



Let the show begin: Noel Daniel spent two years following the transient lives of showgirls and clowns of America's travelling circuses

A big picture of the big ring

Circus: 1870-1950

Edited by Noel Daniel with essays and captions by Dominique Jando and Linda Granfield, and historical consultation by Fred Dahlinger, Jr (Taschen, £120)

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THE travelling circus was what kept millions of Americans entertained before they started going to the movies, watching TV or tuning into the radio, according to this amazing new book, which must surely be the year's largest and most lavishly illustrated. Editor Noel Daniel says he spent more

than two years following troupes such as Barnum & Bailey and the Ringling Bros to uncover the stories and gather thousands of images of the performers and their transient lives.

But it's the pictures, delivered in gigantic format, that fascinate: the midgets, the showgirls [such as these pictured in 1955], the acrobats, the tattooed gentlemen, the dancing bears and the bearded ladies. Not to mention the very fat ladies.

In their way, these events were the precursors to shows such as Big Brother and The X Factor but staged with more pizzazz and flair. A note of caution: the book isn't one to go in the suitcase or even taken to bed — it's better as a replacement television.