

REVIEWS by John Exshaw

SWEET FIGHTING MAN: RING OF TRUTH By Melanie Lloyd Pitch Publishing, 2017, £12.99 271 pages/42 photos

Party pack of sweet memories

This third volume of interviews with fighters from across the generations has been 10 years in the making but it's well worth the wait

The review of Melanie Lloyd's *Sweet Fighting Man, Volume II*, which appeared in the November 2007 issue of *Boxing Monthly*, closed with the hope that "Volume III is already in the pipeline . . .", and now, a decade later, the pipeline has finally gushed forth the long-anticipated *Sweet Fighting Man — Ring of Truth* (Pitch Publishing, £12.99). The reason the book has taken more time to produce than some real pipelines is, the author confides: "due to a succession of obstacles placed in my path by that old devil called life . . ." Well, yes indeed, there's nothing quite like "life" for messing up one's life, is there?

The subjects of what traditionalists will no doubt insist on referring to as *SFM Volume III* are as follows: former British, European and WBF lightweight champion Jon Thaxton; Dave "Boy" Green, MBE, former British and European light-welterweight titleholder, as well as European welterweight champion; Sylvester Mittee, Commonwealth and British welterweight champion; Steve Holdsworth, former fighter and current champion of Eurosport's boxing commentary; British super featherweight title challenger and later, trainer, Colin Lake; Johnny Kramer, one-time holder of the Southern Area welterweight and middleweight titles; Bunny Johnson, Britain's first black heavyweight champion, who later won the British light-heavyweight title; Billy

Schwer, British, Commonwealth and European lightweight champion, also briefly holder of the IBO light-welterweight belt; and Joe Somerville, journeyman *extraordinaire*.

In addition, sandwiched in between Messrs. Johnson and Schwer, is a chapter entitled *The Trinity of the Ring*, in which fighters give their views on the qualities needed to be a top referee, along with succinct interviews with third men, the late Sid Nathan, Larry O'Connell and Bob "BF" Williams (the latter having also been featured in *SFM II*). So there you have it, the usual canny Lloyd choices of fighters from across the years, providing vivid snapshots of British boxing from the 1950s right through to the 2000s.

Thaxton, perhaps most fondly remembered for his 1996 one-round dusting — or perhaps that should be *rusting* — of Paul "Scrap Iron" Ryan, gets the book off to a flying start, his recollections including the grim occasion when he somehow managed to drive himself to hospital after breaking both hands in a fight, with his wife Mikaela operating the gears.

Green, who inherited his nicknames "Boy" and "The Fen Tiger" from Eric Boon, his illustrious fellow resident of Chatteris in Cambridgeshire, still refers to his late manager, Andy Smith, as "Mr. Smith", and identifies his victory over former world champion John H. Stracey as his best performance, leading as it did to his two world title



FLYING START: Jon Thaxton opens the book by telling of a post-fight drive with two broken hands — his wife changed the gears

attempts, against, firstly, Carlos Palomino and secondly, Sugar Ray Leonard.

The ever-loquacious Sylvester Mittee provides a pedal-to-the-metal ride through his life, along with a time-capsule reminder of a time when one could talk about "bikes, birds and Barry Sheene" without causing either embarrassment or offence, while Steve Holdsworth reflects on his brief professional career as follows: "The thing was with me, I had no chin and no punch. God knows why I even bothered really."

Colin Lake recalls his time as sparring partner to the late Terry Downes (who also managed him), Howard Winstone and Ken Buchanan, as well as the occasion when he had to bribe Bobby Frankham to win a fight with the promise of two Mars Bars.

Johnny Kramer's relatively low-key career is enlivened by recollections of fights as far afield as Sweden, South Africa and Australia, along with memories of Bernard Hart, proprietor of the long-lamented Lonsdale shop in Beak Street. Kramer now lives in Canterbury, where he

makes chickens (don't ask).

As a young boy in Jamaica, Bunny Johnson was inspired by the example of Jack Johnson to set his sights on the British heavyweight title, and recalls his later fights with Dennis Andries and James Scott, the latter of which took place in Rahway State Prison in New Jersey.

Billy Schwer, now carving out a second career as a motivational speaker, provides a trenchant account of his exciting career, with additional input from his parents, Billy Sr and Wendy, while Joe Somerville's memories go back to being bombed out in the Blitz, getting a bomb splinter in his leg and participating in hundreds of bouts "on the booths" throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

So there we have it — another win for Melanie Lloyd "by way of big KO", and one thankfully free of the typos and errors that have marred so much of this publisher's recent output. Let's just hope we don't have to wait another 10 years for *SFM IV*. Highly recommended, needless to add.