

NEWSPAPERS

Swinging Lady

Britain's newspapers are in the doldrums—victims of a national economic squeeze that has cut severely into their ad revenues. Yet the London Times, once considered the most vulnerable of them all, has snapped out of the crisis in a way that has startled Fleet Street. Under its new owner, Lord Thomson, the stodgy "Grey Lady of Printing House Square" has turned into a stylish swinger. In the seven months since the Thomson team took over, her circulation has jumped to 350,000—a 30% increase. "The British have lost an institution," says Columnist Peter Jenkins of the rival Guardian, "but gained a newspaper."

The Times has become a "newspaper" by broadening its appeal. No longer does it smugly boast "Top people read the Times." They still do, but now the paper lures younger and even non-U readers. Billboards and subway posters picturing an overalled mechanic proclaim: "It took Bill Sawyer twelve days

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REES-MOGG & HAMILTON



JAGGER

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to discover that he was a Times reader. How long will it take you?" Last week the Times printed the names of 807 honors graduates of 34 redbrick provincial universities—the first time the paper has listed graduates from any schools other than Oxford and Cambridge.

Bylines & Task Forces. The Times used to be filled with long, solemn dispatches from the Sudan or Singapore that were dutifully read by vicars, ex-sahibs and bowler-hatted commuters to The City. Now it prints shorter, snappier pieces on crime, Carnaby Street and California hippies. Reporters are no longer anonymous; they have bylines and are told to pursue the news rather than just ponder it. Editor in Chief Denis Hamilton has set up a five-man task force that stands ready to cover any breaking story at home or abroad. The old Times was never in such a rush.

To attract more businessmen, Hamilton has spun off all financial news into a separate section with its own editorials, gossip column and a recently doubled staff of 50. Woman's Editor Susanne Puddefoot, 32, has disdainfully left the home behind and plunged into the thick of London affairs. "The Times has had an excessively masculine image," she says, "at a time when the differentiation between masculine and feminine is not so strong." To right the balance, she has run lively stories on everything from the troubles of immigrant women to a London matron falsely accused of shoplifting.

Despite all the changes, much of the material of the old Times still appears in the new. The paper continues to carry detailed parliamentary news, lawyer-written law reports and the Court Circular, which keeps track of British royalty. Top people can still discover what other top people are up to in columns of high-toned chitchat. Though demoted from the front page to the back, the personal-ad column still

evokes an engagingly eccentric England. Butlers and nannies proffer their respectable services, bird lovers and wine connoisseurs seek out rarities.

Enter Errors. In making the transition to a more with-it paper, the Times has sacrificed some of its traditional qualities. It is no longer free of typos or factual errors. When a correspondent authoritatively reported that Macaulay "told us a great deal about 19th century parliamentarianism in his studies of medieval England," learned readers replied that Macaulay never wrote about medieval England. Equally slapdash, a columnist recently described Stokely Carmichael as "one of the most influential men in America."

To connoisseurs of the Times, however, the single most significant change is in the leader (editorial) page. Incisively written editorials come to an unmistakable point. Editor William Rees-Mogg, a 38-year-old Oxonian with a habit of self-deprecation, writes most of them himself. He showed no hesitation in putting the once empire-minded paper solidly behind the British withdrawal east of Suez. "You can't police an empire you've no longer got," he says. He aroused the ire of the acid-heads when he argued that the pleasures of drug taking are not worth the perils. Though the Times risked being charged with contempt of court, it was the first British daily to condemn the harsh three-month prison sentence given Pop Singer Mick Jagger for illegal possession of pep pills. Last week the Court of Appeal reduced Jagger's sentence to a year on probation. "This was a magnificent case of the editor of the Times acting as the leader of British journalism," says Peregrine Worsthorne, assistant editor of the Sunday Telegraph. "Earlier editors would have been too establishment-minded to rally to the defense of a pop star involved in a drug case."