

Why did Rat Scabies leave The Damned?

Is the new drummer a rich punk?

Did Rat try to kill himself?

Are The Damned splitting up?

Why is Captain Sensible embarrassed?

What's the name of Rat's new band?



RAT SCABIES: "I love touring"

All this and more is revealed by ROSALIND RUSSELL when she talks to The Damned and ex-member Rat Scabies



THE DAMNED: "Rat got fed up with touring"

CAPTAIN SENSIBLE is embarrassed. It's not easy to embarrass a bloke that frequently goes on stage in a nurse's uniform or has been seen publicly in a ballet tutu and fishnet tights. So you can imagine it must be something fairly strong to bring a rose tint to the lad's face.

"Aw, Captain," the strident American tones ring across the empty Roundhouse theatre. "Aren't you gonna give me a kiss before you go?"

"Shove off," answers The Captain tenderly and swipes his scarf across the lady's face.

"She came to see me from Los Angeles," explains The Captain coyly. "She keeps following me around."

She doesn't follow us to the tacky café down the road, which is just as well because I can't afford to be stung for her dinner as well as everyone else's. The Damned are well into their British tour: new guitarist Lu has settled in at last and new drummer, Jon Moss has taken permanent residency from the departed Rat Scabies.

Already Jon is getting shirty with the Press - someone has said he's connected to the Moss Bros empire and he'd like it known that he's NOT a little rich kid playing punk. But why is he here - and why did Rat run?

"He got fed up with the touring, went over the top," says Brian James. "He's very sensitive, Rat, though he doesn't show it, and there were a lot of pressures. The European tour was very hard. Some people can take that kind of pressure and some can't."

And on the second day he got beaten up trying to get into a private disco. He was drunk, mind, and it

was his own fault. That was in France.

"All the French are w . . . s," offers The Captain, by now having regained his composure and normal pallor. "They tried to kill my dad. They threw stones at him when he was leaving Dunkirk. Not that I remember, but somebody told me about it. Elvis Costello, it was."

Oh yeah?

"Elvis is older than you think," laughs Brian. "He's seen two wars. ANYWAY . . . It was no surprise to us when Rat left. He wanted to leave before, when Jake Riviera left Stiff. But then we played a great gig in Birmingham and he decided to stay."

"But this tour is getting better. Jon had only one day's rehearsal with us before we started."

"Even the old songs sound better," adds The Captain, a man not noted for his acceptance of new ideas. The Captain, if you recall, made great noises about leaving when Lu was introduced to the band.

Ugly

"At first I hated Lu," says The Captain. Lu smiles benignly, looking more than ever like a youthful Steptoe under his tattered bowler hat. "I thought he was unnecessary and ugly. Now he's just ugly."

Lu grins as if he hasn't understood a word (maybe he hasn't).

But there's been a few rumblings recently about The Damned's pulling ability (crowds, not birds). I've heard they haven't been packing in the fans as much as they used to.

"There's a certain promoter trying to finish us off," says The Captain. "He keeps going round telling people The Damned are splitting up."

I ask Jon which band he's been

with before he joined The Damned.

"I was with London and before that I was with The Clash for two months," he says. "I rehearsed with The Clash but they didn't pay me so I left."

Jon was not on The Damned's new album - it was recorded before Rat left - so he's not been included in the general criticism that's been thrown at it.

"It's a great LP," says The Captain. "Better than Generation X's. It's a step in another direction."

I think it's more of a step in the dark but I agree the guitar is more prominent than on the first album. And the new single, a double 'D' for Damned, is far better than 'Problem Child' which was more or less stillborn.

"I thought 'Problem Child' was a top five hit," says The Captain, spraying a mouthful of fried egg all over my good jersey. "But they were trying to hush it up."

Oh, by the way, have any of them seen Rat since he left?

"Yes, he's all right," says Brian. "I think he's forming another band called the Slovenly Pigs or the Runners or something. Rat's got his own thing."

LATER THAT NIGHT (in the Roundhouse bar).

A great number of people are in the bar in preference to being bored by the posturing of the Dead Boys. The Boomtown Rats' Bob Geldof is taking advantage of his height to get to the bar, other luminaries mingle around . . . and a very moody Rat Scabies leans against a pillar, looking unusually serious. What's up?

"I'll tell you what's wrong," he says. "I've just been thrown out of the dressing room by a bodyguard, that's what's wrong. You tour with a band for 18 months, then they have you thrown out. Stars, that's what they are."

Er, what are the chances of an

interview, Rat?

"Yeah. I'll tell you the truth about me leaving The Damned."

They said you'd just had enough of touring . . .

"That's not true, I love touring." And about getting drunk in France and being beaten up?

"Yes, well I have to admit that's true," grins Rat, amused in spite of himself. "But did they tell you the one about me drinking a bottle of brandy and trying to throw myself out of a window?"

Well, no . . .

Fat

"Well, that's not true. I never drink brandy and I didn't try to kill myself. If you want the whole story speak to me on Monday. . . ."

MONDAY EVENING

Phone Tunnel studios where Rat is auditioning musicians for his new band. Now Rat, about the truth behind your leaving The Damned . . .

"I got bored with them being pop stars," he says. "Everyone got fat and lazy and earning money. Then they just stopped working. It was all right while we had nothing and we were all working desperately but as soon as everyone got a few bob in their pockets that was it."

"I mean, that shows in the new album which I think is rubbish."

Well, you played on it, surely you must have some say in what it turned out like?

"Not really. You'd say something but it didn't matter. A compromise? Yeah, I suppose so, but it didn't work."

The Damned might have trouble getting new songs now that Rat's gone because he played a major part (with The Captain) in the writing.

"Yeah, I wrote a lot of the words and stuff. They can't rely on Brian's writing - you've heard the album, you know what it's like."

Was there any particular argument that decided you on quitting?

"No, not really, everyone argues. I went so far and when we went to Europe I knew that was it. I didn't decide to leave after Jake had gone, that's rubbish."

Now Rat is getting a new band (working title the Runners) out on the road and hoping his money from Stiff will come through soon.

"I didn't get a penny out of The Damned - I'm meant to get it in a couple of weeks. I've been living off £2.50 a week and I'm having to borrow the rent off my mum and dad. My publisher, who's been very good, is lending me the money to rehearse."

All this would probably be bearable for Rat if he hadn't had that rebuff at the Roundhouse. But that's changed his view of his one-time mates.

"When we split it was all 'we'll still be mates Rat' and all that. Then I went to that gig and got thrown out of the dressing room."

"I'd already seen Dave and The Captain and they were all right but when I went round to say hello they got that bodyguard to throw me out."

"I wasn't causing trouble or shouting or anything. Brian wouldn't even look at me. Now I'm beginning to wonder what they're really like."

Rat has his own band to worry about now. Another couple of weeks of rehearsal and they'll be on the road. He's found musicians that aren't well known and hopes no one will think of it purely as his band.

"I have one from New York, a lady guitarist, a bass player and a singer from the West Country. What's the lady like? I dunno. She's not a Gaye Advert, she's not an ugly woman, not like you . . . are you giving us a good write-up?"

That all depends, Rat, on your taking back that slur on my looks . . .