

ballroom dancing times

NOVEMBER 1973

12½p



Dancing Profile: The Hurleys

by

GRAHAM PERKINS

We begin this month a new series of articles about the top competition couples, professional and amateur. The series was planned before Anthony Hurley and Fay Saxton announced their retirement from the field (after winning the European Championship at Nuremburg on September 29) and it seems only fair that they should have the first feature—in gratitude for a marvellous career and to wish them well in future. The author is an accountancy consultant by profession but combines the twin hobbies of ballroom dancing and writing. Next month: Alan and Hazel Fletcher.



No caption needed: the day that Anthony Hurley and Fay Saxton became Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Hurley.

THE HURLEYS HAVE DOMINATED THE DANCING scene for so long that you might be forgiven for thinking they were dancing before they could even walk. In Fay's case that is not far from the truth. She started ballet and tap lessons at two-and-a-half and first appeared on stage at the age of three, winning a doll that was bigger than she was.

Her early years were spent in Derbyshire where her parents owned a grocery store. When she was eleven they moved to Nottingham to run a fish and chip shop.

This was a fortunate move since Fay had met a Nottingham boy called Tony Collard who wanted a partner for competitions. They competed together successfully, ultimately winning the 1951 Junior Star Championship. Age then made Tony inelligible for junior competitions and Fay was without a partner.

Compared with Fay, Anthony Hurley was an old man when he first set foot on a dance floor, being all of six years of age. Dancing ran in his family. His mother, a former Tiller girl, had turned her hand to ballroom and taught at a school in Weybridge, close to the Hurley's Walton home.

Anthony, too, started with tap and ballet. At the age of eleven he won a ballet scholarship and spent a short time at the Ballet Rambert School. He also auditioned at Elstree for a Gene Kelly film but was told that he looked too old for the part.

Again like Fay he decided to drop ballet and concentrate on ballroom, since one has to be really exceptional to get to the top in ballet and the idea of becoming a mere member of the corps did not appeal.

Being a boy, Anthony had the problem of risking a "cissy" label at school. He therefore participated actively in athletics and rugby. In 1953 this nearly proved disastrous. Just a month before the Junior Star Championship, Anthony was released from hospital after a bout of peritonitis with strict instructions to avoid strenuous physical activity.

With only ten days to go to the Star, he played in a school rugby match, caught a kick on the kneecap, and ended up with a knee full of fluid.

Thanks to luck and penicillin, he recovered in time and danced with his partner Pamela Curtis to win the title. They repeated this victory in 1954 but Pamela then began to grow so tall that the partnership had to be disbanded.

It was Hugh Carter, with whom both Fay and Anthony had taken lessons, who suggested that they should get together. Fay had by then become too old for the juniors but Anthony was still within the age limit. Fay's reaction to Hugh's suggestion was icy—she was *not* going to partner up with a mere junior.

Needless to say, she later exercised a lady's right to change her mind, and after a trial session in Nottingham they decided to give it a try—if they could overcome the distance problem.

By this time they were both at work. Anthony was an apprentice toolmaker at the engineering company where his father was



Victory at Blackpool. The most exciting moment in any dancer's life—the Hurley's first British Professional in 1969. You can't see it in this picture but Fay is almost certainly crying; she was always, throughout her career, overcome when she heard that they had actually won a major event.



On holiday in Bornholm with Cherrie's godparents, the former Danish champions Flemming and Eva Horning.

a director and Fay was a ladies' hairdresser. Fay came to live with the Hurleys, taking a hairdressing job in a department store. Her problem now was getting the time off which dancing demanded so, when a small local hairdressing business was put up for sale, her father bought it for her.

Anthony soon joined her for, although his father would let him take time off, he did not want to be accused of favouritism by his fellow apprentices.

It did not take them long to make their impact in the dancing scene. They moved quickly through the Novice and Pre-Champ grades and in 1956 reached the last twelve in the Amateur Modern at Blackpool.

Over the next few years they gradually edged their way up the placings and in 1960 finally took the Blackpool title, ousting the reigning holders, Michael Houseman and Valerie Waite. In the same year they won the World Nine Dance Championship taking all but one of the Latin dances as well as all the ballroom dances.

One way and another it was a very eventful year for it was also in 1960 that Fay became Mrs. Anthony Hurley. They had become engaged the previous year having decided that since they were working together in the daytime and spending all their leisure time dancing together, they might just as well go the whole hog and get married.

One thing leads to another and by the time they had won Blackpool 1961 Fay was expecting a child. For several years they had been taking lessons with Henry Kingston, a former Star Champion. He had a daughter called Cherrie who was such a perfect little lady that Fay vowed to name her child, if it was a girl, after her.

The Hurleys do indeed have a daughter called Cherrie and the little lady after whom they named her is now Mrs. Len Goodman.

When Anthony and Fay returned to the dancing scene it was as professionals and with the firm resolve that they would carry on only if they quickly made the grade. This they did, appearing with increasing frequency in finals of major events and eventually beginning to battle with Michael Needham for third place behind the Irvines and Peter Eggleton.

Then in 1969 Bill and Bobbie had retired and Peter was not competing at Blackpool because Brenda was ill. The tussle between Hurley and Needham was as close as everyone anticipated—two dances each, with

Hurley taking the Championship on a majority of firsts.

To win the British is every dancer's ambition but Anthony and Fay had achieved a still greater ambition—they were the first dancers ever to win the Junior, Amateur and Professional titles.

Further successes at Blackpool followed in 1970, 1971 and 1972 along with victories in World's, Star and other major Championships. Visitors to the Hurleys' tastefully

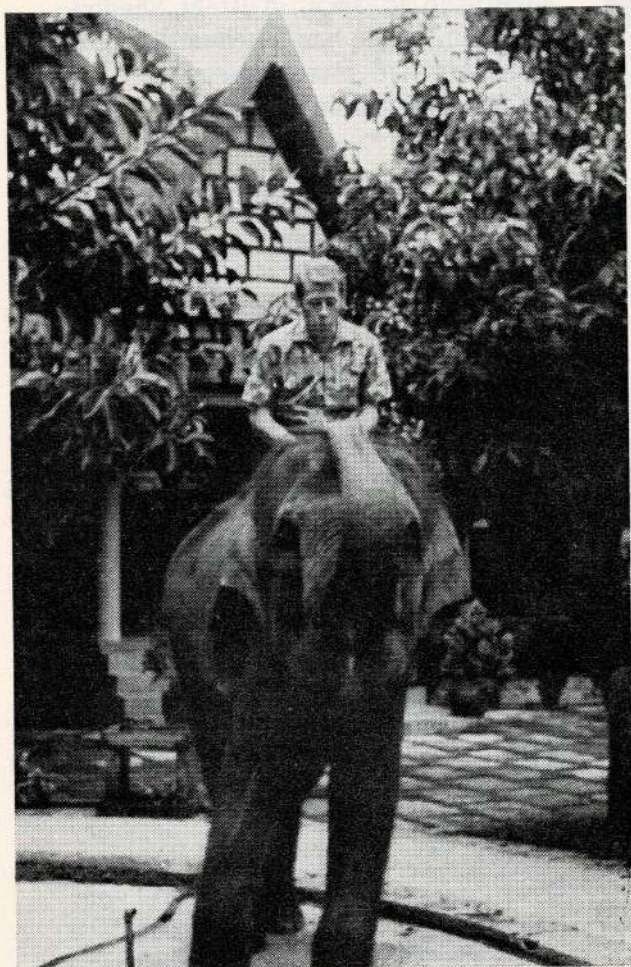


The dedicated junior who was to take all the major titles before retiring from competition dancing; Anthony Hurley, with his partner Pamela Curtis, absolutely absorbed in the dancing at a Star Ball.



Left, the Hurleys in action; a picture we hope to see "live" many more times as they will continue to demonstrate and will doubtless be in great demand.

elegant Surrey home might therefore be surprised to find that the only trophies on display are the two Carl Alan Awards which they won in 1969 and 1971. This is because Anthony and Fay believe in having a private life which is quite separate from their dancing life.



Proud father; Anthony with baby Cherrie. It was her first Blackpool.

An anxious expression on the dancing champion's face but a cheerful one on the face of the elephant. A picture taken in Thailand in the floating river market in Bangkok.