



# MARK CARWARDINE

## WILD THOUGHTS

I see Canadians will soon be offered bicycles, public transport passes or C\$300 (£150) in cash if they agree to scrap their old gas-guzzling cars. What a brilliant idea. It's estimated that nearly a third of the cars and trucks in Canada were made before 1996 – when tougher emission standards were introduced – and these produce about 19 times more pollutants than newer models.

Admittedly, it might be a ploy to divert attention from Canada's determined efforts to distance itself from the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. But at least it's a step in the right direction – unlike Britain's blatant abuse of green issues to fill Treasury coffers. Gordon Brown plans to double car tax on the most polluting cars, introduce a one-off 'showroom tax' for new cars and continue to increase tax on fuel. He claims it's a greener way of taxing cars, but it's a blatant sham. The rest of us know better – it's yet another environmental stealth tax.

A second-hand car salesman would be too embarrassed to attempt such a barefaced charade.

Green taxes are acceptable only if they are transparent. Brown's new car taxes are fine in principle, but they should be linked directly to improvements in public transport. The money raised should be spent explicitly on propping up bus services (to provide a real alternative to driving in both town and country), improving the rail network (which should be cheap, comfortable and reliable) and encouraging people to cycle (with safe and convenient routes). They are all crying out for extra cash. Then anyone who chooses to drive to work every day knows that their increased taxes will make life easier for the rest of us, who choose to take a green and pleasant alternative. Britain's nightmare roads already have millions more cars than Canada's – in an area one-fortieth the size. But if we have nothing to turn to but our woefully inadequate public transport system, no form of stealth tax – even if it does use green issues as a convenient scapegoat – will successfully force us off the roads.

Mark Carwardine is a zoologist, author and tv presenter.



**Would you trade your car for a bike?**

**It's a step in the right direction – unlike Britain's blatant abuse of green issues to fill Treasury coffers.**