

WYCOMBE Wanderers, who have been drawn away from home every year since entering the F.A. Trophy four seasons ago, were out of luck again this week when the draw for the first round was made at Lancaster Gate. The Blues must travel to Bridgend Town on January 14 (writes Stuart Earp).

After going out of the F.A. Cup at the first attempt at Minehead a fortnight ago, Wanderers must have been hoping to have a home tie in the trophy to recoup some of their losses. When it comes to this competition, however, they always seem to be out of luck.

They lost 0-3 at Ilford three years ago and then went out to Slough Town the following year. Last season they recorded their first ever success in the Trophy by winning 1-0 at Barnet but then drew tough Northern club Runcorn away and went down 2-1.

With Enfield so far ahead

in the Isthmian League, Wycombe need a good run in the Trophy to retain interest and attendances but Bridgend are likely to prove difficult opposition.

Situated between Cardiff and Swansea, they play in Division One North of the Southern League where they are currently placed fifth in the table. So far they have won five, drawn three and lost two of their league games.

This is their first season in the Southern League having joined from the Welsh League where they were one of the top clubs. In ten years they were never out of the top four, winning the championship twice.

Their reaction to the draw was one of elation. Club chairman Mr Chris Smart told me: "This is the best draw we could have had. It's funny, I was talking to the manager a couple of days ago and he said the one team he wanted was Wycombe Wanderers at home. Wycombe have a tremendous reputation and it is

bound to attract a good crowd. As far as I'm concerned this draw couldn't have been better."

IMPRESSIVE

Bridgend's confidence is based on their form this season which has seen them lose only four times in 21 league and cup games. Their previous form in the Trophy is impressive. They beat Ferndale at home 2-0 in the first qualifying round and then won 3-2 away to Western League club Paulton Rovers.

Their best win, however, came in the last round when they visited Bideford, Devon. They won 2-0 with goals in the last 12 minutes against a side who reached the first round of the F.A. Cup before losing 3-1 at Portsmouth this season.

Bridgend's F.A. Cup performance, however, was not so impressive. They lost to fellow Southern Leaguers Merthyr Tydfil 3-1 at home while Kings Lynn and Dunstable are the two other clubs to have beaten them in the League this season.

One of their best results last season came in the Welsh Cup. They reached the semi-final and lost 2-1 at home to a full Cardiff City first team. This season they

have reached the quarter-finals and it should be remembered that the winners of this competition qualify for a place in the European Cup Winners Cup.

There are several former professionals in the Welsh club's line-up. Skipper is former Leyton Orient and Swansea player Paul Harris at centre back, while the main force in midfield is provided by Gary Jones, ex-Bournemouth, and Jim McInch, ex-Cardiff.

Up front there is Wayne Harris, brother of Leeds United's Carl and Jan Bekker, who bagged 41 league and cup goals last season. Bekker is the club's leading marksman this season with 11. The manager is Lyn Jones, a former Arsenal and Bristol Rovers player who is in his first season in management.

This is the furthest Bridgend have ever got in the Trophy. They were knocked out at Nuneaton last season having reached the third qualifying round.

Wycombe reaction to the draw was one of obvious disappointment. Manager John Reardon joked: "It's another long haul. I think they ought to present us with a cup for all the travelling we have to do."

John said he would be taking a look at the opposition in the near future.