

Cracker gags for the PC brigade? Pull the other one

By David Wilkes

EVEN if you had never heard them before, they would be more likely to induce a groan than a laugh.

So after putting up with the same old cracker jokes for decades, a sigh of relief might be in order at the news that fresh gags have been readied for this Christmas.

Unfortunately - or reassuringly, depending on your point of view - the humour in the new breed seems to be just as toe-curling.

Among dozens of jokes getting the boot is: 'What lies quivering at the bottom of the ocean? A nervous wreck'.

But its replacement - 'What lies in a pram and wobbles? A jelly baby' - is hardly a brave new world for comedy.

In a sign of the times, others have been axed because they are now considered politically incorrect - such as one about transvestites. Mother-in-law jokes and schoolboys' favourites involving cruelty to animals of the 'frog in a liquidiser' variety have also been dropped.

The changes were announced yesterday by Britain's biggest cracker maker, Swantex, after its research showed an overhaul was needed to make Christmas go with a bang. For the first time the crackers will also include a 'conversation starter' aimed at making the dinner table experience more enjoyable.

A spokesman for the family firm said: 'Jokes are tested by an experienced Swantex panel, including members of the Byk family [which runs the company] in laboratory conditions, i.e. over lunch with optional wine. Jokes that fail to register a smile or a groan are not included in crackers.'

For some the fact the new jokes remain in a similar vein to the old ones is a good thing.

Garry Whannel, Professor of Media Cultures at the University of Bedfordshire, said: 'Pulling a cracker is a ritual and part of that ritual is knowing the jokes are not very good.'

Dr Chris Ritchie, who runs the world's only degree course in comedy, at Southampton Solent University, added: 'They have got rid of some outdated negative stereotyping by losing the mother-in-law and transvestite material, but have kept the essential corniness that we all love.'

Swantex says cracker sales are up 21 per cent on last year.

WHAT'S OUT...

Q: Where can you find literature about Santa's assistants?
A: The elf-help section



Q: Son - Mum can I have a dog for Christmas? **A:** Mum - No you can have turkey the same as everyone else

Q: What do you call a deer with no eyes? **A:** No idea

Q: What do reindeer put on a Christmas tree? **A:** Horn-aments

Q: What is green and turns red at the push of a button?
A: A frog in a liquidiser



Q: What lies quivering at the bottom of the ocean?
A: A nervous wreck



Q: What does a transvestite do for Christmas? **A:** Eat, drink and be Mary



Q: What does a mother-in-law call her broom? **A:** Basic transportation



Q: What do you call a drunk working at an upholstery shop?
A: A recovering alcoholic

...AND WHAT'S IN

Q: What lies in a pram and wobbles? **A:** A jelly baby



Q: What do angry mice send each other at Christmas?
A: Cross mouse cards



Q: Where do astronauts leave their cars? **A:** At parking meteors

Q: What do you get when you cross a hen with a clock? **A:** An alarm cluck



Q: What sort of shoes do frogs wear in the summer?
A: Open toad sandals

Q: What athlete is warmest in winter? **A:** A long jumper

Q: What do you call a snowman in the summer?
A: A puddle



AND HERE ARE SOME CONVERSATION STARTERS

- With whom would you least like to be stuck in a lift?
- When was the last time you cried?
- What last made you laugh until your stomach ached?
- What is your favourite film moment?
- What is your favourite film quote?