One team is beauty and the beast!

JIM RYAN took double pleasure from the performance and result at Villa Park.

It was not only the Town's best away showing all season, but also justified his decision to make no changes after an abysmal display a few days previously, at Manchester.

"If Maine Road was our worst performance this was our best in terms of consistency throughout the 90 minutes and working to the plan we had to win," said the manager.

The "really good defensive work" was a welcome feature after the Maine Road blunders, and so was the way the Town were first to the ball almost every time at Villa Park.

REMEMBER

"Perhaps Maine Road was a reminder to us — it woke us up a bit and helped us against Villa," said Mr. Ryan. "People talked about needing to wipe out the memories of the Manchester game.

"But I felt that we should remember our mistakes there, and make sure they were not repeated."

But the boss admitted that things had not gone entirely to plan in the first 20 minutes, when Villa twice had men in one-to-one situations against Alec Chamberlain. He made important saves from Gary Penrice and David Platt.

Manager's viewpoint

SPECTACULAR

"Fans who have watched us home and away must have been impressed by Alec's form," said the boss. "He has been outstanding this season."

Everyone shared the joy of Mark Pembridge, whose first league goal was one to remember.

"It really was spectacular, a lovely way to score your first in the league.

"I am pleased for him because he has looked like scoring in two or three other matches, and it was nice that when he did score it was an absolute peach."

DRAMATIC

The manager was unable to explain completely the dramatic change in form of the whole team — "It was a bit like beauty and the beast from one game to the other, a complete contrast."

Chamberlain's save from David Platt's spot kick was as good as scoring at the other end for the effect it had on the confidence of the two teams.

● WELL SAVED: Alec Chamberlain blocks David Platt's penalty.

MANCHESTER MISERY WIPED OUT

Reports by Brian Swain. Pictures by Josh Levy.

THE Luton Town team that looked a relegation certainty at Maine Road put the record straight in unbelievable style at Villa Park on Saturday.

The transformation was astonishing. At Manchester manager Jim Ryan had felt sorry and shamefaced for the fans who suffered a display that made you want to pretend you came from Watford.

At Villa Park the same 11 men, some of them lucky to stay in the side, were the glorious opposite of the Maine Road shambles.

And to add to the travelling fans' pleasure we were treated to an excellent match, and a victory which was well deserved.

DOUBLE

It was also important, against a side which was one point and one place below the Town.

It ended a run of nine away games without a win.

It was the Town's first double of the season, and Villa's first home defeat. And the customers had full value for money — there was a corking own goal, a belter for a youngsters's first goal in the league, a missed penalty and a few good saves which prevented the scoreline being a lot different.

More importantly, it was a real signpost to the road to comfortable First Division survival.

The manager admits that perhaps he has taken too long to see the recipe, particularly the need to include a player like David Beaumont in a midfield defensive role.

That was the crucial department at Villa Park. Gordon Cowans threatened a lot in the early stages but was made to look a has-been long before the end as the Town's mixture of Beaumont, David Preece and Mark Pembridge combined to get it right in terms of defence and attack.

STARK

The mystery is all the deeper in view of how everyone bar Alec Chamberlain and Iain Dowie were such miserable failures at Maine Road.

Contrasts were stark and reassuring all over the pitch — and in the way the Town put the Manchester humiliation behind them.

Against Villa the Town were first to the ball in almost every tackle. The defence was tight and composed after two early scares.

Lars Elstrup and Kingsley Black gave Dowie closer support.

Pembridge outshone Cowans and David Platt with his industry and tireless running at the Villa defence.

In short everything wrong and so dispiriting at Maine Road was turned into the opposite at Villa Park.

Chamberlain, surely the Town's player of the year, had to produce his usual heroics twice in the first 20 minutes to bale out a defence which took time to settle.

They were square and slow as simple passes down the middle gave Gary Penrice and Platt chances they would have turned into goals against a lesser keeper.

The £1 million transfer was keen to make an impression on his debut after a transfer from Watford to avoid a Third Division career. So was Platt, who was back in action after seven weeks injured.

DENIED

But both were denied by Chamberlain's careful timing, bravery and good positional sense as he was left exposed and faced one-to-one danger.

At that stage He looked the better striker, but everything changed in the 25th minute when a lucky own goal put the Town ahead.

It was poetic justice for those of us who hearts were broken in the 1985 FA Cup semi-final. Then Gary Mountfield scored the late Everton winner which gave Howard Kendall's men a lucky win.

On Saturday, it was the same goalscorer Mountfield was tracking back to cover the left post as Black unleashed a hard low cross. Mountfield's attempt to clear into the crowd ended the goal became a spectacular shot into the top net.

Villa heads dropped immediately. Town chests puffed out as quickly.

Dowie had a shot blocked and Black hit in a 25-yarder which beat Nigel Spink and hit post by inches.

DELIGHT

And in injury time at the end of the first half Pembridge hit a league goal to remember. From the Town's first corner.

Preece and Platt played the short passes interchange. Platt pulled the ball back at angle and the 20-year-old midfielder sent it first time. Spink was just beginning to move as the ball went past him like a shell into the net.

The second half pattern was a delight for the Town fans, with fairly routine defending interspersed with good passing counter-attacks.

It was sweet and self-assured as Villa were pushed closer to the relegation zone by a team they had expected to beat.

The penalty came in the 50th minute, with John Dreyer unlucky to be pulled up for a foul on Tony Cascarino, who was backing into him.

Platt's spot kick was nearly straight and Chamberlain saved it, and the follow-up by Cascarino from the rebound.

And although the tall striker pulled one back with 20 minutes to go with a close-range header the Town's new-found composure saw them through.

Villa put on a lot of pressure without causing real threat, and at the other end Black, Elstrup and Pembridge all let fair chances go to waste.

The First Division

	HOME P	W	D	L	F	A	AWAY P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
**Arsenal	26	10	3	0	30	5	7	5	1	1	18	7	57
Liverpool	27	10	2	1	30	8	7	4	3	2	10	15	57
C. Palace	28	8	4	1	19	13	7	3	5	1	18	18	52
Leeds	26	9	2	2	28	11	4	5	4	1	21	15	46
Man City	27	9	1	4	23	17	2	7	4	1	6	19	41
*Man Utd	27	7	3	4	23	13	4	5	4	1	7	19	40
Wimbledon	27	7	5	3	24	16	3	5	4	1	7	18	40
Chelsea	28	9	5	1	25	16	2	2	9	1	8	30	40
Tottenham	26	7	5	2	27	16	3	4	5	1	0	17	39
Norwich	26	7	1	5	21	23	3	3	7	1	11	19	34
Everton	27	7	3	4	21	11	2	3	8	1	20	33	35
Nottm For	26	5	3	4	20	16	3	5	6	1	9	21	32
Luton Town	28	6	4	4	19	14	3	1	10	1	4	31	32
Sheff Utd	28	6	2	6	16	17	3	2	9	4	9	26	31
So'ton	27	6	3	3	21	13	2	2	11	1	8	36	29
A. Villa	26	5	5	1	17	10	1	5	9	1	10	28	28
Coventry	27	6	5	3	21	14	1	2	10	5	19	28	28
QPR	27	5	3	5	19	17	2	4	8	3	27	28	28
Sunderland	28	5	4	5	12	11	1	4	9	1	7	30	26
Derby Co	26	2	8	4	16	21	2	0	10	8	25	20	20

** Two points deducted. * One point deducted.

The season so far

THE TOWN's record to date in league and cups:

BARCLAYS LEAGUE DIV 1

August
25 C. Palace (h) 1-1 (Dowie) ..... 9,583 —
28 Arsenal (a) 1-2 (Elstrup) ..... 32,723 —
September
1 Southampton (a) 2-1 (Elstrup 2) 14,878 8
4 Man United (h) 0-1 ..... 12,576 8
8 Leeds Utd (h) 1-0 (Black) 10,185 8
15 QPR (a) 1-6 (Hughes) 10,196 11
22 Coventry (h) 1-0 (Dowie) 8,336 7
29 Norwich (a) 3-1 (Elstrup 3) 12,794 6
October
20 Sunderland (a) 0-2 ..... 20,025 8
27 Everton (h) 1-1 (Elstrup) 10,047 7
November
3 Derby (a) 1-2 (Black) 15,008 8
10 Liverpool (a) 0-4 ..... 35,2017 13
17 Man City (h) 2-2 (Dowie, Dreyer pen) 9,564 12
24 A. Villa (h) 2-0 (Black, Elstrup) 10,071 9
December
1 N. Forest (a) 2-2 (Elstrup 2) 16,498 10
8 Arsenal (h) 1-1 (Dreyer pen) 12,506 11
16 C. Palace (a) 0-1 ..... 15,195 12
22 Spurs (a) 1-2 (Dowie) 27,007 12
26 Sheff Utd (h) 0-1 ..... 10,004.12
29 Chelsea (h) 2-0 (OG, Black) 11,050 12
1991
January
1 Wimbledon (a) 0-2 ..... 4,521 14
12 Southampton (h) 3-4 (Elstrup, James, Dreyer pen) 9,021 15
19 Leeds (a) 1-2 (Elstrup) 27,010 16
February
2 QPR (h) 1-2 (Black) 8,479 16
23 Liverpool (h) 3-1 (Black, Dowie 2) 12,032 15
2 N. Forest (h) 1-0 (Dowie) 9,577 14
5 Man City(a) 0-3 ..... 20,404 14
9 A. Villa (a) 2-1 (Mountfield OG, Pembridge) 20,587 13

LEAGUE APPEARANCES, including as sub in brackets: Chamberlain and Dreyer ever-presents, 28 each; Elstrup, Preece and Black 27; Dowie 24 (3); Beaumont 20 (3); Harvey 18 (2); McDonough 17 (4); Johnson 17 (2); Hughes 17; Williams 15(1); James 9(3); Rees 8(7); Pembridge 8; Farrell 4 (7); Rodger 5; Nogan 1 (4); Holsgrove (1); Breacker 8. Number of players used, 28 games: 20. Last season's total: 27.

LEAGUE GOALS: Elstrup 12; Dowie 7, Black 6; Dreyer 3 pens; Hughes 1; James 1; Pembridge 1; OG 2 (Cundy, Chelsea; Mountfield, A. Villa).

THE FA CUP

January
5 Sheff Utd (a) 3-1 (Farrell, Elstrup 2) 13,897
26 W. Ham (h) 1-1 (Black) 12,087
30 W. Ham (a) 0-5 25,659

APPEARANCES: Three each by Chamberlain, James, Dreyer, Harvey, Pembridge, McDonough, Preece, Elstrup and Black. Farrell 2(1), Williams 2, Dowie 1 (1), Beaumont 1. One as sub: Rees and Johnson.

GOALS: Elstrup 2, Farrell and Black one each.

THE RUMBELOWS CUP

September
25 Bradford (h) 1-1 (Harvey) 5,120
October
10 Bradford (a) 1-1 (Black) — lost on pens 6,180

APPEARANCES: Chamberlain 2, Dreyer 2, Beaumont 2, Hughes 2, Preece 2, Black 2, Dowie 2, Harvey 2, Rees 1 (1), James 1 (1), Nogan 1 (1), Breacker 1, Elstrup 1, Williams 1, Johnson (1).

GOALS: Harvey and Black one each.

THE ZENITH DS CUP

December
19 W. Ham (h) 5-1 (Farrell 2, Rees, Elstrup, Black) 5,759
February
18 Chelsea (a) 1-1 (Dreyer). Won on pens 3,849
26 C. Palace (a) 1-3 (Rees) 7,170

APPEARANCES: Chamberlain 3, Dreyer 3, Elstrup 3, Rees 3, Pembridge 3, James 2 (1), Beaumont 2 (1), Harvey 2, Preece 2, Dowie 2, Johnson 2, Rodger 2, Farrell 1 (2), Black 1, Williams 1, McDonough 1. One each as sub: Nogan and Jackson.

GOALS: Farrell and Rees 2 each. Elstrup, Black and Dreyer one each.

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Town match verdict ★★★★★

● FIRST STRIKE: Derek Mountfield, hidden by David Preece, smashes the ball into his own net for the Town's opener.

● HEADS UP: John Dreyer and Tony Cascarino jump to it.

● TOP TWO: Mark Pembridge, who hit his first league goal to put the Town two up, in competition with David Platt.

Match Details

A. VILLA 1 LUTON TOWN 2

Half-time: 0-2

TOWN: Chamberlain; Johnson, Rodger, McDonough, Dreyer; Pembridge, Beaumont, Preece; Elstrup, Dowie, Black. Subs, not needed: Farrell, Harvey.
VILLA: Spink; Price, Mountfield (Olney 65 mins), Nielsen (Gage HT), McGrath; Cowans, Gray, Platt; Yorke, Penrice, Cascarino.
GOALS: Derek Mountfield for the Town, 27 minutes, crashing a stunner past his own goalkeeper in an attempt to clear a hard low cross by Kingsley Black; Mark Pembridge, another stunner, in injury time at the end of the first half, 25-yard left foot thunderbolt volley from David Preece's pull-back after a short corner routine with Black; Tony Cascarino header for Villa, 70 minutes, after two crosses, one from each side of the penalty area.
OTHER STRIKES: Town seven saved, three wide and one hit the top of the bar; Villa seven saved, including a penalty, and four wide. Corners: 10-3 to Villa.
ATTENDANCE: 20,587, Villa's lowest league gate of the season.
REFEREE: Laurence Dilkes, Mossley, Lancs. Had a good game although the Town thought he was harsh, to say the least, to award Villa a 50th-minute penalty which Alec Chamberlain saved.
BOOKINGS: Marvin Johnson, foul on Gary Penrice; Kevin Gage, foul on Lars Elstrup.
ENTERTAINMENT: Unbelievable for Town fans. After a couple of early scares they were too classy for Villa, with good defence and brilliant football on the counter-attack.

Give-away night

MAN CITY 3
LUTON TOWN 0

THE PERFORMANCE at Villa Park was in sharp contrast to what had gone before, when the Town were all but humiliated at Maine Road, and were lucky to escape with no worse than a three-goal beating.

Good goalkeeping by Alec Chamberlain was the only hint of consolation as the Town produced one of their worst displays for a very long time.

The defence had a nightmare, with all three goals gifts, the midfield was anonymous and lonely Iain Dowie posed the only attacking threat, which vanished when he had to be subbed because of injury. City, without being a class side, were quicker to the ball and better at using it, and also a lot stronger than the Town. But for Chamberlain the Town would have been hit for six.

Darron McDonough, who changed his studs at half-time, fell over twice for the first and third goals, and Graham Rodger's atrocious back-pass and desperate attempt at recovery led to the penalty for the second.

Between times the Town contrived to give the ball away almost every time they won it.

MATCH DETAILS

TOWN: Chamberlain; Johnson, Rodger, McDonough, Dreyer; Pembridge, Beaumont, Preece; Elstrup, Dowie (Farrell 55 mins), Black. Other sub: Harvey.

CITY: Coton; Brightwell (Hill 77 mins), Hendry, Redmond, Point(on); White, Reid (Harper 64 mins), Megson; Allen, Quinn, Heath.

GOALS: Niall Quinn gift, 20 minutes, after Darron McDonough slipped over and failed to make a simple clearance; Clive Allen gift penalty, 31 minutes, after Graham Rodger put him with a bad back pass and then brought him down; Quinn very good header from David White's 41st minute right wing cross, unmarked because McDonough fell over again.

OTHER STRIKES: Town three saved and nothing else; City nine saved, four wide and one hit the bar. Corners: 6—1 to City.

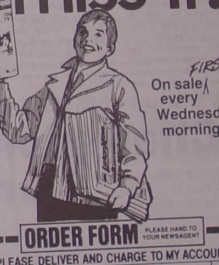
ATTENDANCE: 20,404, Maine Road's lowest league gate of the season so far.

REFEREE: Paul Danson, Leicester.

BOOKED: Lars Elstrup for kicking the ball away in annoyance at being given offside.

ENTERTAINMENT: The half-time Bovril was a lot better than the Town's football.

Be sure you don't miss it!



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