in Adelaide and was keen for the extra work. It ended up printing the magazine for virtually the remainder of its life (September 1978 right through to July 1982). It doesn't matter if you run up a debt with your printer, Zerman confided conspiratorially—it gives them an interest in continuing to print you. And so it proved.

A more professional production set up was an immediate priority. Clive Dorman was a newspaper journalist who had seen the potential of the (then) new phototypesetting technology. He set up his own business, Neighbourhood Typesetting and became *Roadrunner's* production editor. Geoffrey Gifford, who ran a small design studio, took over design and layout and Collette Snowden joined as office manager.

As the new production crew moved in, it was becoming clear that there was a growing disconnect between the type of music we wanted to write about and the local Adelaide music scene that had initially supported the magazine. The solution? National—and international—coverage and national distribution.

On the writing side, Keith Shadwick became the magazine's first London editor. A poet, writer and saxophone player with Uncle Bob's Band, Bleeding Hearts and most recently the High Rise Bombers (with Paul Kelly and Martin Armiger), Shadwick left Melbourne in mid-1978 and quickly established himself on the London scene, where the new wave was still cresting. He contributed news, live reviews (including one about Public Image Limited's first live performance), a fond retrospective on Marc Bolan and—after embedding himself on the tour—an exhaustive behind-the-scenes account of the Sports' early 1979 twirl around the UK supporting Graham Parker and the Rumour.

Michael Zerman gave me an address for Phillip Frazer in New York and I wrote to him to ask if he would be interested in writing for us about the New York music scene. While wishing us the best of luck, he declined, saying 'I don't know if I can help you. I'm not particularly following the music scene here because I dislike most of it. New York punk is mostly ephemeral, weighed down by posturing about decadence/pain/how sleazy it all is etc., rather like the Beatnik era.' Fair enough. He went to say he 'liked the general feel of *Roadrunner*—some careful or maybe just talented writing—but it's a shock just how other-directed people in Australia are.'

After some encouragement from Stuart Coupe, who maintained friendly relations with his comrades in the south throughout his tenure at *RAM*, Stuart Matchett from 2JJ signed on as Sydney editor and Scott Matheson, then bass player with Brisbane band the Numbers, offered to contribute stories from Queensland. Ian Henderson started writing about Perth and with Bruce Milne and Clinton Walker in Melbourne, we had all mainland states covered. We even appointed a poetry editor—Donna Maegraith. And did publish some poems. It was the 70s after all.

Clive Dorman hit the road and tied up newsagent distribution in NSW through Alan Rodney Wright and Victorian distribution through Melbourne Wholesale Newsagency. In SA we already had distribution through Fullers, while in Queensland, Scott Matheson, under the banner of Riptide Distribution, supplied Rocking Horse Records and other interested record shops. Copies to White Light Records in Perth rounded out the picture.

The first national issue hit the newsstands in February 1979. The cover story on the riots and run-ins of the summer Elvis Costello tour was by the hard-hitting Ross Stapleton, whose fascination with the behind the scenes machinations of the Australian music industry was to yield a series of lengthy features over the following twelve months. As well as being fascinating exposes in their own right, they had the effect of making *Roadrunner* a must-read for industry participants in the Eastern states.

My indulgence of Ross' tireless championing of The Angels—admittedly the country's biggest drawing live band—in the year to come would however cause ructions amongst the magazine's founders.

To help publicise the magazine's national launch, Clive Dorman wrote the following piece, which he sent around to various newspapers and magazines. It actually did prompt a nice article by Stephen Hunter in Adelaide's morning newspaper the *Advertiser*. It provides an insight into my state of mind as I launched into a career-defining escapade.

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Australia's rock aficionados this month get an extra option when they go to the newsstand to pick up the national rock press. From this month, there's a third competitor in the field, pitting its weight against the Sydney-based *RAM* and the Melbourne-based *Juke*.

The new magazine is *Roadrunner*, from Adelaide—and it isn't really all that new. The February issue is in fact the tenth *Roadrunner*, but it's the first national one.

Roadrunner first appeared in Adelaide early last year, edited by Donald Robertson and Stuart Coupe (the latter now in Sydney with *RAM*) after their punk fanzine *Street Fever* wasn't able to go on after its first edition. Robertson and Coupe, then joined by several others in an editorial and productive collective, soon began producing the broader-based *Roadrunner*.

During 1978, the collective struggled on, usually just managing to survive. It was scratching for advertising, largely unrecognized by many of the people, even in Adelaide, who it needed recognition from. Various diets of the largely New Wave fare were tried, but by October the other editors had decided to give it away. Coupe had by this time quit and joined *RAM*.

Only Donald Robertson decided to continue. But he quickly managed to get a new team around him, including a number of professional journalists—something lacking previously on the *Roadrunner* editorial collective. He started commissioning articles and seeking out better quality pix. He streamlined the accounting side of the operation so the paper could start recovering more of the money it was owed by advertisers. Finally—he increased the print run.

The next step was an eastern states tour by Production Editor, Clive Dorman late last year. He found a lot of enthusiasm in Sydney for *Roadrunner*, both in radio and record company circles. Wizard Records took out a full-page ad, testimony of their faith in the magazine. There was also a lot of interest generated in Melbourne, where one of the editorial collective members, Bruce Milne,

continues to write for the paper. More advertising revenue came in from Melbourne.

When Dorman returned from his trip, he and Robertson decided that the magazine really needed to go national. There was, really, no way back to the struggling Adelaide-based paper which sent perhaps one hundred copies of each edition to Sydney and Melbourne as curios. They decided to take the risk of attempting to produce a national newspaper from Adelaide.

Roadrunner, in case you're wondering, doesn't take its name from the bird that consistently beguiles Wile E. Coyote and foils the ACME Company. It's the title of a song by Jonathan Richman, a Boston New Waver, all about Living in The Modern World, and driving to the stop and shop with the radio on. Robertson chose the name for the philosophical reason that he and the others liked it.

The first national edition has emerged with 'Australia's Independent Music Paper' under the masthead, and it's certainly going to have to create some form of dedicated readership around this or some other concept to succeed. *RAM* and *Juke*—each boasting much bigger circulation than the newcomer—are well placed to squeeze.

But if the first edition is anything to go by, perhaps there is room for optimism for *Roadrunner*. It certainly does seem more heavyweight or 'quality'-orientated than its two competitors, with a much cleaner appearance. But does Australia have room for a music paper that won't tell the fans about what Rod Stewart's doing after his concerts and what Leif Garrett does when he gets tired of skateboarding?

In this regard, *Roadrunner* runs up against all the same old questions of demand that any aspirant quality press finds constantly asked in Australia. Or to put it another way, if the masses want newspapers with girly shots on p3, what are your chances of survival if you don't print them and put something else there? Can an Australian rock music paper survive without John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John?

Well, if the first national edition, with its 11 thousand print run, 50-cents each, distributed in all states except Tasmania, is anything to go by ... the answer could well be yes. Although the lead story by Melbourne freelance Ross Stapleton has appeared elsewhere, Stapleton has gone much deeper into the riots and run-ins of that bizarre concert tour. There's also a good article on the Sports, the Melbourne band most-likely-to when they head off to Britain soon. An interesting piece that could only appear in *Roadrunner* is about the record industry itself—and how Adelaide has a huge record plant that won't touch rock. There are also pieces from correspondents in Britain and the USA. No reprints.

Donald Robertson is 25. He runs the magazine from his crowded bedroom in a maisonette in Norwood, inner Adelaide. Nearly everything in room relates to the magazine, from the accounts books and art materials on the desk to the yellowing piles of back issues stacked by his bed.

A Scot who migrated to Australia with his parents in the mid-sixties, he did a Bachelor of Science at Adelaide University in the early seventies. And could easily have gone on with a promising career as a scientist. Instead, he became a public servant in Canberra with the Whitlam government and wrote letters for Bill Hayden. Early in 1975, with the demise of the Whitlam government well and truly written on the wall, he left for his native Britain, where he stayed for nearly three years. During his time away, of course, he saw the New Wave break. 1977 was the Year of the Punk in Britain, and on returning in late 77 to Adelaide, he decided to start his own fanzine to chronicle what was happening in New Wave in Adelaide. He met Stuart Coupe and ... *Street Fever* appeared.

He barely slept at all in the week this month's first national edition was printed ... but when he finally awoke from 2 days sleep after getting it safely produced, I managed to get the following interview ...

Q. What direction is the paper taking at present?

A. Physically or metaphysically?

Q. Metaphysically I suppose

A. Do you always ask the hard ones first?

Q. Well, when it started it was in the New Wave line, and then you broadened the base somewhat. Would you ever have articles about Rod Stewart for instance?

A. Only highly critical ones I think.

Q. But in the past your policy has been not to give people like him any space at all ...

A. I think the Rod Stewarts and the others of his ilk receive enough publicity as it is from the other parts of the media ... Not just the rock press, I mean all media—TV, TV news, papers, magazines. A newspaper which is dedicated to providing information about rock'n'roll shouldn't cover people like that because they're not making rock'n'roll music; they're making middle of the road music.

Q. What are your criteria though? Where do you draw the line? Obviously John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John would be in the same position for you ... but what about the Eagles? How do you make a distinction?

A. I don't think you can draw a line. You have to take up every case on its merits. You have to weigh up all the factors.

Q. Is it more effective to ignore them or criticize them?

A. To ignore them.

Q. Do any overseas magazines have a policy of ignoring large sections of popular music?

A. There are a few. *Zigzag* in the UK and *Creem* in the USA. We've attempted to cover a lot of good non-mainstream music as well, with articles and reviews of jazz, folk, reggae.

Q. Well, how would describe the magazine overall?

A. A rock and roll magazine, but concentrating on original Australian music and the more original and creative music emanating from overseas. *RAM* and *Juke* tend to cover things like the Rod Stewart tour and reprint articles from overseas. *RAM* reprints from the *New Musical Express* in the UK, while *Juke* occasionally reprints from *Sounds*, another UK mag. They reprint stories on the big overseas bands they can't afford to cover themselves. Our stories from the USA and UK have all been written from Australian correspondents there.

Q. Does Roadrunner material get lifted as well?

A. All the time. Last issue of Sydney 'fanzine' *RAM* had a big slab lifted from our previous issue, quoting 'Roadrunner fanzine'. It was from our interview with John Dowler of Young Modern.

Q. Is there the possibility that with Roadrunner, Australia will have a quality rock press?

A. Oh most definitely. I think with this current issue, the first national issue, we've actually achieved that. It's perhaps Australia's first quality rock paper. I can't think of any of higher quality.

Q. Well what are your chances of competing with RAM and Juke? Will you start taking some of their readers?

A. I think there's going to be a lot of overlapping readership. People will take one of each initially. In Sydney they'll buy *RAM* and *Roadrunner* and in Melbourne they'll buy *Juke* and *Roadrunner*. In a way we won't be taking readers off them. *RAM* is fortnightly, *Juke* weekly, we're monthly at the moment. But I think we

cover areas in depth that they don't touch on, especially outside Sydney and Melbourne. There are a lot of people who want to read about those areas.

Q. Do you want to publish more often?

A. We're aiming to print fortnightly within about three months. Weekly? No.

Q. How's the magazine doing financially?

A. Okay. We've got money to pay but money uncollected. We're doing alright and we'll do better soon.

Q. What about payments for contributors?

A. They're pretty low at the moment, but as our situation improves there'll be an immediate flow-on to them.

Q. Do you find the record companies get unhappy when you don't cover their glamour acts? How does that side of things tally up? Do you have strained relations with any of the record companies?

A. Not at all. The record companies are happy to get any exposure they can for their artists. As editor I retain responsibility for what goes in the paper and no record company's going to dictate to me what my cover story's going to be. I'm going to dictate that. And in the same way, no record company's going to dictate what goes inside either. If they give us records to review that's great, but we'll only review what we've got space for.

Q. You've been through a lot of permutations since you put out Street Fever just over a year ago. Did you ever think Roadrunner would reach this point, especially with you as editor when you started with four or five other people as a collective?

A. Never imagined it.

Q. Yet, if you look back, is it so surprising?

A. Well, I think that Stuart Coupe and myself were the prime movers of *Roadrunner*—we put out *Street Fever* together. He's still involved in writing, for *RAM*. He's number two there now I think.

Q. Quite a meteoric rise in itself in less than a year.

A. If anything I think that shows just how thin the Australia rock press is and how easy it is to do something in the field. I mean for us to go in a year from nothing

to a national magazine and do it without financial backing ... I don't know if it could happen anywhere else.

Next: Part 2: Growth Stage.

Part 2: Growth Stage (Feb 1979—Jan 1980)

In January 1979, *Roadrunner* production editor Clive Dorman wrote to Michael Finucan at Brisbane community radio station 4ZZZ asking if he was interested in writing for us about what was happening in Brisbane. Dorman was upfront about the magazine's financial situation. 'We're poor as hell and will be so until the cheques for national sales start coming in, in about three months time. However we think we'll be able to start paying writers at least something to grumble about mid-year.'

The magazine had begun with no capital and no investors, and 12 months on went national with a print run of 11,000, a cover price of 50 cents—and still no capital and no investors. As Kris Kristofferson wrote, 'When you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose.'

Bridge Press in Murray Bridge agreed to print the magazine on credit for a few issues, while enough ad revenue was coming in to cover other production costs, pay my rent and put food on the table. Michael Zerman also introduced me to a groovy bank manager, Phillip Virgo at the King William Street branch of the Commercial Banking Company of Sydney, who agreed to extend the magazine a small overdraft against future sales receipts.

Production moved to Geoffrey Gifford's design studio in Glen Osmond Road, Eastwood, near iconic rock venue the Arkaba. Gifford recalls Clive Dorman arriving at the door one day with a huge phototypesetting machine, which he proceeded to install. As Gifford was also living at the premises, this was rather an imposition, but being the cultured soul he is, his protests were polite, muted and, well, ineffectual. The magazine promptly set up camp in his living room.

A new production routine evolved. Bridge Press provided printed layout sheets and Gifford and his offsider Trudy Hayter would stick down the phototype coming out of Dorman's machine, the headlines, the bromides of photos, captions, page numbers and Gifford would weave magic with spot colour screens on the cover and centrespread. The day before print deadline usually involved myself and the production crew staying up all night to complete the artwork, then as the sun rose, jumping in someone's car (I didn't have one and in fact didn't even have a driving licence) and motoring the 75 km up the South Eastern freeway to Murray Bridge.

Once at Bridge Press, I would hand the artwork over to Neil the printer. Neil was a taciturn Aussie bloke, in his thirties, who always seemed faintly amused at the artistic covers we tried to create. But he was an excellent printer and always rose to any challenge we threw his way.

I was fascinated by the printing process and would watch intently as Neil made negatives from the pages, joined four negatives together then made the metal plates that were strapped onto the cylinders of the two-unit Goss Community web offset press. Coloured inks were added to the unit that was doing the spot colours, black ink to the rest, the large paper rolls were connected and when everything was in place, Neil pressed the go button. When the first few complete copies came out the end, he would stop the press, check the output, give me a copy for any comments and if all was well, away the machines went again.

The binding machine at the end of the press spat out bundles of 100, which on a print run of 10,000 meant there were 100 bundles. I (with whoever had accompanied me that day) loaded the 40 bundles for Sydney into their car and drove them the 250 metres down the road to the Murray Bridge railway station, labelled them, and booked them in as freight. Then back to the printer for the 35 bundles for Melbourne, back to the station then back to the printer to pick up the rest (Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, subscriptions, contributors and freebies). Then an hour's drive back to Adelaide where I would collapse into bed. Hands-on? You betcha.

Contributors were enthusiastic, with Keith Shadwick writing in February that December 1978 (issue 9), with Joe Camilleri on the cover was 'fucking good—keep it up!' and Ross Stapleton saying February 1979 (issue 10) was about a '200 per cent improvement on the previous issue.' Stapleton went on:

I don't think you are far off achieving the sort of excellence you should be aiming for. There's still a way to go but by god you've already covered most of the distance, the touchdown shouldn't be nearly so difficult now. I don't think the content can greatly improve, but visually I think that's the area for the most concern. I'll give you 7 out of 10. Keep up the great work.

For the second national issue (issue 11) the cover story was from Brian Johnstone, an AAP journalist who I'd met through my housemate Larry Buttrose. Johnstone, who had previously contributed some well-researched articles about the state of the music industry in Adelaide, chipped in the tasty tale of the confected media outrage surrounding the Stranglers' tour of Australia—not Mike Willesee or Molly Meldrum's finest hour. The issue also featured part one of Ross Stapleton's expose of agency manoeuvres in the live music business, which recounted some of the skirmishes resulting from the challenge newcomers Dirty Pool were making to the might of Michael Gudinski's Premier-Harbour group.

After submitting his magnum opus about the Sports tour of the UK, Keith Shadwick in London was positive things were going in the right direction.

The real advantage of *Roadrunner* I think over *Juke* and *RAM* is good articles, in-depth studies, sensible reviews overall and their (sic) own overseas correspondents. *RAM* just reprints *Melody Maker* stuff etc etc. You agree?

Well, yes.

Ross Stapleton delivered a forensic account of Michael Gudinski's vertically integrated music empire in May (issue 13) and followed up with a cover story on The Angels in June (issue 14). Some of the magazine's founders were not impressed with the latter. Bruce Milne, who had succeeded Clinton Walker as Melbourne editor, wrote to me.

We are without any direction at all. As I understand it (and I'm saying this after discussions with Stuart, Clint, Peter and Bakowski) we are supposed to be covering the new bands and offering the sort of down-to-ground stuff you won't find in the other magazines. We don't need to compete with the other magazines. So why are 4 of our 12 pages of articles devoted to the Angels? ... I'd like to know what R/R wants so I can decide whether I want to write for it.

Oh dear. Growing pains. Was *Roadrunner* going to remain alternative or go mainstream? Was it going to stay credible or sell out?

As far as I can recall, I wanted both. I wanted to cover the up and coming bands and the new music but I also wanted to sell more copies and if that meant putting The Angels on the cover, then that was absolutely fine.

And we needed to sell more copies and more ads because the patience of some of our penniless contributors was beginning to wear thin.

Keith Shadwick wrote from London outlining his parlous financial state and seeking a monthly retainer.

I do really want to keep our good working relationship because I believe very much in you & in the magazine as a whole. I will need some money soon, however, to make ends meet. Can you dig it?

Clinton Walker did a cover story on Electronic Musick for July (issue 15) and when it came out he wrote saying he was most 'most impressed' and had a 'rejuvenated interest' in *Roadrunner*. But he was also facing hard times in Melbourne.

What else? Well, money. I don't mind so much about not getting any (of course I'd love to though), but it is very hard for me to keep taking pix without some sort of financial support. It's pretty hard taking pix on the dole's \$50 a week—for instance, I'm forking out \$10 for some prints today and they're going to you, and \$10 away in one go really fucks my finances. I'd appreciate some money just to cover my costs.

Jillian Burt had been involved from the magazine's very early days. She had relocated to Melbourne where she was still a contributor and gave a mixed review of the July issue.

The Angels interview (again) was a bit unnecessary. Doc Neeson didn't say much or say it well. There has been heaps of criticism of the Angels by lots of people: that they're derivative, contrived etc. How about a piece on the Angels that presents that view ...

Clinton's electronics are spot on and his Sydney bit delightful. The creatively obnoxious John McLaughlin bit was an absolute pleasure to read after all the holier-than-all stuff that's been printed about him. It was like it was the second bloody coming, or so the promoters would have us believing.

The news was better from New South Wales. After packing his bags for Sydney, Stuart Coupe had hit the ground running but after 12 months at *RAM*, he had an argument with the esteemed Anthony O'Grady (over the length of a Redgum album review I understand) and David Dale hired him to write a rock column for the *Sun-Herald*. The move also enabled Coupe to join forces with Stuart Matchett to create a Sydney dream team for *Roadrunner*.

Subscriptions were one way to get sales money up front and I managed to sweeten the subscription offer with *Roadrunner* T-shirts. In July 1979 a year's subscription was \$8, with t-shirt added, \$10. This sometimes put those on the front line in some peril.

Stuart Matchett wrote from Sydney.

There I was at the Bondi Lifesaver watching Sports when this woman said "hey! Fuckhead where's my *Roadrunner*?"

it turned out I knew her—her name is Margaret Wertheim (I think)

she lives in Brisbane (I don't know

and claims to have sent off money for a subscription and hasn't seen a copy yet. Just thought I'd let you know.

Margaret's subscription was promptly attended to, I can assure you.

In my July 1979 newsletter to contributors I brought people up to date with the magazine's advertising, distribution and general financial situation.

Money. We have managed to knock \$1000 off our print bill due to a concerted effort by Michael Zerman here in Adelaide, Bruce Milne in Melbourne and Stuart Coupe in Sydney. But we're not out of the woods yet. We are going to have to pay \$1000 a month to the printer if the paper is to continue. That shouldn't be too hard as the big record companies have at last decide to come to the party. We have signed a 12 months advertising contract with Festival for one full page per issue which is going to be a help, but realistically we need about six pages of ads per issue if we are going to be able to pay everyone for what they write. If you have any good ideas for advertising contact Bruce Milne in Melbourne or Stuart Coupe in Sydney. We pay 20% commission for each ad when the ad is paid for (we have quite a lot of difficulty extracting the moola from certain of our advertisers) so if you can get the money pre-paid we get our money and you get yours and everyone is happy.

Distribution. Is still not good, particularly in Victoria. It's O.K. in N.S.W. and not TOO bad in S.A. Scott Matheson is distributing in Qld. again as President Distributors fell through. White Rider Records are distributing in Perth. We are currently talking to Compres who distribute *Women's Weekly* and *Rolling Stone* about the possibility of them distributing us nationwide, which would solve most of our distribution problems I think. There's nothing definite yet, but it is a possibility.

Keith Shadwick finally lost patience and gave me a blast in his letter of 10 July.

I'm really pissed off with what's been happening, or rather not happening as well. What happened to the retainer? For three weeks I relied on the money coming and it didn't—it left me up shit creek financially and now it's too late to get a temporary job as all the Uni. Students have snapped them up. As you can see from the article I've enclosed, I've kept faith, deciding this can all be worked out in due time but for godsakes let me know one way of the other, please.

My August letter to contributors explained the magazine's situation.

Yup, *Roadrunner* has managed to keep the wolves from the door for another month. I reckon I should change the name of the mag to *Houdini Weekly*. The problem with the paper is not that it's not selling enough copies or getting enough ads. It's that the people who distribute the paper and the companies who advertise in it are taking an inordinately long time to pay the money that they owe. In business terms this is known as a cash flow problem I am told. The problem is compounded by the fact that the bulk of the paper's revenue is located in Victoria and especially NSW. This means that I can't just pop around to CBS/EMI/Festival and set up camp until the cheque for advertising is forthcoming. In fact, if production costs were not so cheap here in Adelaide, I would move the paper to Sydney tomorrow. I am thinking of moving it anyway, but am waiting on some production estimates from Stuart Coupe.

The 'brand spanking new' advertising rate card offered the following pitch to advertisers.

Roadrunner is a monthly music magazine published in Adelaide and distributed throughout Australia, It provides in-depth coverage of the Australian music scene through its network of correspondents in all capital cities plus on the spot reports from writers overseas. The paper also includes a comprehensive review section which covers the latest album and single releases plus reviews of current films and books. *Roadrunner* has a distinctly Australian flavour for the simple reason that all articles and reviews are original, not reprinted from overseas magazines. If you are part of Australia's ever growing music scene then *Roadrunner* is your paper.

The cost of a full-page ad was \$280, half page \$180. Inexcusably, no circulation or readership figures were included. Doh!

Coupe sent me his thoughts about a proposed move to Sydney. In his considered opinion it was not a good idea. He felt the three important things were a regular contributors fee ('even if it's small it should be for all'); increased circulation in Sydney ('have you suggested to Allan Rodney Wright that they flood shops with it?') and sometime go fortnightly. 'Given all this I realise you're probably working your arse off just to keep things going,' he conceded. And he was right! He said:

My feelings are the other three things are more important than sacrificing what appears to be an established production cycle—I'll check but costs will skyrocket up here—no-one typesets for Clive's price and no-one will print for anywhere (near) that money plus you've got the problem of finding more staff and let's face it what extra could be done up here that

you couldn't do in Ad(elaide) or have me do here????????? ... you really won't get any closer to the higher echelons of record companies and the further you go up the worse they are—believe me hanging around record companies is one big drag—they'll all be your friends superficially but that's because they want things—it's so nauseatingly insincere up here—the good thing about Adelaide is that you're filtered from the bullshit ...

I think the mag is at a crucial stage and if you keep up the present rate of work for another six months you'll be here to stay for as long as you like and although a move to Sydney might be good then I think things would be thrown into chaos at this crucial time—my advice is get really established, get yourself a decent income equal to all the work you're doing, start paying contributors, give me more to do, try to keep in closer contact and things'll be great—what do ya think?

Anyway I better post this—keep it up—the paper gets better every issue and it's important to keep it going, even if you're bored shitless in Adelaide—Sydney has even more deadshits and most of them work in the music business ...

I wrote to Keith Shadwick in London explaining the situation and he replied with the news that with the assistance of a somewhat exaggerated reference from *Roadrunner*, he had landed a position as editor of *Music Trades International*, a trade magazine, at a salary of £5500 p.a. and company car. 'It won't interfere with writing for *Roadrunner*,' he assured me, 'in fact it'll help because I'll then have a car and can go to a lot more gigs at night and out-of-town things.'

The communication from Melbourne was not so positive. In August, contributor Jillian Burt unloaded on the August issue (issue 16), saying it 'has almost no redeeming features. You want criticism and comments, so here they are.'

Burt didn't miss. Malicious Gossip was 'overly smartarse and carelessly written and cumbersome to read.' Stuart Coupe's Jo Jo Zep piece was 'careless, gluggy and of no substance at all'. Keri Phillips' interview with English rock journalists Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill of the *New Musical Express* was an "'in media" wank'. The Young Modern story needed 'more of them, less of Stuart (Coupe)'. The Angels—'How tiresome, tedious, overdone. More Angels by Ross Stapleton, even more odious. It was an utter waste of space.' She concluded:

Roadrunner as a whole is an in-joke, a slightly left-of-mainstream *Juke*. You are cast as the benevolent puppet of the record companies. The paper is out-of-touch, has lost its impartiality and capacity for criticism. With the tendency to cuddle up to hype so easily *Roadrunner* simpers not barks.

I donated articles and assistance to *Roadrunner* because I believed in the notion of a smart paper that concentrated on the small Australian bands without being afraid to step on record company toes. I believed *Roadrunner* to be a paper with foresight and objectivity, that it is not. I'm bitterly disappointed with your lack of regard for the contributors, financially and otherwise. I'm consequently relinquishing any association I have with *Roadrunner*. Prove me wrong, make *Roadrunner* worthwhile.

Ouch.

In my September newsletter to contributors I announced that Rob James had joined the paper and would be handling administration and financial matters. 'Rob used to work on an Adelaide mag called *Magnetic Tadpole* and has a long and murky record in enterprises of this type. He is in Melbourne at the moment trying to sort out the paper's affairs over there (particularly the distribution).' I also mentioned that Toby Creswell and Richard McGregor (*Rolling Stone*) had started writing for the paper.

One of the first things Rob James did was organise a contra deal through Ogilvy & Mather (Australia) with the coach company Ansett Pioneer. The deal was for 5 free-of-charge tickets Adelaide-Sydney return in return for a full-page ad. The deal enabled me to get up to Sydney, meet key contributors like Stuart Matchett, nail down some advertising contracts with record companies (including with Phil Mortlock at WEA and Martin Fabinyi at Regular Records) and generally hang out and network for a week or so in the buzzing Sydney scene.

We put together a benefit concert for the magazine in Adelaide—two local bands, Lemmy Caution and the U-Bombs donated their services and we brought the Boys Next Door over from Melbourne as headliners. Held at the Burnside Town Hall on 28 September, it was a mild success.

On the Melbourne front, Bruce Milne tendered his resignation as Melbourne editor on 2 October. He wrote:

Not because of any great grudges or bullshit like that but because—
a) I'm not interested enough in the job and consequently aren't committed enough
b) My involvement with other things makes it slightly unethical
c) I'm just too busy at present.

So my stand is—I'll help in any way I can, I'll remain a contributor, and aid you whenever necessary. OK?

OK.

Bruce followed up in November.

I've heard about the financial problems and I'm worried. I'm concerned firstly because I realize it's a business with your name so that debts (ultimately) fall on your head. I'm also concerned because *Roadrunner* must continue. There is a huge need for it and despite any differences between us I don't ever want to see it fail.

I have some suggestions:

- 1) A benefit concert in Melbourne. Stuart mentioned to me plans for one in Sydney. I'm sure I could organise one at the Crystal Ballroom early next year.
- 2) *Roadrunner* is still not reaching Melbourne shops. If you'll give me the same cut as Melbourne W/salers I'll distribute to the import shops.
- 3) Clint, Phil Brophy and I are bringing out a booklet of the complete Oz New Wave discography. Really complete—titles, catalogue #s, photos, studios used, producers, # pressed, release dates etc etc. When we've got it printed (Jan) and know how much it will cost you're welcome to sell copies thru the mag and make a retailers profit.

I can't stress enough that I want to see *Roadrunner* continue and will help if I'm needed. You're always welcome to stay if you're in town.

At the suggestion of Moira Manos, the new head of Virgin Records Australia, I send some copies of the mag to her brother in law, Chris Salewicz, a staff writer at *New Musical Express* in London. Chris wrote back in November and offered to do a 'monthly think piece—with all relevant quotes—about what's going on in London'. This didn't eventuate, but he did contribute some impressive feature articles in the years to come.

Geoffrey Gifford moved out of Glen Osmond Road to a first floor studio at 240 Rundle Street in the city and the *Roadrunner* office moved to the front room of Robbie James's house in Parkside.

The last four issues of the year contained some real highlights. The Knack/B52s/Sports cover in September (issue 17) was smart and cheeky. Geoffrey Gifford's graphic 'Powerpop' cover for October (issue 18) was arty and classy—and the centrespread on Mental As Anything looked superb. The cover for issue 19 in November (a live shot of British rock'n'reggae band the Members) wasn't outstanding, but issue 20—a double issue celebrating the end of the 70s—was far and away the best the magazine had yet produced.

I don't recall whether it was Ray Hearn and John Woodruffe of Dirty Pool (the Sydney management agency that had The Angels, Cold Chisel and Flowers) or Chris Gunn (who managed Adelaide politico-folkies Redgum), who introduced me to Phil Gerlach of G&S Management Services. Whoever it was, it was very welcome, and *Roadrunner* appointed G&S as accountants and financial and management consultants in January 1980. Apart from doing the books properly, G&S with its aura of respectability, was invaluable in negotiating an ongoing relationship with Bridge Press. This involved paying for each issue up front and knocking a bit off the accumulated debt every month—a satisfactory situation for both parties.

I wrote to all contributors in January on my newly acquired second hand Olivetti portable typewriter.

Well, friends, the eighties start here. Contrary to what you may have heard, (if you haven't, don't worry about it) *Roadrunner* has not curled up and died. Financially things are tight (when haven't they been?) particularly due to the extra expenditure involved in putting out the double edition, but with everything else looking so promising I certainly don't feel that it's time to throw in the towel.

The reaction to the double issue has been most heartening. That is the standard of layout and design that all future editions must be judged on. The quality of the writing has always been excellent but finally I think we achieved a visual style that was commensurate with it. I would like to thank you all for your contributions and I hope I can count on your continuing support for the year ahead.

To raise some much needed capital for the paper we have decided to put on benefits in Melbourne and Sydney. The Melbourne one is arranged for the 27th January at the Crystal Ballroom and will feature three top bands (details TBA).

Roadrunner has always been undercapitalised, in fact apart from a loan from Stuart Matchett early last year, the paper has survived on the money it has made from advertising and sales. Hopefully the money we make from these benefits will put us on a solid financial base. As you probably know, there is a considerable delay between putting an issue out and receiving sales money for it. With a monthly paper like RR it's about two and a half months. If we had all the money from copies that we've sold we'd be fine.

Partly to speed up this process and partly to effectively compete with *RAM*, *Juke* and *Rolling Stone*, I have decided to publish the paper

fortnightly from the first issue in February. I estimate that by the end of March the increased revenue from this move will enable us to pay contributors at the rate of \$20 per thousand words. Payment has been a long time coming, but coming it is.

Another development that is going to increase our sales is the soon to be signed agreement with the Herald and Weekly Times for distribution in Victoria and Queensland. The agreement has been drawn up and sent to H&WT and we are just awaiting their formal approval.

It seemed *Roadrunner* could look forward to the 80s with some optimism.

However as the old proverb says, there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip.

Next: Part 3: Maturity Stage

Part 3: Maturity Stage (Feb 1980—Jan 1981)

Roadrunner's 'End of the 70s' double issue in December 1979 (issue 20) made a few people sit up and take notice. One of them was Paul Gardiner, publisher of Australian *Rolling Stone*. He used to play the occasional game of squash with Stuart Coupe in Sydney and asked Coupe if I might be willing to sell the magazine to him. He had just started a new publication, *The Record* (edited by Ed St John) and was looking for another title—with the new wave/new band content that *Roadrunner* contained—to really put the squeeze on his main competitor, *Rock Australia Magazine (RAM)*.

Coupe told Gardiner to get in touch, which he did, inviting me to Sydney for a meeting. Gardiner, a former *Australian Financial Review* journalist and obviously no mug, also engaged Dun and Bradstreet to do a report on *Roadrunner's* long-term operations, credit history, profitability and stability. Shortly afterwards, I received a questionnaire from Dun and Bradstreet in the mail asking for all sorts of information about circulation, advertising revenue, production costs, assets and liabilities etc etc. Wary of revealing to a competitor how penurious *Roadrunner* really was, I sent advertising manager Robbie James to Sydney to suss Gardiner out. Accordingly to Coupe, Gardiner was less than impressed that I didn't take the meeting. I didn't complete the survey and Gardiner's interest lapsed.

Attempting to publish the magazine fortnightly at the beginning of 1980 was a misstep and one that was quickly exposed as an overreach. Three issues into the year, I was explaining to Bruce Milne and other contributors that going fortnightly, 'has been rather a strain on the financial and production structure of the paper. Which is why we haven't strictly been fortnightly—more like three weekly—this year, so far.' The difficulty was still cash flow.

The big problem is, as always, the slowness of the advertisers and distributors to pay. Because we (or I) haven't got any finance behind us (or me) we almost need the money from the previous edition in order to print the next one. So if that money is late then so is the next edition. The Melbourne Birthday Party was set up to put that financial safety net under the paper, but while it was a pretty good night and a reasonable promotional exercise, it didn't really put a lot of money in the bank. Ever heard of tightrope walking?

Roadrunner's Melbourne Birthday Party was a concert at the Crystal Ballroom, St Kilda on 10 February 1980 featuring Sports, Boys Next Door and Adelaide band Lemmy Caution. The door price was \$6, promoter Laurie Richards donated the venue and the bands donated their services (although I seem to recall the road

crew got paid and there was a loooooong free list on the door). Lemmy Caution paid their way over from Adelaide for the exposure. There were a few tense moments when the Sports road crew squared up to the Boys Next Door crew about placement of stage equipment, but a phone call to Mushroom HQ at Dundas Lane seem to resolve the issue. A highlight of the night was the inaugural *Roadrunner* Rock Awards, compered by Red Symons and Wilbur Wilde. The poll results were included in issue 21, published on 8 February.

As the *Age* reported on Monday 11 February:

The Australian band Sports stole the scene at the 'Roadrunner' Rock Awards in the Crystal Ballroom, St. Kilda last night. Although it spent 11 months overseas last year, the band won—in the Australian section—best group, best album for 'Don't Throw Stones' and best songwriter, guitarist Martin Armiger. Joe Camilleri of Jo Jo Zep was rated best male vocalist and Angie Pepper of The Passengers won the best female vocalist award.

Readers of the national rock paper 'Roadrunner', who were polled for the awards, thought Mental As Anything was the tip for 1980 and gave it the best single title for 'The Nips Are Getting Bigger'. Best live group went to The Angels, best television rock show was won by 'Nightmoves' and in the overseas section Talking Heads took best group, the B-52s won best album and Bruce Springsteen won best songwriter.

Chris Salewicz, a London-based journalist who wrote for *New Musical Express*, contributed a lengthy two-part feature on the Clash for the first two issues of 1980 (issues 21 and 22). As *RAM* and *Juke* regularly ran reprints of articles from *New Musical Express* and *Melody Maker*, via syndication deals with their publishers, some readers mistakenly assumed that *Roadrunner* had succumbed to the same practice. In an editorial in issue 22, I pointed out this was not the case, that Salewicz contributed directly to *Roadrunner* and that the magazine continued to publish 100 per cent original material. The editorial prompted a nice response from John Magowan, editor of the Canberra-based *Record Buyers Guide*. John wrote:

I'd just like to offer my congratulations on the expression of an attitude long overdue in this country. As someone who buys and reads nearly all available music magazines from Australia and overseas it's a pleasure to see an Australian mag that has the courage and integrity to aggressively assert its own originality.

For too long Australian rock fans have been forced to accept the appearance of identical articles in several different magazines simply because from the viewpoint of the local publishers it's easier and less

expensive to reprint an article than it is to generate the material here in Australia or to offer a financial commission to an overseas writer.

Wishing you every success for the best rock'n'roll newspaper in the country.

Gee, thanks John!

The advantages of having writers on the spot was again on display in issue 23 (April). The cover had Mental As Anything's Greedy Smith hamming it up in front of London's Buckingham Palace and the cover story was by Chris Willis, an Adelaide journalist on his rite of passage to the Old Dart. More recently, Willis was a long-time News Director at Channel 7 Sydney.

Murray Cammick from Auckland's *Rip It Up*, which was like *Roadrunner's* New Zealand cousin, also got in touch, sending a couple of issues and enclosing a feature interview done with someone over the phone (the letter I have doesn't say who) which he said we were free to use. I don't think we did, but we struck up a correspondence and he sent some great photos of New Zealand's Sweetwater Festival, held 24-26 January 1981, that we used on the cover of the first issue of 1981 (issue 32).

Some further unexpected recognition came in the form of a voting form for the industry awards in the inaugural TV WEEK Rock Music Awards. The covering letter read:

As a journalist with a recognised affinity for rock music, TV WEEK is officially inviting you to register your vote in a number of categories in the Special Awards section of the TV WEEK Rock Awards. These awards are voted for by the rock press and radio throughout Australia ...

The table below shows the categories (for calendar year 1979), my vote and the eventual winners.

Category	My vote	Winner
Best New Talent	Mental As Anything	Mi-Sex
Best Single	'The Nips Are Getting Bigger' — Mental As Anything	'Computer Games' — Mi-Sex
Best Album	<i>Screaming Targets</i> — Jo Jo Zep & the Falcons	<i>First Under The Wire</i> — Little River Band
Best Songwriter	Kevin Stanton	Terry Britten
Best Record Producer	Mark Opitz	Peter Dawkins
Best Album Cover	<i>Screaming Targets</i> — Jo Jo Zep & the Falcons	<i>Breakfast At Sweethearts</i> — Cold Chisel
Most Outstanding Achievement	The Angels	Little River Band

The new wave was obviously beginning to encroach into the established order and by the following year, all the award winners were firmly within *Roadrunner's* orbit. The 1980 awards were held at the Comedy Theatre, Melbourne and broadcast live on ABC-TV's *Countdown* on Sunday 13 April. I received an invitation in due course, bought a return train ticket and took the opportunity to convene a meeting of all the Melbourne-based *Roadrunnerites* that weekend.

The upshot of the meeting was that Adrian Ryan, who had been contributing some finely written pieces since July 1979, became Melbourne editor, Bruce Milne handed over the role of distributing the magazine to Melbourne import record shops to John Cummings while Robbie James, who had relocated to Melbourne, departed as advertising manager and was replaced by Adelaide-based Lyn Saunders.

These changes were reflected in issue 24, which was printed on 14 April for the period 18 April—1 May. An old school and Adelaide University friend, Michael Hope, who played in Adelaide ska/reggae band Jumpers, wrote the cover story on Split Enz. Eric Algra took the black and white cover photo in the alley beside the Thebarton Town Hall after an Enz concert. In an editor's note I wrote:

First of all my apologies for the delay between this issue and the last one. Perhaps we were a little hasty in going fortnightly at the time we did—but you learn by your mistakes and so in the last month we have been setting up a stronger organisational structure that WILL enable us to come out fortnightly.

Issue 25, with a cover story by Stuart Coupe on Jimmy Page's fascination with magic, came out in mid-May for the period 21 May—4 June. Err, what happened to the period 2—20 May?

Eventually I did learn from my mistake and issue 26, with Doc Neeson of The Angels on the cover, was dated July. Issue 27, with a cover photo of No Fixed Address by Eric Algra, was dated August—and there was no more talk of a fortnightly.

The No Fixed Address cover was a bold call—putting any unsigned band, let alone a young Adelaide-based Aboriginal reggae band, on the cover of an Australian music magazine was pretty much unprecedented—but I found the rationale pretty compelling. As I wrote in my intro to the cover story:

For a whole lot of reasons, political, historical and musical, No Fixed Address is probably the most important new group in this country today. The voice that they speak with has been too often suppressed in the last two hundred years. It's about time it was heard.

Over the next two years, No Fixed Address did a national tour supporting Cold Chisel, supported the Clash at its *Magnificent Seven* shows at Sydney's Capitol Theatre, supported Peter Tosh on his Australian tour, signed to Rough Diamond Records and toured the UK.

There was a rather poignant news item in that August 1980 issue. It read:

If you are a burglar and you're thinking of burgling the ROADRUNNER office—don't bother. Someone's already done it. Sometime on the weekend of 2nd August, persons unknown broke into the office and took the office stereo, a swag of albums and just about all the new release singles. As a result there are no singles reviews this issue ... if you know somebody whose record collection has tripled overnight, we'd love to hear from you.

On the business side of things, for some time I had been exasperated by poor distribution in Victoria and Queensland. Early in the year I approached Gordon & Gotch to distribute the paper in all states bar New South Wales, where Alan Rodney Wright had been doing a great job for over twelve months. They were interested, but only if they could have all Australian states. So reluctantly, I agreed, parted with Alan Rodney Wright, and G&G distributed nationally (and into New Zealand) from issue 24 (April 1980) onwards.

Figures for paid circulation, advertising revenue and production costs in 1980 survive and give a snapshot of the magazine's precarious financial position.

The average newsagency sales for the eight issues distributed by G&G in 1980 was 4309, which broke down geographically as: NSW 35 per cent, Vic/Tas 24.3 per cent, SA, 18.6 per cent, Qld 8.5 per cent, WA 5.3 per cent and New Zealand 8.2 per cent. The best selling issue was issue 26 (July) with 5075 copies and the poorest was issue 29 (October) with 3224.

With a cover price of 60 cents, the return to the magazine was nominally 50 per cent (30 cents). However once the cost of freighting the issue around the country was deducted, the effective return was about 23 and half cents. So revenue from newsagency sales averaged \$1011 per issue.

The average advertising revenue per issue for 1980 was \$2301, although this fluctuated widely, from a high of \$3405 (issue 25, June) to a low of \$770 (issue 29, October).

Average production cost per issue was \$2321. This included printing, typesetting, freight, layout and bromides (photo reproduction). This meant there was, on paper, around a thousand dollars per month to pay for everything else—

my (modest) living expenses, office rent, electricity, office supplies, advertising commission and—unfortunately, last in the food chain—contributors. In practice, slow cash flow meant that when money came in, it almost always went straight out again to pay an overdue bill. We always seemed to be chasing our tail.

The figures also demonstrate how important increasing advertising revenue was to the paper's survival. Adding a thousand newsagency sales would net the paper a paltry \$235. Adding an extra full-page ad—\$280, less 10 per cent commission, a net \$252.

There was a significant turnover in contributors in 1980. Departures included one-time co-editor and Melbourne editor Bruce Milne, whose Au-Go-Go Records became more of a serious proposition, and 2JJ presenter and Sydney correspondent Stuart Matchett who was deeply involved in Double Jay's move to the FM band and rebranding as 2JJJ. Contributions from Clinton Walker, another former Melbourne editor, petered out to the odd record review as he decided he preferred getting paid for his writing by *Rolling Stone* and *RAM*—and who could blame him? Walker collected 13 published articles (and numerous photos) from *Roadrunner* contributors to include in *Inner City Sound* (Wild & Woolley, 1982) his seminal overview of punk/post-punk music in Australia 1976-81. The book attained legendary status and after many years out of print, was republished by Verse Chorus Press of Portland, Oregon in 2005.

Ross Stapleton headed for London and a position in the Virgin Records press office where he started pushing albums, singles and interview opportunities the way of the paper. In September, Scott Matheson, who'd been an absolute stalwart in Brisbane, providing features, reviews and even distributing the magazine to record stores, wrote from Sydney to tell me his band, the Riptides, had moved to the Harbour City six weeks previously and despite all their initial gigs being blown out, 'must have picked up a street vibe pretty quickly because now we work 4 or 5 times a week and (booking agency) Nucleus are right behind us and we've made a couple of trips to Melbourne and one to Brisbane in the meantime.' He went on:

I guess it's about time I put my journalistic aspirations into abeyance and concentrated on the Riptides. Not that I ever spent much time writing, it's just that it seemed to get me into so much trouble all the time.

So I'm just enjoying being Scott Matheson who plays guitar in the Riptides in Sydney, rather than as I was in Brisbane Scott Matheson that creep who writes about his own band in *Roadrunner*. Brisbane is such a funny place. I mean I only wanted to write for *Roadrunner* because I was a fan of the

music and I thought it was about time people found out what was happening in Brisbane. I hardly think I used *Roadrunner* as a platform for the Riptides and in all honesty (though this doesn't mean much because Brisbane is such a tiny place) the Riptides were the most popular band in Brisbane in terms of the people we could pull to gigs.

Bravo Scott. And later, after he left the Riptides, Matheson picked up his pen and resumed writing from Sydney.

Elly McDonald was a prolific new Sydney contributor, with features on the Radiators, Lonely Hearts, Skyhooks, Icehouse, Jimmy and the Boys and the Dugites. David Langsam chipped in features and reviews from Melbourne and Kim Williams continued to lob good stuff over the Nullarbor from Perth. Craig N. Pearce, a hot new talent from Melbourne, sent his first reviews in October—he would become a prodigious contributor in the months ahead. And in that same issue James Manning, later publisher of the Australian *Smash Hits* and *Mediaweek* magazine, contributed a review of a benefit concert for Melbourne community radio station 3RRR at the Melbourne University Union Building. Manning saw thirteen different bands, including Mental As Anything, Australian Crawl, Paul Kelly & the Dots, Matt Finish, the Dynamic Hepnotics and MEO 245. Way to go James!

Geoffrey Gifford bowed out as art director with issue 28 in September. The cover was Flowers (who renamed themselves Icehouse shortly afterwards) and since Gifford was doing the design of their debut album cover for Regular Records, he was able to utilize the excellent shots by Grant Matthews and create a superb cover and centrespread. Art direction was taken over by Richard Turner, who shared Gifford's studio, and Kate Monger joined the layout team.

We were all working on the final issue of 1980, the December 1980—January 1981 edition, in Gifford's studio in the east end of Rundle Street, near the Exeter Hotel, when the news hit. It was mid-afternoon on Tuesday 9 December 1980. John Lennon's been shot. And killed.

We stopped what we were doing of course. And just talked. Geoffrey, Richard, Kate and myself. And after a couple of hours I went home and wrote what became the cover story of that edition. I was devastated but it helped to have something to do, an opportunity to say something. And I always felt the cover, a young Lennon in a doorway in Hamburg, with subtle tints of red and yellow, was one of *Roadrunner's* best.

Next: Part 4: Saturation Stage

Part 4: Saturation Stage (Feb 1981—Jan 1982)

Roadrunner's first issue of 1981 (issue 32) signalled some changes. First, the cover price went up from 60 cents to 80 cents. We attempted to offset this by a bumper subscription offer—two free albums (*Vinyl Virgins*, a Virgin Records Australia sampler and Tactics' *My Houdini*) plus a year's subscription (12 issues) for \$15. The offer snared 61 new subscribers, netting \$915, the magazine's best ever subscription drive.

Secondly, over the summer the magazine moved office—into a ramshackle metal shed out the back of G&S Management's office at 103 King William Street, Kent Town. It certainly wasn't much to look at from the outside, but inside it had electricity and phone lines. We got these connected, installed two phones and three desks and decorated the walls with rock posters—sweet!

And thirdly, Giles Barrow joined the magazine. Barrow's role in issue 32 was described as 'Office', which as well as basic office admin included deliveries around town and driving artwork up to the printer in Murray Bridge in his battered Holden HK Premier station wagon. Barrow also wrote under the pseudonym 'John Doe'. He had the pulse of the local Adelaide music scene and was familiar with most of the bands around town. He also wrote features and reviews—all in his inimitable sardonic style. I very much enjoyed his turn of phrase so from May 81 (issue 35) gave him his own column, 'John Doe's Ruined Scene'. The first column, titled 'Iconoclasts 4: Albatrosses: nil', began:

I've been abused in local punkzine D.N.A for calling weak-headed Bombay Rock punks " ... weak-headed Bombay Rock punks." Crime, sin. Some people just can't stand the sight of real fruit juice.

Loved your work Giles.

David Pistorius took on the role of Brisbane contributor vacated by Scott Matheson. His first contribution was a round up of 1980 in the capital of the Sunshine State—a year he described as 'rather eventful'. Pistorius, who also hosted a weekly new releases show on community radio station 4ZZZ, contributed a steady stream of live and record reviews through the year. He also sent a feature piece on the Go-Betweens, catching Robert, Grant and Lindy preparing to record their debut album, for the April issue.

The rest of the writing line-up seemed quite settled: Stuart Coupe in Sydney; Adrian Ryan in Melbourne; Kim Williams in Perth; Keith Shadwick and Chris Willis in London, soon to be joined by my landlord and cobbler Larry Buttrose; and a clutch of reviewers including Craig N. Pearce, David Langsam, Goose, Tyrone Flex (a.k.a. Peter Jolly from Nuvo Bloc), Span Hanna and Adrian Miller.

On the production side, Clive Dorman folded his Neighbourhood Typesetting venture and typesetting transferred to SA Type Centre. Design and layout continued to be handled by Richard Turner and Kate Monger of AND Productions who moved across Rundle Street to a much larger, airier first floor studio at number 255 above Ruby's Café—a space they shared with Geoffrey Gifford's Modern Art.

On 20 February, Keri Phillips wrote from New York offering to provide articles and regular reports on the NY scene. I had met Keri a couple of times in Sydney when she was working as an announcer at 2JJ/JJJ-FM and had published her interview with English rock journalists Tony Parsons and Julie Burchill of the *New Musical Express* in issue 16 (August 1979). She told me that JJJ had decided to severely limit 'spoken word' interviews and she was looking at ways of using the interviews she was doing. I accepted with alacrity.

The March issue (issue 33) had a striking cover of Adam Ant, a manipulated television image of the new King of the Wild Frontier. April had an Eric Algra photo of Cold Chisel's Jimmy Barnes and Don Walker, a black and white live shot with red and yellow spot colour treatment. The cover story was an interview I did with Don Walker in Paradise Studios, Woolloomooloo a few days after the notorious *TV Week* Rock Awards when Chisel trashed the stage at Sydney's Regent Theatre.

The Reels decorated the cover in May (issue 35), with a typically dense and challenging cover story from Craig N. Pearce. Pearce also had the lead album review, the Birthday Party's *Prayers On Fire*. The issue included the first of many top quality 'New York, New York' columns from Keri Phillips, who also submitted a feature on former Ronette Ronnie Spector.

Larry Buttrose had fetched up in London at the turn of the year, from where he had been contributing the odd piece—on the Brixton riots, surf punks the Barracudas, ANZAC Day with the Australian Labor Party. Buttrose had been right on to CBS Records in London about getting a Bruce Springsteen interview for *Roadrunner* when the Boss's *The River* tour hit Europe in the northern spring. The tour was a big deal—Springsteen's first overseas performances since the four European dates he played in 1975 following the release of *Born To Run*. But Buttrose had hit a brick wall in the person of CBS London staffer Kit Buckler. 'Now this boyo says not only will I probably not get an interview,' Buttrose wrote to me, 'but it's no-go even on some fucking tickets.' Buttrose implored me to apply some back-channel pressure via CBS Australia.

The River tour was supposed to hit the UK in mid-March for 12 dates, but the first leg of the tour—with Springsteen pumping out four-hour shows night after night

across the US and Canada from October 1980 to March 1981 (a punishing 72 shows in five months)—had left the Boss exhausted and the UK shows were rescheduled for May, at the end of the European tour.

Meanwhile, there were persistent rumours that Springsteen would tour Australia in 1981. The catch was that the Boss wanted a million bucks. And at that stage, he wasn't a big record seller down under—or anywhere apart from the States. One night in Sydney, at a Charlie Daniels party-cum-record presentation, Stuart Coupe was chatting to new CBS Australia head honcho Paul Russell. 'We think we need someone to go to Europe and tell people in Australia what Springsteen is like live,' Russell told Coupe. 'Do you think you could find the time to go over?'

'Are you kidding?' lifelong-Boss-fan Coupe responded. 'I would walk over broken glass!'

So Coupe called me. Did I want the story? Absolutely. He had tickets for three of the London shows in March. Which then were blown out. So it was two shows in Paris instead, 18 and 19 April. And an interview after the second show. Coupe went to New York for three weeks, then onto Paris, flew home, delivered a ten thousand-word magnum opus and Springsteen graced the cover in June 1981 (issue 36). We were quite up front about the largesse. The sub-head ran: 'Stuart Coupe finds the key to the universe in a trip to Paris paid for by CBS.'

Oh, and Buttrose eventually wangled tickets for one of the May shows in London and sent a glowing full page live review for the July issue.

Scott Matheson had returned to *Roadrunner's* pages in May with a live review of Radio Birdman re-treads New Race (supported by The Church) at the Family Inn, Rydalmere, deep in the Sydney suburbs. His interview with INXS lead singer Michael Hutchence in August (issue 37), with a live shot of Hutchence by Eric Algra on the cover, was the first cover story INXS had ever had. The first of many. 'A Star Is Born' was the story's headline, and it was true.

Another new face graced the cover in September—Jeremy Oxley of the Sunnyboys. Stuart Coupe had been singing their praises as a live act for some time and with a debut album produced by rock legend Lobby Loyde in the shops, Coupe's cover story for issue 38 lauded them as a blast of fresh faced (power)pop.

* * *

From issue 33 in March 1981, *Roadrunner* had grown in terms of pages. In 1979, every issue of the magazine had been 24 pages, except the 48 page December/January double issue.

In 1980, most issues were 24 pages, but nos 25, 26 and 31 (Dec/Jan) featured 32 pages. Issue 29 (October) was only 20.

In 1981, issues 33 to 37 (March to July) were all 32 pages. Issue 38 (August) dropped back to 24 pages, but then issue 39 (September) was 40 pages, issue 40 (October) was 48, issue 41 (November) was 40 and the end of year double issue was the biggest ever, at 64 pages.

What happened? Lyn Saunders, the magazine's advertising manager, persuaded me that he could sell more advertising and organise more promotion if he was based in Sydney. It made a lot of sense. Almost all the major record companies were based there and more and more, they were the ones booking ads. I did have my reservations. Lyn Saunders—who was tragically murdered outside Mildura while hitch-hiking from Sydney to Adelaide in 1987—was a hustler, possessed of boundless enthusiasm, but I felt he often lacked judgement. Working closely with him in Adelaide was one thing. I felt I could channel his enthusiasm. Letting him off the leash and loose in Sydney was another matter. It was a risk, but one I decided to take.

Why? The magazine was still in a precarious financial position. Newsagency sales for the first seven issues of 1981 averaged 4230—stuck stubbornly close to the 1980 average of 4309. Ad sales were also flat. There wasn't enough in the bank to pay G&S Management for their accountancy services in August so we moved out of the shed at the back of their office. We remained on friendly terms—it was just business—and moved into a one bedroom terrace round the corner at 2 College Road, Kent Town that they managed on behalf of the owners—The Angels. Giles Barrow moved into the bedroom. And G&S Management took the debt matter to court and eventually (about a year later) won a certificate of judgement for the amount of \$847.85. Whatever that meant.

An abiding memory from 2 College Road was doing the singles reviews. This was a fun job I'd usually leave to the last possible moment—mainly because there was so much else to do, but also to make the column as current as possible. Once business hours were over, I'd toddle up to the Maid and Magpie Hotel at the corner of Magill and Payneham Roads and buy a bottle of Stones Green Ginger Wine. Can't remember why and I never drank it at any other time—go figure! I'd come back to the office, set my typewriter up on the kitchen table, sort the singles into some sort of order, pop the first one onto the turntable, drop the

needle, have a sip of the GGW and type the first thing that came into my head. Repeat 25 times and hey presto! —an empty bottle and a singles column.

Lyn Saunders hit Sydney running and quickly tied up a deal with Polygram Records that saw newly-signed Polygram band the Eighty-Eights on the cover of the full-colour 40-page September issue (issue 39). There was also a 'poster' of the Jam in the middle of the magazine. A slight problem—the 'poster' was a blown-up blurry black and white photo that art director Richard Turner did his best to jazz up with some semi-tone treatments. A bigger problem. Who the hell were the Eighty-Eights and what were they doing on the cover of *Roadrunner*? And who was 'Ronnie Raver', the author of the rather lame Q&A with the band? There was more than a whiff of advertorial and 'payola' around the whole scheme. The rest of the issue was great—a feature on the Ramones from Keri Phillips in New York, a double page spread on Malcolm McLaren from Chris Salewicz in London, a double page on John Dowler from Adrian Ryan in Melbourne and more. But as Michael Samaras from West Wollongong put it in a letter we printed in the next issue:

I noted with some degree of amusement the 88's on *Roadrunner's* September cover and the featuring "interview" and full-page picture. (Incidentally, who is Ronnie Raver? The 88's manager?)

Further amusement was obtained when I read that the 88's go "through" Polygram and then examined the delightful 4 page Jam Poster with "Polygram" tucked oh, so coyly in the corner.

My amusement soon turned to disgust when I re-read the *Roadrunner* No. 3 (June 1978) Editorial which referred to, in part, the Editors (Stuart Coupe and Donald Robertson) fascinating "experience of dealing with the people who's (sic) job it is to sell the product ... "Look I'll take out a full page ad each issue for 12 months if (so and so) are on the cover".

O.K., so maybe June 1978 is a long time ago and maybe the Polygram connection between the Jam overkill and the 88's overkill is a simple, if frightening, coincidence; and maybe the Stuart Coupe—CBS—Bruce Springsteen connection can be overlooked.

But maybe not.

Fair cop, guv.

The same promotional package was sold to EMI for issue 40—when the cover price increased to \$1. Recently arrived Kiwi band The Tigers were on the cover and there were black and white posters of Ward 13 (really?) and Australian

Crawl inside—but that was it. I killed the idea. The end didn't justify the means. It had damaged the magazine's credibility—not irreparably I hoped.

It seemed all too much for Stuart Coupe who handed over the baton of Sydney editor to Scott Matheson. Scott only lasted a few issues before Giles Barrow moved up from Adelaide over the summer to take the chair.

The final two issues of the year both sported full colour covers—but chosen on editorial merit, not as part of a paid promotion. Iva Davies of Icehouse and Jim Kerr of Simple Minds chatting in a London street ahead of their joint Australian tour featured in November (issue 41) and Doc Neeson of The Angels appeared on the December/January double issue (issue 42).

In Sydney Lyn Saunders switched his efforts to promotion, organising a TV ad to run late night on Channel 7 and radio ads to run on 2MMM. That end of year issue was the largest, at 64 pages, and highest selling (5853) edition of the magazine to date. The sales in New South Wales almost doubled— from 1665 in November to 3169.

The future looked rosy—but there were clouds on the horizon.

Next: Part 5: Declining Stage

Part 5: Declining Stage (Feb 1982—Jan 1983)

The concerted push to increase sales and advertising revenue following the establishment of a *Roadrunner* Sydney office in mid-1981 was only a qualified success. While ad sales saw a marked increase and newsagency sales nudged six thousand for the first time (with the end of year issue), most of the extra revenue was offset by the higher production costs of going full colour, printing extra pages, plus extra typesetting and layout costs. Factoring in the costs of running a Sydney office and supporting two Sydney staff meant the magazine entered 1982 still very much as a leaky boat.

Jodi Hoffman joined the Adelaide office. An enterprising young Aboriginal woman from Elizabeth, she organised a placement with the magazine through the Commonwealth Employment Service, which paid her a weekly allowance. She was a budding photographer and I was grateful for her cheery nature and staunch belief and support in the difficult months to come.

Content-wise, the first issue for 1982 (issue 43) was a corker. With a tabloid-style black and white cover screaming 'Clash Shock!' the 32 pages contained a transcript of the Clash Sydney press conference, a full report on the Mushroom Records Evolution concert, a massive paean to the Birthday Party by Craig N. Pearce, two pages on the Little Heroes by Jenny Eather, a double page retrospective on Creedence Clearwater Revival by Adrian Ryan, glimpses of the coming British new romantics (Soft Cell, Ultravox and Altered Images) plus a clutch of live and album reviews.

The Clash were magnificent on their one and only Australian tour, but in many ways it was the end of something. Change was in the air. And putting Kim Wilde on the cover in March (issue 44) signalled an embrace of that change. Chris Salewicz in London wrote the cover story, 'Portrait of a Pop Princess,' and although the rest of the issue contained the typical new wave faves—DEVO, Police, Teardrop Explodes, Laughing Clowns, a double page live Clash review and a long Cold Chisel interview with Don Walker—it was becoming clear that from the *Roadrunner* viewing platform the new wave was approaching the beach and starting to break.

Issue 45 (April) reinforced this impression. Synth-rockers the Human League were on the cover, Craig N. Pearce got to grips with David Sylvain of fashion plates Japan and there were features on two of the hits of the 1982 Adelaide Festival—feminist author Fay Weldon and 'new wave' comedy troupe, the Comic Strip. The Comic Strip, from London, comprised Alexei Sayle, 20th Century Coyote (Rik Mayall and Ade Edmondson), the Outer Limits (Nigel Planer and Peter Richardson) and (Dawn) French and (Jennifer) Saunders. Fast, fresh and

furious—and very funny—who could have predicted members of the group would go on to create such classics as *The Young Ones*, *Absolutely Fabulous* and *The Vicar of Dibley*?

Tiring of chasing their unpaid management fee, G&S Management gave us notice to quit the office at 2 College Road, Kent Town and I found alternative office space five minutes down the road at 92 Rundle Street. There Jodi Hoffman managed the phones on days when I was feeling the weight of the world on my shoulders and struggled to get out of bed and make it into the office.

The focus on non-musical content continued in May (issue 46). Adrian Ryan sat down with film director Gillian Armstrong in Melbourne to discuss her musical *Starstruck*, while Jenny Eather described an on-air encounter on Adelaide community radio station 5MMM with Lindsay Kemp, the outrageous English dancer, mime artist, choreographer and teacher. The Church was the cover story and I cut up an interview Giles Barrow did with lead singer Steve Kilbey in Sydney and interspersed quotes from Richard Neville's *Playpower*, Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*, Jeff Nuttall's *Bomb Culture* and other 'alternative' sources. Well, it seemed a good idea at the time.

The financial situation was deteriorating rapidly however and in Sydney Lyn Saunders started a little side project called *Roadrunner's Other Magazine*, a free gig listing with ads from venues and musical hire outfits. The only problem was he didn't tell me. When I saw the first issue, I hit the roof.

It was a cheap, shoddy product that reflected badly on the *Roadrunner* name. The magazine's reputation had already taken a hit with the 'paid covers' scandal of the previous year. This was adding fuel to the fire. I also discovered Saunders had opened a bank account in *Roadrunner's* name and was depositing ad money from the new magazine into it. It was all too much. I told Lyn to stop producing the magazine under *Roadrunner's* name, close the bank account and seek alternative employment. Which, to give him his due, he did.

Scrabbling for ads, copy and enough money to pay the printer, we missed all the deadlines for June 1982 so issue 47 came out in July. Geoffrey Gifford offered to design it, on the condition that I give him full control. Normally I would mark up the copy, selecting typefaces and sizes for headlines and body copy and Richard Turner, Kate Monger and myself would compose each page; then Turner would produce a bromide of any photos to fit the available space. I was more than happy to give Gifford his head and he produced probably the most coherent issue ever in terms of design. The main story was again one without a music focus—a lengthy, illustrated On-The-Road-in-America-in-the-80s piece by Larry Buttrose.

And, so I thought, that was it. For a couple of years I had been doing two on-air shows at community radio station 5MMM and when my friend Terry Bradford resigned as programme director in July, I applied for the job and was successful. A month later, on 27 August (before I'd actually started), I wrote to 5MMM tendering my resignation. I said:

When I accepted the position as Programme Director the position of ROADRUNNER seemed hopeless, and I had resigned myself to the fact that the business would have to be wound up and myself going bankrupt in the process. There is now the possibility that that will not happen. It is a possibility that I feel bound to pursue.

What happened? Word had reached Michelle Higgins, National Promotions Manager at Mushroom Records, that the magazine was in financial trouble. Higgins had been a long-term supporter of the magazine (since her time as Promotions Manager at Festival Records in Adelaide) and mentioned *Roadrunner's* problems to Lobby Loyde.

Lobby Loyde, a legendary Australian guitarist, songwriter and producer, had set up a management company in Sydney called SCAM (Suss City Artist Management) whose roster included the Sunnyboys, Machinations and Ian Rilen's Sardine V. I didn't know Loyde, but I had met and was impressed by his offsider, Sally Collins, who had brought the Sunnyboys to Adelaide on their first SA tour the year before.

Out of the blue, I got a call from Higgins. 'Give Lobby Loyde a call,' she said. 'He wants to make you an offer.'

The conversation went something like this:

'Lobby? This is Donald Robertson from *Roadrunner*.'

'Mate, Michelle Higgins tells me you're in a bit of financial bother.'

'Yes, you could say that.'

'Well mate, I don't want to see *Roadrunner* go under. It's a great little paper.'

'Err, thanks Lobby.'

'Why don't you move to Sydney? There's space for you here at SCAM. And I've got a financial backer who's willing to invest in the magazine.'

I was on the bus two weeks later.

* * *

Scott Matheson kindly offered me a couch in the terrace he shared with his partner Annette and Riptides manager Paul Nearhos in Reservoir Street, Surry Hills. It was a short walk down Riley Street to Yurong Street, East Sydney and SCAM HQ.

Lobby Loyde welcomed me with open arms, showed me the large vacant basement where *Roadrunner* could set up operations and introduced me to his backer, Michael Heffernan, co-owner of Her Majesty's Theatre in the Haymarket and principal of Michael Heffernan Investments. Loyde had apprised Heffernan of the magazine's situation and he agreed to cover my expenses while I set about establishing *Roadrunner* in Sydney and putting the next issue together.

I got in contact with Michael Zerman, who had been so helpful in evolving *Roadrunner* to a national set up four years previously when he was at Adelaide's Media Resource Centre. Zerman, now based in Bondi, was happy to offer his insights into the Sydney print production environment—printers, typesetters and bromide makers.

There were still bills outstanding in Adelaide—by far the largest to the printer, Bridge Press. I wrote to them and the other creditors, advising them of the situation and assuring them of my best endeavours to pay off the debts from future magazine revenues.

I contacted contributors seeking ideas for stories—Adrian Ryan in Melbourne, Giles Barrow back in Adelaide (where shortly he and his guitar would join legendary Adelaide punksters Exploding White Mice), Brian Johnstone in Darwin, Keri Phillips in New York as well as Sydney contributors, Andrew McMillan, John Elder, Arch Brown, Linda Campbell, Patricia Sheahan, Edwina Shannon and Peter Tesla. I made contact with record companies, started collecting records for review and did a few interviews myself—Tom Verlaine of Television, Kevin Rowlands from Dexy's Midnight Runners, Joe Camilleri from Jo Jo Zep and Jim Kerr from Simple Minds among others.

Andrew Savage, formerly of *RAM*, came on board as advertising manager and Simon Penny joined as art director. Penny was a member of Quietly Confident, an alternative cabaret outfit I had been managing in Adelaide since early in the year. Larry Buttrose was also in the group. They had decided to give Sydney a go and all moved up shortly after me. So as well as setting up the magazine, I was seeking gigs for them at venues like Kinselas and Stranded. Speedboat, an Adelaide band I rated highly, also sought a helping hand in the Harbour City and I persuaded Sally Collins at SCAM to find them some engagements and sang their

praises to Virginia Moncrieff at JJJ, Greg Taylor at *RAM* and other taste makers round town.

Jodi Hoffman moved up from Adelaide to resume running the *Roadrunner* office (and taking photos) and by the start of November things were falling into place for the next phase of the magazine.

Cognisant of the trend in music (New Romantics) and music magazines (*The Face* and *Smash Hits*) in the UK, I had decided the way forward was a full colour glossy format and a broadening of the content. Still predominantly a music magazine, the idea was to branch out into travel, sport, film and TV and other cultural pursuits.

On the production front, I did the rounds and settled on Authotype as the typesetter, Lithomaster for bromides, Offset Alpine as the printer and Network Distribution (part of Kerry Packer's Consolidated Press group) as the distributor. The print run for the first issue in the new format was 25,000 and cover price was \$1.80.

I penned a press release for newsagents.

We've been away, but now we're back!! ROADRUNNER, for many years Australia's most respected music orientated publication will return to the newsagents on 14th December after a hibernation of four months. During that period, the centre of operations has moved from Adelaide to Sydney and a whole new production and distribution structure has been arranged.

The new ROADRUNNER will be half tabloid in size, printed on glossy paper, ensuring better print and photo reproduction and will have a full colour cover as well as colour inside.

The magazine's editorial base has broadened and as well as contemporary music, there will be features in the areas of travel, sport, current affairs, film, video, musical instruments and in fact anything that falls within the ambit of popular culture.

Andrew Savage got a good hearing at the record companies and final ad bookings totalled \$5350. Contra deals were organised with FM stations 2MMM Sydney, 3EON Melbourne and SA-FM Adelaide for full colour ads in exchange for radio spots.

With Kevin Rowlands in full gypsy-clad glory on the cover (Dexy's 'Come On Eileen' had been sitting at number one nationally all through November and

December), the issue also had articles on musical acts the Reels, Tim Finn, Simple Minds and emerging African music superstar King Sunny Ade. Features on Senegambia, tennis and the Australian alternative cabaret scene demonstrated the broadening of the content base and all in all, I felt it was a pretty impressive package.

Unforeseen production delays meant the issue didn't hit the newsstands until 7 January. Did this have an impact? Who knows? ... But when Andrew Savage starting doing the rounds later in January for ads for the February issue, he had no luck. None at all.

The general economic outlook perhaps played a part. The National Archives offers [this summary](#).

Unemployment had risen from 5.6 per cent in May 1981 to 6.6 per cent in May 1982 and would reach 10.3 per cent by May 1983. Many of Australia's problems flowed from the prolonged international recession, but they were exacerbated by a major wages breakout in the second half of 1981 and an inflation rate of over 10 per cent. Interest rates were at very high levels, partly because of strong public sector borrowing, and consumer spending and business investment had stalled.

Whatever the reasons, the press release I penned—for the media this time—once the issue was out, while somewhat poignant in retrospect, does give some idea of what the whole thing had been about.

The next issue of ROADRUNNER marks two important milestones for the magazine. Firstly it is the fiftieth issue (*I couldn't count. In fact it was the 49th*) and secondly, it marks the paper's fifth birthday. The first ROADRUNNER rolled off the presses in February 1978.

Although certainly older and hopefully wiser, the original principles that myself and the other founding editors espoused in those early days are still intact, and I'm sure those principles are one of the major factors behind ROADRUNNER's continuing existence.

What are those principles? Firstly to discover and expose original and exciting music, but particularly Australian music. I would like to think that by searching out and writing about bands who are perhaps just starting their career and who seem to be trying something new, ROADRUNNER has in a significant way contributed to the healthy expansion of the music scene in Australia over the past five years.

Secondly, within that promotion of new Australian music ROADRUNNER has always tried to give a truly national overview of music in this country. The number of top Australian bands who had their origins outside the urban sprawls of Sydney and Melbourne is too long to list here and ROADRUNNER from its beginnings, endeavoured to report what is happening in every State, not just the two most populous ones. With the new format, this policy will remain and with a network of correspondents across the country will be even more informative and of heightened relevance to every reader, wherever they live.

Thirdly, ROADRUNNER is an independent publication. We have a very small staff, don't make much money, have to stave off the creditors, work long hours. So why keep doing it? I think the answer is quite simply, the music. Music has become the dominant cultural expression of our times—it's global and crosses international borders and hurdles language barriers with ease.

Being independent means having the flexibility to say what you want. ROADRUNNER has never been a party to the practice of reprinting stories holus bolus from overseas magazines either. We report news from the source. All stories are original.

The outward form, the physical representation of these principles has recently changed, from a tabloid newsprint paper to a half tabloid full colour glossy magazine. This is obviously more expensive, but it creates a more durable, vibrant, colourful and exciting magazine, a magazine that looks as good as it has always read. Already after one edition, there has been interest expressed by American magazine distributors to have the magazine sold in the USA. If you want to know what is happening in Australian and overseas music then ROADRUNNER is the mag for 1983.

The first issue in the new format also expanded slightly from the paper's traditional solid music editorial base. Articles on tennis star Ivan Lendl, music from the West Coast of Africa, coverage of style, films and musical instruments as well as a piece of fiction ...

The press release peters out at that point. It was never sent.

And that was it. Michael Heffernan picked up the print and production bills for that final issue, but made it clear that without ongoing ad revenue he was withdrawing his backing. Unfortunately the contributors were never paid.

I still have the page plan for the February 1983 issue that never was. There were to be four page features on the Divinyls (by Andrew McMillan), the Narara

Festival (by Patricia Sheahan) and Cold Chisel's Don Walker (by myself). Also to be featured were Culture Club, Hunters and Collectors, Models and Pel Mel. A piece on video clips by Edwina Shannon, something on cricket, plus articles on fashion and film were also planned. And there were fourteen blank pages for ads.

The debt to Bridge Press was \$12,273.71. I had no means of paying it, or the couple of grand the magazine owed to a handful of typesetters in Adelaide. Considering Bridge Press had printed forty-two issues of the magazine, I rationalised they were almost certainly still ahead on the deal. They never came looking for me anyway.

In the meantime, I had an alternative cabaret act to manage. Quietly Confident played the Narara Festival north of Sydney over the Australia Day long weekend and I organised a national tour for early March. They recorded an independent single, 'Republic of Australia' and made a film clip for it that got a couple of airings on Basia Bonkowski's *Rock Around the World* on SBS-TV.

I also pitched the *Rockzine* music news show I had been doing at Adelaide community radio station 5MMM to commercial station 2MMM and they hooked me up with David White for a three hour slot on Sunday nights.

Then out of the blue I got a call from Stuart Coupe. 'Hey Donald. The ABC is looking for a new full-time editor for *Countdown Magazine*. It has to be someone with credibility. They asked me, but I turned them down. Too busy with *Dolly*. You interested?' Was I? Yes, please. And so began phase 2 of my career as a magazine editor.

Within 12 months *Countdown Magazine*, with a very similar format to the final *Roadrunner* (albeit aimed at a younger demographic), was selling more than a hundred thousand copies a month. Built around the ad that money couldn't buy—the monthly promo on the *Countdown* TV show by host Molly Meldrum—the magazine rode the New Romantic wave of the mid-eighties (Duran Duran, Culture Club, Spandau Ballet, Wham!) while maintaining a strong focus on home-grown talent (INXS, Models, Mental As Anything, I'm Talking, Pseudo Echo, Kids In The Kitchen, Do-Re-Mi, Hoodoo Gurus et al).

The crucial input of English art director Ed Gillan (fresh from the London graphic design movement that had also produced Neville Brody, designer at *The Face*)—realised the vision I had had of a magazine that looked as good as it read—but, as they say, that's a whole other story.