**Vive La Resolution!**

**By Leon Horton**

Maybe it’s because we’re driven towards self-improvement. Maybe it’s because we’re feeling fat and fed-up after an over-indulgent Christmas. Maybe it’s because there’s nothing better to do in January. Whatever the reason, many of us will stagger from the hangover of another Christmas and hit the gym of the New Year making resolutions we know we won’t keep.

So why do so many of us set sail for failure in this way? It could be argued that in our initial enthusiasm we tend to set the bar too high (get out of debt, change jobs, travel the world, etc), but since the majority of resolutions tend to be more pragmatic (lose weight, take up a hobby, spend less time on Facebook, etc), might we not expect a reasonable return on our hopes for the coming year?

Not so, according to a study from the University of Bristol. Thanks to grant money well-spent, scientists now know that 88% of people who give themselves New Year resolutions are doomed from the off, despite the fact that 52% claim to be confident of success.

It’s not all doom and gloom, though. They also claim that men, by and large, achieve more by setting specific targets (to reduce their alcohol intake from ten to five pints a week, say, rather than just saying ‘cut back on the booze’), whereas women are far more likely to succeed if they make their goals public and get support from friends and family.

Personally, I always opt for a three-pronged attack; a trident of try harder, if you will; an easy goal, a not so easy goal, and a goal so ludicrous that it just might happen. Last year my three resolutions were: to take up gardening (which I duly did), to give up smoking (which I duly didn’t), and to produce a piece of writing so exquisite, so masterly, that it would live in history as a testament to what human endeavour can achieve...

Ah, well. One out of three wasn’t bad.

The practice of making New Year resolutions is found in many cultures, stretches back centuries, and has, of course, changed considerably over the years. In ancient times, Babylonians and Romans would begin each year by making promises to their gods to return borrowed objects and pay their debts; these days we are more likely to promise to cut up our credit cards and stop using payday loan companies. In medieval times, knights would take the ‘Peacock Vow’ at the end of the Christmas period to reaffirm their commitment to chivalry; in modern times, we might resolve to stop ending relationships by text message.

Whatever our reasons, whatever our concerns, in the making of resolutions - be they social, material or philosophical - it matters not if we fail. What matters is that we have the willingness to improve our lives and, by implication, the lives of those close to us. This year my big three are: to give up smoking, to enrol on an Open University course, and to use my meagre talents to praise a wise and caring government in all their policies.

Ah, well. One out of three won’t be bad. Vive La Resolution!