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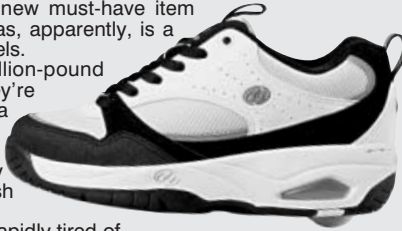
THE BLOKE QUOTE

I'd hate to drown. You look so awful afterwards — ALAN AYCKBOURN

ASIDE from TMX Elmo, the new must-have item "every kid wants" for Christmas, apparently, is a pair of trainers with retractable wheels.

We're told they're a multi-million-pound business in America, and now "they're about to hit the UK with a vengeance." Presumably completely different to the trainers with retractable wheels I bought my daughter for Christmas from a British store about eight years ago.

The same pair, I might add, she rapidly tired of and flogged at a boot sale about six months later.



A NEW study says women are far grumpier in the mornings than men.

Of course we are. We have to wake up next to you lot.

KATE MOSS'S old mucker Bobby Gillespie has confirmed rumours that she's engaged to Pete Doherty.

He says she showed him the engagement ring and adds: "Oh my God, it's huge."

In which case, either she bought it herself or young Pete's been getting busy with one of those cranes at the end of the pier.

NOT THE BLOKE QUOTE

Never rub bottoms with a porcupine — JANE PHILBIN



MP MUM ... Oona King



STAR MUM ... Madonna

OONA PUTS IT IN BLACK AND WHITE

REACTING to the furore surrounding Madonna's adoption of an African child, former MP Oona King wrote a profoundly disturbing article about her own experiences of trying to adopt in Britain.

When she described herself as "mixed race" on the application form, she was told by a white social worker that the term was unacceptable and she should now call herself "dual heritage."

She says another couple were rejected because their six-year-old daughter didn't know what a swastika was, and Oona was also told she couldn't adopt while still an MP, although male MPs were eligible because they "had a wife at home."

As it happens, she lost her seat anyway, persevered with the adoption process and now she and Italian husband Tiberio are the proud parents of toddler son Ilya.

Returning to the subject of Madonna, Oona adds: "When I see black people who would rather a black baby died than be brought up by a white family in the UK, I also see how much racism still criticises our capacity for sound judgment."

Hear bloody hear.

Similarly, while it's right that prospective parents in Britain are vetted for any criminal past or rocky relationship history, the current system here makes it so difficult to adopt that many become frustrated and give up.

Meaning thousands of children who would have benefited from their care are abandoned to the fate of an often loveless existence in an institution.

I'm going 'green' too ... at the thought of these cynical taxes



GREEN is the new black as politics once again reveals itself to be as cynical and devoid of values as the world of fashion.

The eco-bandwagon is splintering under the strain of so many corpulent, overpaid MPs desperate to clamber aboard for the latest round trip of gesture politics that leads nowhere but will still blight the lives of ordinary people.

"Pay up or the planet gets it," was The Sun headline to Tony Blair's article about "catastrophic tipping points in our climate unless we act."

How reassured the parents of the British soldiers struggling to control Iraq must have felt to see the Prime Minister so impassioned about solar panels and cleaner energy.

Similarly, every parent whose child has been murdered in the burgeoning gun-toting gang wars that now pollute our inner cities. Saving the planet must really be preying on their minds.

The reality, of course, is that like so many of this Government's trendy new initiatives, the argument for it is far from fully justified.

Dissenting voices include Professor Philip Stott, a professor of biogeography from the University of London, who says he's doubtful we can ever manage our climate. He's "far from

convinced that human activity is responsible for global warming" and says other well-respected experts suggest that tediously sorting household waste is "misguided."

Reusing bottles and glass costs twice as much as making new ones from raw materials, trees are grown specifically to make paper, and emissions from shipping far outstrip those from the cheap flights the Government wants to tax to the hilt and thereby make less affordable.

The bottom line is that for every "green friendly" hoop we'll be forced to jump through, there is little or no scientific evidence to justify it.

But the politicians aren't too bothered about that. They just want the stealth taxes — yet more money to spend on pointless civil servants and wars no one wants.

Unproven

Meanwhile, the rich "eco-friendly" set will drive to work in their ludicrously impractical two-seater electric cars (which, by the way, run on vast batteries you can't recycle), while their nanny is probably sneaking the kids to school in a gas guzzler or trudging them there on foot in the wind and rain.

And while they're advocating that the rest of us should be fined for putting our empty Coco Pops box in the wrong colour binbag, Environment Minister Ben Bradshaw is caught putting, among other things, "Rizla papers" (intriguing) in the wrong bag but claims it was an "inadvertent" mistake. Oh, that's all right then.

It's all unproven, posturing nonsense and an irrelevance to the majority of the general public who have dozens more pressing issues they'd like their Government to address first.

Trouble is, all parties are at it, meaning that whichever way we vote at the next election, the rich will pay what it takes to make their cars and homes more environmentally-friendly, while ordinary families who can't afford such grand gestures get taxed heavily.

Makes you go green at the thought, doesn't it?

A LOUD BORE

YOU Know You're Getting Old When (Part 203):

You often think of your holiday to the Seychelles a few years ago and fantasise about being back there, relishing the peace of a day spent on one of its empty beaches before strolling to a quiet restaurant unspoilt by either its own loud music or the persistent throb of a nearby bar or club.

Then you read an interview with Girls Aloud singer Cheryl Cole who, describing her recent honeymoon in the Seychelles, says: "It was the most boring place ever. It drove us mad."

GET REAL ON 'RACIST' REMARKS

SENIOR police officer DI John McFarlane was speaking at an Adopt-A-Robber initiative when he made an off-the-cuff remark that it might be a good idea to get Madonna involved.

Now he's being investigated for the "alleged racist overtone" of the remark.

I had to read the story twice before I twigged what the "overtone" was — and apparently it's because Madonna's adopted son is black and therefore the DI was insinuating that all robbers are black too.

Laughable.

Anyone with an ounce of common sense will tell you that if you were to play a word association game with anyone this week and asked them to use one word to describe why Madonna has been in the papers, they would say "adoption."

That's how the brain works in quick-fire situations and it's abundantly clear the DI was joking about the adoption aspect and not the ethnicity of the child involved.

There are plenty of genuine examples of racism that demand our outrage without becoming sidetracked by trumped-up nonsense like this.

BREAKING away momentarily from the "Tampax" musings of her husband, Camilla Parker Bowles has contributed her "favourite" recipe to a friend's new cookbook.

It's called HRH's Smoked Sausage starter.

I'll bet it is.

