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EX-SMOKERS WILL SOON FIND OUT IF THEY ARE UP TO SNUFF

I've seen a lot of unlikely, successful comebacks over the years – Spandau Ballet, double denim, Thierry Henry at Arsenal – but snuff?

By the till at my local London corner shop, there's a big crate of the stuff. "People kept asking for it," shrugged my newsagent when I started examining one of the tiny blue J & H Wilson boxes. "So finally I ordered a whole load and it's selling really well. At 99p a tin, I'm getting a lot of young men trying it for the first time. The Polish builders have been buying it instead of their morning packet of B&H, too. It's a cheaper, healthier alternative to the fags, I suppose."

Healthier? Sticking pulverised tobacco leaves up your nostrils? But a quick Google search seems to confirm this. "Unlike tobacco smoke, snuff is free of tar and harmful gases such as carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides," says one snuffer's website. There are no secondary health complications, and "since it cannot be inhaled into the lungs, there is no risk of lung cancer, bronchitis, and emphysema." Another site claims "there has only ever been one reported case of cancer from snuff use in the UK, and that was from a farmer in Suffolk who managed to put snuff in his ear for 40 years and developed ear cancer."

Manufacturers like J & H Wilson – once renowned for using droll slogans such as "We are as famous for pinching as the Italians" or a picture of Napoleon accompanied by the caption "It wasn't just Josephine that got up his nose" – might want to play the health card to introduce all the quitting smokers of 2013 to the joys of snuff. And since the expression "toffee-nosed" did originate from well-born snuff-takers' toffee-coloured nasal excretions, the ad campaign to convert today's toffs has already been written.