

# Get married, spend money - it's your patriotic duty

Looking at the evidence, DICK LUMSDEN detects a trend for later life marriages and thinks it could give the economy a boost

**S**O... at the age of 75, Michael Winner, one of the country's most high profile bachelors, has finally decided to marry his long term fiancée.

Calm down dear... he's not the first pensioner to tie the knot and, judging by some of the current trends, he certainly won't be the last.

For years, we have seen a continuing fall in the number of weddings recorded each year - to such an extent that latest figures available show the smallest number since 1895.

But in the last couple of years we have also seen a noticeable slow down in the number of divorces and, at the same time, a dramatic rise in the number of people registering with online dating sites - up from two million in 2006 to an estimated six million over the next year.

And the fastest growing age group on many of these dating sites are the over 50s - including pensioners who are looking for someone to share their later years. Even if only a relatively small percentage of them meet and marry, it will be a major shot in the arm to the UK wedding industry.

Collectively, we spend an estimated £6 billion a year on weddings - with wedding gifts accounting for a further £1 billion.

At a time when everyone is feeling the financial squeeze, more weddings are good news for the economy. Not everyone will spend as much on their wedding as Michael Winner of course - but at an average cost now of around £20,000 - it is no small undertaking.

And then there is the vast, invisible, cost associated with guests' clothes, travel and accommodation, hen parties and stag dos.

Now in my mid-50s, I thought my days of attending stags were well behind me... but I have been invited to two in the last month, one of which involves a group of middle aged men heading to Marbella.

I thought the only thing I had in common with the cast of *The Only Way is Essex* is that we happened to live in the same county - but now I find myself booked on a flight to Malaga for a long weekend of who knows what.

I'm not a vain man, but in the interests of not standing out like a



**WINNER IN LOVE:** Above and right, movie director and restaurant critic Michael Winner, 75, is to wed his fiancée Geraldine Lynton Edwards next month - Dick Lumsden is unlikely to attend. Photos: PA

you can't beat them, join them, so I have adopted the "No carbs before Marbs" diet. For two weeks now I have shunned potatoes, bread, pasta, rice, beer, wine and anything resembling biscuits, cakes, sweets, crisps or chocolate.

Instead, I have been filling up with eggs, meat, fish, salads and the odd morsel of cheese and peanuts. I have to say the gin stock has taken a bit of a hammering in lieu of wine, but overall I have been pretty good and managed to shed seven pounds.

Sadly, seven pounds is but a

in the two weeks left before I fly at least one of my chins disappears.

Don't get me wrong, I may be a tad overweight, but I'm not classified as obese by any means - after giving me a mild scolding for my lack of exercise, my Wii Fit told me at

exactly halfway between healthy and obese in fact.

Scarily, the NHS predicts that by 2015, almost 40% of British men will be obese, and by 2050 that number will be almost 60%. I think there could be an awful lot more on the no carbs diet in the years ahead.

Mind you, if that trend continues unchecked, many of them won't live till 2050 to be a statistic. A new study published in the *International Journal of Epidemiology* claims to show that for every two years that someone walks around with a BMI over 30, they increase their chances of early death by 7%.

So ten years of obesity means you are pretty much a walking time-bomb.

Interestingly their findings were based on a long term survey of Americans living in the small town of Framingham who signed up for annual monitoring way back in 1948. I say interesting, because Framingham was originally founded by a man from Framingham in Suffolk who was a settler in the US and named it after his own home town. Quite where the missing "I" has gone over time no-one knows.

I don't suppose I'll get an invite to Michael Winner's wedding. Not surprising since I've never met the man - although I do remember paying to go and see *Death Wish* at the cinema in 1974, therefore contributing a tiny amount to his personal fortune.

But I hope he and his guests do their bit for the economy and I hope his stag do is of epic proportions.

In these straightened times, we all have to our bit to help the economy get back on its feet... OK, so I'll be helping the Spanish economy get back on its feet this time... but every little helps.

**■ Dick Lumsden is Managing Director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to the 50+ group.**

**If you have any views on this article, or are over 50 and would like to take part occasionally in some gentle consumer research, please**

