

How to give up cycling

Contributed by Bob Williams
30 November 2006

[Editor's note: this is one of the finest "what you can do" articles to address our global-warming lifestyle! - JL]

Following the shocking revelation that heat generated by vigorous exercise is a major contributor to global warming, we are all having to reassess our own activities. It comes as a major surprise to many of us that storing energy in human fat is actually a valuable way of reducing our impact on the environment. Government may be introducing plans to extract this fat by large-scale liposuction programmes and storing it underground, but we all have a responsibility to reduce our participation in ecologically hazardous physical activity.

Looking at my own lifestyle, it was easy to identify my cycling habit as a major problem. I'm only too aware of the amount of heat that cycling can generate but cutting down was not going to be easy, so six months ago I turned for help to my friend Jeremy. He has not cycled since he was a child and is a respectable three stone heavier than me. He now runs a consultancy helping people like me to face up to and overcome our environmental deficit.

I explained to Jeremy that I had been trying to reduce my cycling mileage:

"I've been trying to keep it down to 10 miles a day but it just keeps creeping up – sometimes I'm doing 20 or 30 a day. And the weekends are the worst; when the sun is shining I just can't resist heading for the hills."

Jeremy explained that there were different approaches to the problem:

"Some people can gradually cut down their cycling but that doesn't work for everyone. People like you probably need to just decide to stop cycling entirely one day. I'd suggest you just get rid of your bikes and buy a car."

"Buy a car? But that's such an unreliable way to travel around town. You never know when you are going to arrive because of congestion and problems with parking. I mean, I have work to do and people who rely on me being on time for my appointments."

"You have to explain to people why you are making this choice. You'll probably find that they are very understanding."

"And what about longer journeys? I use my folding bike to get to the train station and then I can work on the train – it's incredibly convenient. In a car, you just have to sit there and you can't do anything else."

"Well, I admit that it can be difficult combining car travel with other activities but you'd be surprised how much you can do with a little practice. Talking on the phone, texting, smoking, eating, drinking – it's all possible."

"But what about the cost? I mean cars cost thousands of pounds and that's just to buy one. Then there are all the running costs and insurance and tax and the hassle if they break down and so on. And, on top of that, if I stop taking exercise and put on weight, I'll probably be shortening my life as well. So you're offering me the opportunity to have less money and die sooner. It's not very appealing."

Jeremy looked pained.

"Look, no one said it was going to be easy. There are some sacrifices we all have to make if we are going to overcome the problems facing the planet. After all, it won't be any good living longer if climate change means the country has become either a desert or been flooded by the sea."

I nodded, feeling suitably guilty.

"OK, I take the point. But you've got to give me something here. What about the fun factor? I get a big kick out of cycling, both going up the hills and coming down them – especially when I'm off road on my mountain bike. How can I get that kind of sensation in a car? I mean it's just like sitting down in an armchair. I'm afraid that I'll get so bored that I won't want to carry on."

Jeremy smiled.

"I can definitely help you there! You just have to drive as fast as possible and the speed will compensate for being inside the box. It really can be great fun."

“That sounds good. But, and forgive me if I sound like a wimp, isn’t it also terribly dangerous? I hear that thousands of people are killed and injured every year because of people speeding on the roads. And you can get into trouble for speeding as well, surely?”

This time Jeremy laughed.

“Ah, now we’re getting to the point – to succeed you need a fundamental change in your attitude. I expect that like many other people you think that becoming a motorist is just a matter of passing your test and getting a car.”

“It’s not?”

“No, to be a true motorist you have to believe in motorism.”

“Motorism? What on earth is that?”

“Motorism is a belief system with two main principles. The first is that, as a motorist, you have a right to drive whatever you like and wherever you like. Don’t fall into the all too common trap of thinking that the vulnerability of cyclists, animals, pedestrians and whoever should affect how and where you drive.”

“Oh right. Well I can see how easy it would be to fall into that particular trap. And what’s the second principle?”

“The second principle is that road rage is good. Yes, you’ll hear people talking about road rage as if it was a bad thing but this of course is nonsense. There are so many obstacles facing motorists - traffic laws, traffic wardens, traffic jams and, of course, traffic – that they need anger and aggression to overcome them. After all if you thought about the real stress and cost of motoring you’d probably just give up and take the bus and then where would we be?”

“Phew. I have to admit there’s no answer to that.”

So how am I getting on six months later? Even though I do try to drive everywhere and not ride my bike I still don’t think I can call myself a real motorist. But at least I do know that I am poorer, fatter, and angrier then ever before.

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Bob Williams is a software specialist in England. He sent his article to Culture Change in the spirit of "Helpful Advice?"
Laughter indeed helps! His website:

www.redsmoke.co.uk/How_to_give_up_cycling.htm

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