

Reasons to be cheerful

It may seem perverse, but despite the gloom and doom all around, **Dick Lumsden** believes the over-50s have the ability to kick start the economy

WARNING: This article contains optimistic content which may be offensive to those of a pessimistic nature.

At the risk of upsetting some people, I think we need to keep a sense of perspective here. Yes I know we are in a recession, that house prices have fallen, that jobs have been lost and that the value of our pensions and our savings has been cut.

But it's happened before and in all probability it will happen again. Just because Gordon Brown told us a few years ago that we had seen an end to "boom and bust" doesn't mean we actually have.

Those of us who have a few years on the clock can remember sitting down to dinner by candlelight – not because we were hopeless romantics, but because there wasn't enough power in the National Grid to keep us all going at once. We can remember rampant inflation, Britain being described as "the sick man of

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Europe" and unemployment levels almost twice as high as the current percentage of 6.1 – and that was when there were fewer people!

So forgive me if I appear uncaring, but contrary to what some people who should know better are telling us, it isn't the end of the world and we need to break free from this state of collective paralysis and get on with the rest of our lives.

And I'll go farther. Those of us over the age of 50 should be setting the pace. We are more resilient, we know from experience that this will end sometime soon and, in so many ways, we have the keys to unlock the economic handcuffs.

Proportionately, as we get older and our major debts begin to reduce (mortgage being paid off, children leaving home) so our disposable income begins to rise in proportion.

More than the younger age groups, we buy things – and good



HAPPY SHOPPER: The affluent over-50s have cash to spend on the good things – and could be the ones to kick-start a recovery, says Dick Lumsden.

things at that. We buy top of the range cars, we invest in better quality furniture and clothes, and we consume premium brand food and drink because after decades of hard work and effort we like to reward ourselves.

Now isn't the time to change all that – we are more in control of our own destiny than they give us credit for – and the economy depends on the £200 billion a year we have at our disposal.

If we just hold our nerve we can save the car industry, we can kick-start the housing market and we can keep shops, cinemas, pubs and restaurants in business far better than any Whitehall intervention plan, simply by doing what we have always done.

I was contacted by a woman the other day who told me that, at the age of 59 she was fed up being pigeon-holed and told what she should and shouldn't be doing because of her age and sex and the general sense of gloom and despondency.

She said: "In a few months' time I will be going with my best friend

to celebrate our 60th birthdays in a tent at Glastonbury, where we shall enjoy listening to some very loud music and no doubt behave very badly and drink far too much."

Now that's the spirit. And in an effort to redress the balance in the face of some seemingly endless statistics telling us the bad news, I've dug out a few overlooked surveys in the past couple of weeks to give us all cause for optimism.

Scientists at the University of California have proved (apparently) that browsing the internet excites the brains of older people more than reading.

This probably explains why the over-50s are the fastest growing internet community. And a separate survey predicts that by 2013 online shopping in the UK will double to an annual £6.2bn because we mature customers are open to new shopping experiences.

The UK cruise market is poised for record growth over the next five years, despite the economic downturn, because operators are

tailoring their offer to include far more specialist cruises for over-50s who want alternative destinations, or themes to match their lifestyles.

And an overwhelming majority of us aged over 50 are taking steps to keep active and stay healthy. In a survey, 73% rated their health good or excellent, 68% said they take regular nutritional supplements and 33% said they took regular exercise to stay trim.

So I say, let's shake off the gloom and all be a bit more optimistic. It's our life, so let's get on with living it and not be swayed by the pessimists who tell us things are going to get worse before they get better. Learn a lesson from the rabbits in the headlights!

■ Dick Lumsden is Managing Director of Senior Agency, one of the few companies specialising in marketing and advertising to the 50+ group. If you have any views, or are over 50 and would like to take part in occasional consumer research, please contact him on dlumsden@senioragency.co.uk

