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# The blighting on the wall

THERE is a particularly insidious poster campaign around town at the moment, which I imagine to be in the middle of its run. It features a man on a ladder, apparently beginning to paint something on the side of a lorry. As the weeks go by, the advertisers will cunningly reveal that he has spent his time up there painting a cigarette ad.

I don't know which product this clever device is promoting. But by the campaign's end, as sure as cigs are cigs, you will have absorbed the message and its subtle encouragement to smoke.

Because I am a limp-willed smoker who is constantly reminded of cigarettes by these billboards, I find I have a warm regard for Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans, a 34-year-old surgeon from New South Wales who is a leading member of Buga-Up (Billboard Utilising Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promotions).

He and his lively friends in Buga-Up have commandeered the wit and slyness of the copywriter to convert cigarette ads into effective assaults on the tobacco industry in Australia. With a can of spray paint on an extension pole, a pre-planned slogan and a little Dutch courage, they transform ads such as New, Mild and Marlboro into New, Vile and a Bore, and Have Your Own Black (for John Player Specials) into Have Your Own Black Lungs.

Chesterfield-Evans was in Britain last week to encourage anti-smoking campaigners to follow suit. His talks were not all open to the public, because a number of distinguished doctors at them did not necessarily want to be associated with a fellow who cheerily advocates the wilful damaging of property. There is no doubt, though, that he has their support.

He is an alert, boyish

character who, until three years ago, had sailed through his medical career ignoring the ultimate reason for the operations he was performing. He is the sort of doctor who is uninhibited about medical matters: he will tell you a gruesome story about the bladder over a meal, and make an amputation sound funny.

However, one particular patient's death affected him badly. "He was in his early fifties and on about 50 Benson and Hedges a day. His premature death was entirely due to cigarettes. I was very upset by it. Anyway, my girlfriend decided to take me out of myself and we went to the movies... but when the lights went down, the Marlboro man rode on to the screen. I thought, this is where it all starts. I will not rest until I've stopped it."

His labours began one Saturday night after a few drinks. "Naturally, I was soon caught and found guilty of wilfully marking premises. But the appeal court found that a piece of paper on a billboard could not be described legally as premises." The point, he believes, was that neither the law nor the tobacco industry wanted to confront the issue. Thus Buga-Up has been more or less left to its own devices.

He says that Australian advertisers have now begun designing posters with slogans out of reach. Not to be outdone, Buga-Up has pioneered the exploding paint-bag, which is either thrown or catapulted against the hoarding.

"Ultimately, cigarette ads rely on subtle and dishonest imagery. If you make fun of just one copy of a poster, people will remember the joke every time they see that poster."

Notebook is written by

**Henry Porter**