

Taking Life Easy

As I popped the cheque for the plumber into the envelope, I asked myself the following question. If as they say, "life begins at forty, and things become easier as you advance gracefully through the years," why weren't these rules applying to me, I am advancing in years but carthorse, is the descriptive that comes to mind. Everything I do just lately turns into a nightmare despite trying my best to make it easier and simpler.

Technology is partly to blame, we live in an age when there is an answer to every problem, you can bet your free air miles that somebody, somewhere, will have invented a gadget or widget to fix whatever it is that happens to give you gyp.

Every now and then a little catalogue comes through my letterbox that is full of the latest inventions, all of which will help to banish my blues. I could just throw it in the bin, but my curiosity always gets the better of me. What new inventions will there be in this issue? Perhaps there will be a special spoon that I can buy to help me get more pleasure from eating a boiled egg, or a special pin that will help me pluck the seeds from a pomegranate

All of the items in the book seem to have come from the same source, I imagine a little man with, glasses like milk bottle bottoms sitting in a darkened room, his brow furrowed as he tries to wring yet another new product from his over used prune-like brain. The process is a simple one. Think of a problem in the home, then think of a product that will fix it.

Example problem

I keep finding spiders in my bath, and if I try washing them down the plughole (I know it's cruel, but that's what some people do) ten minutes later they come back up again looking as if they have been white water rafting.

Example product

We will make a special ladder for spiders that can be put in the bath, so that if a spider should accidentally fall in then it can climb out again. Problem solved.

This all sounds good, everybody is happy. Well they would be if all of the products worked. We had a problem that their product wouldn't fix; we called it galloping rug syndrome. We bought a couple of beautiful rugs that went a treat in our lounge; (the colours were perfect they picked out subtle hues in the curtains and cushions.) The trouble was they would not keep still, they moved across the floor at an alarming rate when you weren't watching, I would get up in the morning and find one half way up the wall. The catalogue had just the thing, but it didn't work. It did slow them down to a canter and it took them the best part of a week to get all of the way around the room but it wasn't good enough. I eventually cured the problem the old fashioned way with eight nails, one in each corner, they haven't moved since.

Not all, make life easier products are confined to catalogues. Take the cordless hammer drill for instance, how is it a better product than your old-fashioned mains powered drill? Answer, you do not have to plug in an extension cable when too far from a convenient socket. That all sounds very well, but in reality it goes like this.

You finally decide to get out the drill and put up those shelves for an extremely patient wife, however your plans are scuppered immediately because the drill's battery is flat. So you have to get out the charging equipment whilst suffering a

barrage of well-deserved abuse. Now, wouldn't it have been easier plug in an extension in the first place and just proceed like we did in the past.

Pressure washers are another item that can be a lot more trouble than they are worth. Fine if you just want to use it to clean the car, a process to which they are well suited, but don't be tempted to try it on anything else. My problem came after I had cleaned the car. I noticed a couple of stains on the block paved drive, so thought I would give it a squirt to see if it would come off. Well it didn't just remove the stain it made the whole area look so clean and fresh. I am afraid that enthusiasm got the better of me and I did the whole drive. Whilst doing this I failed to notice that I had blasted the sand out from between the blocks and they were all becoming loose. All the sand had gone down the drain, and another good idea had turned sour, now I'd have to buy some sand to replace it.

I was amazed when I saw the difference in the price of ordinary sand compared with the kiln dried variety that was supposed to be used on block paving. I reasoned that it was only kiln dried, to assist it in going between the blocks, damp sand would stick together. My plan was simple; my wife had gone to visit her sister so I would secretly put our oven to good use. I'd save myself a few bob and reduce today's misery by buying ordinary building sand and drying it myself.

I spread a thin layer of sand on a baking tray and whacked the oven up to full blast. I calculated about 5 minutes a tray and 12 trays to the bag of sand I would have the job done in plenty of time before the wife came back. About three minutes had passed when there was a loud noise came from the cooker, it was a sort of clattwang. I suppose it could've been compared to the first note of "mule train" as sung by a drunken uncle at an easily forgettable New Year's eve party. He thought it was clever to accompany himself by bashing a metal tray on his head in time to the beat of the song.

Anyway, I opened the oven door and there was sand everywhere, the rapid increase in heat had caused stress in the baking tray, which had relieved itself by flexing and catapulting the sand all over the cooker. Why did we only clean the cooker at Christmas before the Turkey went in, if it hadn't been full of fat and grease it would have been easy to sweep the sand out, now I would have to clean it properly.

I am sure I am not the only person who has blasted the sand out of his drive and I won't be the last, but I do feel sorry for those individuals who in looking for a job for their pressure washers take to the roof.

I have seen several individuals blasting the lichen off their tiles, ignorant that they are probably soaking their roofing battens and setting up them up to rot. Be warned, just use the pressure washer for cleaning the car or better still use a bucket and sponge.

Another labour saving item that people need to be ware about is the wall paper steamer. I recently moved house and had to redecorate all the way through. One of the first rooms to be done was the bathroom, and I duly set about stripping of the old wallpaper. The problem was it was really difficult to shift, I think they must've put it on with araldite. My experience with vnyns is that you strip away the front layer, then wet the backing, which can then be easily scrapped off. Well this paper would not have any of that, I tried scoring it but to no avail, it was stuck like a tic to terrier.

This looks like a job for one of those wallpaper steamers I thought. Well to cut a long story short I bought one and wept. It started out reasonably, the paper did come off slightly easier although it was far from as good as I thought it would, but it was better

than nothing. That was until we were half way through our evening meal, when a noise from my childhood came back to haunt me. Whenever the coalman made a delivery my dad made me stand in the front window and count the bags as they carried them from the coal wagon to the coal shed. On one occasion I only counted nineteen when there should've been twenty. A big row was followed by the weighing of the coal using the scales from the back of the truck and the coalman was proved to be right. I guess I must've lost concentration for a minute. Anyway, the noise of the coal being tipped out was exactly the same as what I had just heard, only in this case it was made by all the plaster falling off the wall into the bath. A bad case of over steaming but having spoken to other people about my experience I am not alone.

My latest venture into staking a claim for my piece of the easy life as made me realise that the quest is futile. My wife was moaning about not being able to clean the floor under the washing machine, and suggested we purchased a set of wheels from, the catalogue of good inventions. When they came they were like a pair of giant roller skates, so I followed the instructions and strapped them to the machine. All was well with the world until washing day. When the machine reached the fast rinse cycle it took off across the kitchen, with such force that it did not stop until it had put a large dent in our fridge. On the way it had picked up enough momentum to pull the pipes out of the back and flood the kitchen. The water got into the wiring and blew all of the fuses.

Enough is enough, my mind and my wallet are both stressed out. I bought a new fridge freezer, paid the electrician and now the plumber, I knew where I had been going wrong. Instead of just getting on with life and taking things as they come, I had been trying to hard to make easy and that was a mistake.