

CHEERS!
The Town
players
act up to
the
camera
on the
special
train
bringing
them
back
from
Rochdale
at the
end of a
roller-
coaster
1969-
1970
season.
In the
picture
are, left-
to-right:
Chris
Nicholl,
Mike
Keen,
John
Collins,
Viv
Busby,
Malcolm
Macdonald
and John
Rovers.



ps, cowns and then up!

AFTER the disappointment of the Town's narrow failure to win promotion to the old Division Two in 1969, Luton's supporters could have been forgiven for wondering whether the club's ambitions had folded when top scorer and blue-eyed boy Bruce Riech was sold to Aston Villa for a record £100,000 during the summer.

As manager Alec Stock bided his time before rushing out to spend the Riech money, the only signing of note was a young, little-known full back from Fulham.

Malcolm Macdonald cost £18,500 and soon found himself thrust up front after a succession of injuries to recognise forwards during the pre-season games and was seen to have some talent that encouraged Stock to continue with the experiment into the season proper.

The Hatters got off to a nice start, beating Barrow at home 3-0 before Macdonald scored his first goal for the club in the 1-0 win at Bourne mouth the following week.

The execution of that goal was to become a Macdonald speciality over the next two years - facing clear of the defence to be first to a through ball, drifting round the goalkeeper before placing the ball into the net.



**Report by
LUTON
TOWN club
historian
ROGER
WASH**
Roger Wash is always on the look-out for Hatters memorabilia including programmes, press cuttings, tickets and pictures. If you have anything of interest please contact him on 01538 602551. Good prices are paid.

A 3-2 home win over Orient followed, with the Town being 2-0 down at one stage, before Halifax escaped with a point in a 1-1 draw at a rain-soaked Kenilworth Road. Stock was impressed with the Halifax centre-half Chris Nicholl so immediately tabled a £55,000 bid for him.

"He will play for England one day," was Halifax manager Alan Ball's brave promise. Right sentiment, wrong country, as Nicholl went on to star for Northern Ireland.

Stock also felt that Macdonald needed someone alongside him who showed stealth and guile and so paid Charlton £25,000 for the clever Matt Ties.

Supporters, who had berated the manager for not spending money could now appreciate why he had kept his powder dry as both Ties and Nicholl made their Luton

debut in the 2-0 win at Gillingham on August 30, 1969 to be followed up with a 4-0 home victory over Bristol Rovers as the Town strode away at the top of the division.

The Hatters, in fact, went in the first 13 matches unbeaten before losing 2-0 at Doncaster in front of a crowd of 17,380 before bouncing back in style with a fine 2-1 win at Brighton, who were seen as major rivals, the following week.

A string of draws then followed before Rochdale were seen off 2-0 at Kenilworth Road.

Rochdale were the surprise team of the season and the game was a fitting choice for the club's home debut on Match of the Day.

After the 5-0 home thrashing of Bradford City on December 18 fortunes inexplicably took a dive with four straight defeats.

Firstly, on Boxing Day the Town went down 1-0 at Orient on a squiggle of a pitch followed up by a 2-1 defeat at the hands of lowly Gillingham which put an end to the undefeated home record that had stretched back 18 months.

Worse was to follow with a 5-1 thrashing at Shrewsbury and then an embarrassing 2-0 home defeat by Plymouth in front of the TV cameras again.

The Town had now dropped out of the promotion places and it was a case of clawing their way back, with pride being restored to a degree with a 3-1 win at Bury in a

game where mercurial winger Graham French could do no wrong.

The win, however, was a fairly isolated occasion as the Town struggled to put together another sequence similar to that which had carried them to the top of the table earlier in the season.

Following a series of draws and defeats the Hatters had to travel to Reading for a genuine "four pointers" on March 11, 1970.

A crowd of 18,785 turned up to be soaked to the skin, but enthralled by a highly entertaining game set by Macdonald's last-minute goal.

The Town had lived to fight another day but spoiled the good work by drawing their next two games and then losing at relegation-threatened Tranmere where the home team celebrated their 3-2 win as if they had clinched the championship.

With five games to go it looked odds on that Orient and Bristol Rovers would secure the promotion places with Fulham perhaps the next best placed.

The 1-0 win at Fulham, with Macdonald the scorer against his old club in front of a crowd of 18,867, enabled the Town to leapfrog their closest rivals.

Walsall were seen off 3-0 at Kenilworth Road in a game staged on the evening of the FA Cup final and then a solitary strike from Viv Busby settled a tense encounter with ace-spoilers Southampton which, with the news that Bristol Rovers

had stumbled at home, meant that one point from the remaining two games would clinch an unlikely promotion for the Town.

Many supporters travelled to Mansfield on April 20, 1970 to witness a poor excuse for a game of football, to put it mildly, but the 0-0 result was still important. The Hatters were back in Division Two.

The final game, at Rochdale, would probably have been called off had there been anything riding on the result due to the state of the pitch, but the Town players waded through the ankle deep mud to record a 2-1 win and with it the 10th away victory of the campaign.

All then ended well with the Town taking full advantage of slip ups by their fellow promotion chasers, but putting their long-suffering supporters through all the emotions during a turbulent nine months.



OUR recent article about Luton Town sparked a response from Duncan Bedford, of Watford Road, Doncaster. He sent in this super 1958-10 cigarette card of Luton player RM Hawkes.

NEXT WEEK: Another fascinating look back on the Hatters...only in the sporty News-Gazette