

## **Ban the bangs!**

*Reformed firestarter Mark Tran explains why fireworks no longer light his candle*

I have to admit that I was once a firework abuser. As children my friends and I used to sneak into a building site, climb to the top, insert bangers into empty milk bottles and watch them shatter in mid-air.

That kind of prank seems quite innocent compared to what goes on now, when valuable private and public property is targeted by firework vandals. In Liverpool police are investigating a wave of fireworks assaults, which have destroyed 30 cars and 29 telephone kiosks.

In one incident destined to go down in urban folklore, vandals used fireworks as explosive devices to blow a BMW to smithereens. According to Norman Bettison, the chief constable of Merseyside police, the army bomb disposal team called out to the incident had not seen anything like it in mainland Britain since the IRA campaign. The adapted fireworks, which sprayed shrapnel up to 200 metres, had the potential to kill.

Admittedly these are extreme cases. Nevertheless fireworks have certainly become a nuisance. Around this time of year, urban evenings are regularly punctuated by the whoosh of rockets and bangs so loud that residents could be forgiven for thinking that they are being subjected to their own version of shock and awe. And nowadays, we are not just talking about a few nights a year. The firework season now begins weeks before November and lasts well beyond.

It would be fine if the fireworks were only let off at organised public displays. But instead we are talking about hit-and-run tactics, in narrow alleyways and otherwise quiet streets, that send noise reverberating through our living rooms every evening.

It would be a joy to have fireworks banned outside of public displays. Some countries, such as Australia, have already bitten the bullet. But the authorities here believe this will merely drive the firework trade underground.

There are plenty of measures, short of an outright ban, which the government is thankfully considering. They include an 11pm curfew on the use of fireworks and making it a criminal offence for people under 18 to carry them. Whether these plans amount to anything is another issue, but they at least signal that the problem is being taken seriously.

Today, Tony Blair receives a petition signed by almost 75,000 people, urging him to curb the use of fireworks because of the misery they cause to animals. But it is not just animals and their owners who have had enough. The rest of us would be happy to see fireworks go up in smoke - quietly.

**By looking at the language he uses, explain how the writer conveys the threat posed by fireworks.**