

One man's view on cycling in Edinburgh



by Kim Harding

I have been cycling for more years than I care to remember, I first started to ride a bicycle on the roads on my own at the age of seven. Even in the days when I worked as a driving instructor, if I needed to nip to the shop to get milk or a paper, I would take the bike rather than the car. Before starting at University Edinburgh as a mature student I had never really lived in a town and had only occasionally used a bike to get to and from work.

Arriving at Uni in 1994 I sold my car (a red MG Midget) to fund my studies, thinking that in four years time I would buy another one. In the first week I had a meeting with my director of studies, a great character called Charlie Hinks, and I was bemoaning the problem of getting to morning lectures in George Square (I was living in a student flat at the King's Buildings). Charlie put down his pipe and said:- "You had better get yourself a bike then".

This has proved to be very good advice.

When I came to graduate, I found that far from wanting to buy another car, I really didn't want to own a car. I had discovered freedom and didn't want to give it up! Living in a city, a car is just a nuisance. You have to worry about where to park the thing, it is a drag on your finances (given the choice between insuring a car or a week's skiing holiday, I will take the holiday.)

When you do try to drive in the city, there is all that congestion caused by all those other people driving. Riding a

bicycle you can avoid most of these problems. Yes, there are some issues around cycle parking, but things in Edinburgh are getting better. Yes, it rains, but not as often as you might think. Only 5% of my commutes are made in the rain, and anyway I have a rain coat. Yes, there are hills in Edinburgh, but modern bicycles have gears and lots of them. If I really need to drive somewhere I just rent a car (or van). I have considered joining the City Car Club but, I have yet to convince myself that I would use it enough to make it worthwhile.

Not everything is perfect with cycling in Edinburgh. There are roads which are unpleasant to ride on, and some drivers are not as careful around cyclists as they should be. However, cycling isn't actually as dangerous as it is made out to be. On average, cyclists (and other active people) live two years longer than the general population, although that alone doesn't make it feel safer.

The best way to deal with these problems is to improve our road infrastructure and make it more people friendly. That is why I am supporting the [Pedal on Parliament](#) event on 28 April 2012, which is highlighting the need for safer roads for everyone.

Kim Harding lives in Edinburgh and writes a blog which highlights news about many things including a lot about cycling.

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