

THE HUMAN FACE OF THE HIT MACHINE

Success finally caught up with Rick Astley halfway between London and Athens, in the bosomy spaces of Manich Airport's transfer lounge.

For the five weeks that 'Never Gonna Give You Up' had been number one in Britain he'd maintained the same dour Northern attitude to stardom.

He was quite enjoying it, thank you, but not about to stick his head in the clouds.

Then, suddenly, while he was sipping his coffee and waiting for his flight on to Greece, a trio of German fans came panting up for an autograph.

"My first thought was, how do they know me?" says Rick, in a guttural Mancunian accent. "I was just standing there thinking *Greece, Greece* — my mind completely on the flight — but of course my record had just gone to number one in Germany as well..."

IN THE HIT POWER STATION

In fact, less than a month after it left the British top spot, 'Never Gonna Give You Up' had reached number one in five European countries: Belgium, Germany, Holland, Norway and Sweden.

It's given Stock/Aitkes/Waterman — Britain's most successful new songwriting

Rick Astley seemed to appear from nowhere with his massive hit single 'Never Gonna Give You Up'.

In fact he came straight out of a hit machine that has produced many of the biggest hits of the year.

Report by Martin Townsend

team — their biggest hit in a sparkling three-year history.

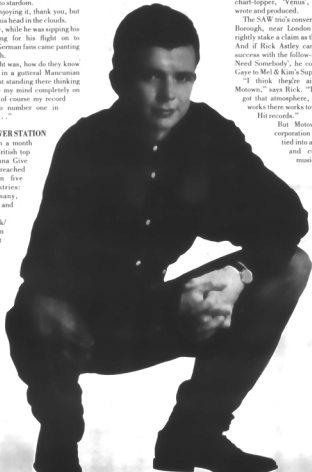
Rick's record climbs above the trio's previous three number ones — Dead Or Alive's 'Spin Me Round', Mel & Kim's 'Respectable' and the Ferry Aid single — and has eclipsed Bananarama's American chart-topper, 'Venus', which they also wrote and produced.

The SAW trio's converted power station in Borough, near London Bridge, can now rightly stake a claim as the British Motown. And if Rick Astley can repeat his debut success with the follow-up 'Whenever You Need Somebody', he could be the Marvin Gaye to Mel & Kim's Supremes.

"I think they're aiming to be like Motown," says Rick. "The buildings have got that atmosphere, and everyone who works there works towards a single end. Hit records."

But Motown, like any big corporation and especially one tied into an industry as fickle and cut-throat as pop music, had a flip-side.

Unless they took careful advice, artists became cogs in a hit-making machine. The conveyor belt of success can make reputations — and ruin human beings. ▶



"I don't ever expect to follow 'Never Gonna Give You Up' in the same way. It had five weeks at number one — how often does that happen?"