

SUPER CUP SHOW BY THE TOWN

BY BRIAN SWAIN

COCA COLA CUP SECOND ROUND (First leg):

**LUTON TOWN 1
DERBY COUNTY 0**

THREE DAYS after they trudged off the field to a barrage of jeers from home supporters, Luton Town earned a standing ovation on Tuesday for producing the best football seen by a Hatters team for a very long time.

On Saturday in the Second Division Chesterfield embarrassed and humiliated Luton by snatching a first-half goal and then finding it all too easy to defend the lead against a team with precious little

attacking flair. But on Tuesday, in the Coca Cola Cup, almost the identical team showed the other side of football.

The visit of Derby County from the Premiership became a self-motivating challenge, and to a man the Town rose to it magnificently.

The difference between the two matches was scarcely

believable. The underdogs made it a real cup-tie, and frightened Derby out of their wits.

One of the Press box duties was to name a man of the match, to receive a prize of a mountain bike. An apt reward for a team that had given itself a mountain to climb after Saturday's performance.

The voting by journalists proved just how good the Town team display had been: not one Derby player was nominated, despite the millions of pounds spent on them.

And just about every Town man picked up one vote at least, and it was eventually David Oldfield who edged the award.

Supercharged

The Town were so much on top, playing super-charged football in the first half, that the defenders had time and space to back up attacks.

Seldom has any team, from any division, been outplayed so completely as Derby were in the first 45 minutes.

The Town were quick, determined, and spot on with their passing, and Derby were simply swamped. The pity of it was that such an outstanding display produced only one goal - a huge relief for Derby manager Jim Smith.

The build-up and taking of the winner was an illustration of the Town's superiority.

Mitchell Thomas was marauding down the left wing with the pace and enthusiasm of a teenager. The 32-year-old helped to terrorise the visitors' defence.

Early runs resulted in Oldfield poking a half-chance just wide, and lobbing fractionally too high after a succession of

passes left Derby's illustrious internationals flat-footed.

But they had no answer to the brilliant 25th-minute move that led to the goal. Thomas made another surging run, and although his cross was too high for Oldfield Derby failed to clear and Graham Alexander, who had a tremendous match laid the ball back for Julian James to slam in his first goal (at the right end) since March last year.

It was no more than the Town deserved, and for the rest of the half the crowd, a pathetically small 4,459, was kept on a high of excitement.

Kim Grant wasted a chance when action man Gary Waddock put him clear: Grant's pace and control took him away from veteran Paul Parker, but the goal that might have restored the striker's confidence failed to materialise as he chose to shoot early - and straight at the goalkeeper.

Press vote

Ceri Hughes was driving on all of the Town's attacks and, after Park had been booked for body-checking

Bontcho Guentchev, Hughes cracked in a 20-yard free kick which was shelling towards the top corner until Russell Hoult's fingertips intervened.

But the keeper was helpless, and much relieved, a few minutes later when another concerted Town attack, full of flowing football and rapid movement, led to Marvin Johnson pulling back a pass which was met by Steve Davis. The woodwork was probably still rattling this morning after the club captain's drive thundered against the angle of bar and post. Inevitably, Derby were a better side after the break, and

following a roasting from their manager.

But that was only the opportunity for Ian Feuer to stake his claim for man of the match honours. For 15 minutes Derby threatened to equalise, but he stood firm, with a series of top-class saves.

Said manager Lennie Lawrence: "We were up for it, and Derby were a little below

par. We have outplayed a Premiership team, and it's a shame we have only one goal to show for it."

LUTON TOWN: Feuer; James, Davis, Johnson, Thomas; Alexander, Hughes, Waddock, Guentchev; Grant (Fotiadis 74 mins), Oldfield.

DERBY COUNTY: Hoult; Rowett, Stimac, Parker; Laursen, Van der Laan (Carsley 69 mins), Asonovic, Dailly, C. Powell; Simpson (Cooper 84 mins), Ward.