



The wheeler-dealers

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INTERLUDE

Books, —

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PEOPLE make history, and so do the commercial companies which energetic and talented people form.

As Prof. Tregonning once remarked, company history contributes a basic element to the life-story of any nation. Especially is this true of a nation like Singapore, which is founded upon trade and industry.

For this reason I welcome **WHEELS OF PROGRESS** by Eric Jennings (Meridan). It is the story of the first 75 years of Cycle and Carriage, a story well told in 50 pages of text and pictures.

It all began in Kuala Lumpur in 1899, when the Chua brothers from Malacca founded a small general store. Over the years, the general store developed into a group of companies concerned with the distribution and assembly of motor vehicles and other interests too, including merchant

banking.

In 1974, Cycle and Carriage declared a consolidated group profit before tax of nearly \$28 million — evidence, as Eric Jennings puts it, of 75 years



of endeavour.

In the High Street in Kuala Lumpur in 1899, Chua Cheng Tuan and Chua Cheng Bok sold haberdashery, bicycles, sewing machines, and carriages. This was still the age of the horse-carriages for the rich, gharries for the poor,

the bullock cart and the ricksha.

They quickly grasped the opportunities offered by the beginning of the motor age. Under Cheng Bok's vigorous leadership Cycle and Carriage opened branches in Ipoh, Penang and Singapore. The author says that Cheng Bok had a remarkable gift for combining sound Chinese business instinct and practice with Western-style management and corporate structure.

Today the small store in Kuala Lumpur is a group of companies with assets of some \$150 million, directly employing 1500 men and women of several races.


In Malaysia, Cycle and Carriage have four wholly-owned subsidiaries. In Singapore there are three. In addition in Singapore there are two part-owned subsidiaries, including a merchant bank. There are five associated companies in Malaysia and Singapore.

Eric Jennings has taken the opportunity to write chapters on the history of Malacca and on the Straits Chinese. He reminds us that when Raffles founded Singapore in 1819, he invited the Malacca Chinese to help build the new settlement. Singapore-Malacca family links have been retained to the present time.

What of the future? Cycle and Carriage, looking at the regional economic possibilities, be-

lieve there is a new era opening for surface transport, particularly the motor vehicle. They intend to move with the times.


MORE and more young Singaporeans are sailing the seas as sailors and deep-sea fishermen. In due course, I am sure, like other islanders, Singaporeans will be writing tales about ships and men at sea. These are stories that can be written only from knowledge and salty experience.



Such a story is Anthony Trew's **THE MOONRAKER MUTINY** (Collins). Trew spent many years at sea and commanded a destroyer during the Second World War.

The *Moonraker* is a tired old freighter and Captain Stone, her master, is a secret drinker of gin. The motley crew were drawn from the riff-raff of the world's waterfronts.

On a course from Freemantle to Mauritius,



homeward bound, the *Moonraker* picks up the warning of a suspected cyclone ahead. Helped by alcohol, Captain Stone makes some wrong calculations. Instead of moving away from the path of the cyclone, the *Moonraker* heads towards it.


Soon the battered old bulk is reeling helplessly before the blast of a tropical storm. During a lull, the panic-stricken crew turn on their captain and decide to abandon ship.

Captain Stone is left behind with his pretty niece, aged 18, and Hank Casey, an Australian passage-worker.



Into the story now comes another much smaller ship, the coaster *Myfanwy*. The *Moonraker* has survived the storm but is drifting. In a brief moment of moonlight, Captain Evans of the *Myfanwy* sees what looks like a ghost ship lying beam on to the sea. He sees the "not-under-command" lights. He stands by until daylight, then boards the *Moonraker* in the morning.

Captain Evans offers salvage; a considerable sum of money is involved. He decides to tow the big ship nearly 3200 km (2000 miles) to Freemantle.



Soon another ship sails into the story, the Australian ocean salvage tug, *Adventurer*, captained by a very ruthless master, also much interested in salvage money.

Captain Brockman of

the *Adventurer* decides to muscle in on the salvage and tries to break the tow-rope. Captain Evans responds by threatening to ram the *Adventurer*.

Captain Brockman takes the threat as bluff. Merchant ship captains don't seem deliberately to

don't rain liberally in the latter half of the 20th century. Adventurer holds her course. Brockman sees the Fyfanwy turning towards him, white water under her stern. He realises with a shock that the coaster is on a collision course. It wasn't bluff.

By the narrowest of margins collision is avoided. But even then the Adventurer does not give up. Not until the air force and the navy get into the story does the Adventurer sail away.

Meanwhile, the two lifeboats have been found and some of the crew rescued. The police begin to ask questions about mutiny.

Captain Stone, still in his cabin on the Moonraker, continues to swill gin. He has an alcoholic dream of fitting the helpless Moonraker with sails. He tries to make a model, to scale of course, and composes the speeches he must make when he sails triumphantly into harbour.

Instead, it is plucky Captain Evans who drags the old freighter into harbour to receive a hero's welcome. A thrilling, credible yarn, one I can recommend to anyone with an interest in the sea and ships.

