

# Forever is a long time in recession

## Worm's eye

Dan Atkinson

It was a mistake to be rude last week about the importance of the film industry to the national economy. That industry has now taken its revenge. Hardly had I inherited the family ciné camera than it transpired I was two months too late — Kodak stopped making the necessary film back in July. The camera could happily whirl away into the next century, but without the shiny black stuff it's a museum piece.

Resigned to non-participation in the forthcoming Gordon Brown-masterminded British film renaissance, I

turned for consolation to an interview with a splendid chap called Charles Ware, who for many years has run a brisk business in the manufacture of spare parts for the Morris Minor. Back in August 1988, Mr Ware espoused what he called "the durable car philosophy", by which he meant that there was no reason why a Minor (last made by Leyland in 1970) should not be regarded as a modern passenger car. Provided the necessary parts continued to be made, he said, the Minor could stay on the road almost indefinitely.

Well, that was in booming 1988, when conservation (or at least talking about conservation) was all the rage. Mr Ware's views get less space now. You can tell we are in a

recession from the hilarious, almost hysterical, stream of TV adverts in which American and European motor giants plead with the consumer to buy their fantastically dull cars.

Four years ago, the motor firms — growing fat on the boom — weren't too worried by Mr Ware's modest proposals. Today, conservation is the last thing big business wants to promote — the message is borrowed straight from President Eisenhower's dictum: "Buy, buy, buy — it's your patriotic duty."

Yet before the next boom triggers, as it will, another bout of hand-wringing about conspicuous consumption, it may be an idea to think through some of Mr Ware's ideas. If an assured supply of

spare parts can maintain the "durable car", the same principle can be applied to a whole range of consumer products — from lawnmowers and cookers down to items marketed on the basis of their disposability — cigarette lighters, wristwatches, and so on.

Creating this assured supply would require a great shift in tax incentives, and changes in the law. It would also need a shift of manpower from production into care and maintenance. In 1991, the creation of a durable goods economy appears irrelevant and impractical. Come the next spasm of boom-induced guilt, things may seem rather different.

I shall hang on to the camera. Just in case.