

JULIA BRADBURY on why handmade items are important, how home-grown traditions are being revived, and the success of British handicraft at a time when the future of our country has never been more in focus

# First lady



**SPOILER ALERT:** Some good news. Bookings on campsites are already up this year, and business is booming for many manufacturers. It's heartening that the camping, caravanning, motorhome and glamping industry is so vibrant and forward-looking right now. The caravanning sector alone is worth more than £6 billion to the UK economy and employs 130,000 people. The outdoors sector as a whole appears to be on the up in the UK.

It was great to see so many businesses doing a brilliant job while I was presenting the Club's Owner Satisfaction Awards in Manchester earlier this year, and as I presented them it was clear there were a number of standout British brands that had done exceptionally well, both in terms of having well-made and trusted products and providing top notch customer service.

Overseas manufacturers also performed well, and it's good to see a bit of healthy competition that keeps everybody focused.

It got me thinking about all the doom and gloom Brexit news bombarding us every day... why don't we big-up the positives instead?

On my travels I come into contact with lots of interesting people with all sorts of stories, some of them making very creative or innovative products that are proudly designed and made in the UK, so I'm going to celebrate and share some of them with you.

As a bit of a horologist I love a good timepiece and I have one that was designed and built by two British fellas, Ian Elliot and Alex Brown. We've all heard the best watches come from Switzerland, right? Well, we have a history of making fine timepieces in Great Britain too. Edward

East was a watchmaker to Charles I, and a member of the Clockmakers' Company established in London in 1631. Ian and Alex haven't been around for quite as long but they worked together for more than 20 years at the Animal brand, when they decided to partner up and form Elliot Brown, which it turns out was a smart move. The watches are award-winning, thoroughly British timepieces, and are put through rigorous testing to survive the harshest of conditions.

When you buy the Canford Mountain Rescue Edition, they make a donation to Mountain Rescue teams in England and Wales, so by supporting a British brand you're also helping people who get into difficulty out on the hills.

I first met the aptly-named Robin Wood MBE, when I presented him with an award on behalf of the National Trust. A few years later I popped my head around his workshop stable-door in Edale, Derbyshire, and he was busy making something beautiful out of wood using his foot-powered lathe – a skill that has earned him that MBE. He makes beautiful wooden bowls, knives, plates and tools. I think he's the only person in the world making his woodwork in this way, a skill which he single-handedly revived, but now imparts to the world via the medium of YouTube!

He loves his job and has resurrected a great tradition. If you're passing you can't miss him because he works with his doors wide open so he can let the outside in. Like me, he appreciates a bit of house music so you may find him working particularly fast when the speakers are on. Every piece he makes is unique – I have a gorgeous

bowl of his at home and it's one of my most treasured possessions.

Another uplifting story comes in the rather unlikely shape of a rake. The Rudd's Rake Factory of Dufton in Cumbria has been making them by hand

for four generations. A true family business that has been running for almost 400 years, the Rudds have seen their rakes appear in the BBC's Poldark series and they were used in the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony. I also gave one to my mate Matt Baker on the One Show a few years ago for his birthday. Who needs a leaf-blower when you can get yourself one of these beauties?

I think it's incredibly important to support our home-grown, often family-run enterprises. There's something magical and intrinsically important to us as human beings to use our brains and our hands in a connected way. I'm not saying we should all become rake-makers but you can appreciate it's an incredible part of human evolution – we make and create, it's a phenomenal skill and we shouldn't let go of it.

Buying British, or to put it another way, buying local, is also one of the Club's great constant messages that we promote through the Eat Local campaign too.

So when you're out and about, consider how you are supporting our home nation with your buying power. You might be eating British-grown food from a British-made bowl using British-made cutlery while sitting in a British-made caravan. What a brilliant way to support our economy and our traditions.