



# Drive less, cycle more

It's all too easy to depend on the car for transport, especially if you have a family. **Ben Searle** suggests ways to cycle more instead

Car use is decreasing in Britain: 5% down between 2004 and 2008 – most noticeably in London, where cycling has had a resurgence. The population isn't switching from cars to bikes en masse, but some people are making trips they would once have driven by bike instead. Why? To save money. To beat congestion. For environmental or health reasons.

Regular cyclists know the advantages of travelling by bike, and for us the transition from car trips to cycle trips is easier. But there are still factors that can stop us cycling as much as we'd like, such as where we live, the jobs we take, and our choice of schools. So how can we spend more time cycling? Here are some suggestions.

## **Trip computing**

Start by keeping a travel diary for a month. Record all your trips. List other planned trips, such as holidays. Take a close look at them. How many could you replace by bike? Why are you not cycling them? Too far? Need to carry a lot of stuff? The trip involves someone less able? Pick off the easy hits – the trips with the lowest mileage – and work your way up to ones that throw up more challenges.



**Getting to work or school**

If your commute is under three miles: do it now! Three to ten miles? Try it some days. Ten miles plus? Buy yourself a nice bike to motivate you. You don't have to make the switch in one go. Try a day or two a week. Or make half your commutes by bike for a month. It does get easier. And the more you do it, the more you'll know what you're comfortable with. For more help, see [biketoworkbook.com](http://biketoworkbook.com) or [ctc.org.uk](http://ctc.org.uk).

If you're still struggling, try an electric bike. You decide how much effort to put in. Electric bikes also enable a family member with a disability to keep cycling – so that you all can (from £800, reviews at [www.atob.org.uk](http://www.atob.org.uk) and [www.electricbikemag.co.uk](http://www.electricbikemag.co.uk)).

Dropping off children by bike can start young. From nine months and up you could use a child seat (see p66), or for more all-round protection use a single or a double child trailer. Croozer and Chariot make a good range (from £250, [www.amba-marketing.com](http://www.amba-marketing.com)) and they'll carry infants as young as three months – or less at your discretion – using a dedicated cycle trailer baby seat.

**Get them pedalling**

Whenever practical, let them ride their own bikes. My two year old on her Puky LRM balance/trainer bike (£65, [www.pukybikes.co.uk](http://www.pukybikes.co.uk))

can move at a good clip – making three-mile trips on hers. They can very easily graduate from this to a pedal cycle, when 20-mile trips are possible by the age of five.

Most people accept children cycling on the pavement, with care, until aged nine or ten. Gradually move to riding on road together as their skills and speed increase. At what age this happens depends on each child. Use your judgment. Sign up your child to Bikeability training when they are offered it at school ([www.dft.gov.uk/bikeability](http://www.dft.gov.uk/bikeability)) and consider cycle training for yourself.

Child-back tandems are very useful to cover ground or trickier routes, and great fun – 40-mile trips are possible for five year olds. Models include the Raven Dynamic, a high-end Rohloff hub gear model (around £2000, [www.thorncycles.com](http://www.thorncycles.com)) or Dawes Duet (£800, [www.dawescycles.com](http://www.dawescycles.com)). Alternatively, 20-inch wheel tandems are very rider-size-versatile. Consider the very packable Bike Friday Tandem Two's Day (£3000, [www.bikefriday.com](http://www.bikefriday.com)) or the Circe Helios tandem (£1099, [www.circecycles.com](http://www.circecycles.com)).

Or adapt an adult tandem with kiddy cranks – you'll need a seat tube attachment block (£61, [www.sjscycles.com](http://www.sjscycles.com)). Trailer-cycles are much more affordable and are swappable between bikes, but many are poorly designed and built. The more stable rack-mounted Burley and Islabikes models are

Slow down to enjoy urban or rural journeys with children

**I WENT CAR-FREE**  
**Victoria hazael**

As soon as I passed my driving test, I bought a car. I thought I couldn't live without it. Then it got older and more expensive to run. The final straw came earlier this year: it was ten years old and failed its MOT. The mechanic shook his head.

As I'd just had a baby, we did think about buying a new family car, but, with a shrinking budget, we decided to save money and see if we could cope without one. We worked out what we used the car for and looked at the alternatives: the weekly food shop can be ordered online; we live near the station so my husband can get the train to work; and we both have bikes so can cycle or walk.

There's no denying it is a bit more hassle, especially with a baby. However, we are saving money, not just on the price of a new car, but on petrol, insurance, car tax, MOT, repairs and parking charges. Even if we take a few taxis or hire a car occasionally we are still not out of pocket.

So far I've learned many things. For example, there is only so much shopping you can fit in a bike trailer. You also need to be pretty strong to ride a loaded cargo bike up a hill. If you are using the train with a bike, or even a buggy, check that there are not lots of steps at your destination. Car clubs can be pricy and it is often cheaper to hire a car for a whole day instead of paying by the hour.

Opposite: iStockphoto.com. This page: Ben Searle



(Top) Bikes used often must be accessible  
(Right) Saddlebags let even racers carry kit



(Above left) 'Longtail' load bikes like this Yuba Mundo are the cheapest cargo bikes

(Above) But trikes like this Christiania can carry lots more. Price? Less than a car!

the only ones I can really recommend but are out of production.

As well as the obvious pleasure you will have cycling as a family, the best thing about investing in good junior cycling equipment is that its resale value will remain high. Network with cycling friends to obtain and pass on hard-to-find bikes and equipment.

### Avoiding the parental taxi

As your children get older, if you're going to pick them up by bike, don't dress to embarrass them, and let them ride any bike they want to. Even if it's a BMX, it's a bike. Teenagers are quite capable of using buses and trains, given a little experience.

If days out including other people's children are becoming car dominated, why not suggest family bike trips from your home area? Start simple and well within everyone's capabilities and they'll want to do it again. Give advice when asked. Once you have other parents' confidence, they may let you accompany their children on longer rides.

### Shopping and utility cycling

A bike equipped with front and rear panniers can carry a surprising amount, so invest in a good set. A couple of bungees will hold bulky packets like nappies on top.

For really big loads, consider a cargo bike (plenty of ideas at [www.cargocycling.org](http://www.cargocycling.org) and [www.reallyusefulbikes.co.uk](http://www.reallyusefulbikes.co.uk)) or a cargo-carrying bike trailer such as the Carry Freedom range (from £190, [www.carryfreedom.com](http://www.carryfreedom.com)). Trailers are cheaper, versatile and much easier to store.

## WHY I'M NOT CAR-FREE

### Chris Juden

We were always a car-free family. Most cyclists we knew got a car when the kids arrived. But we persisted, doing all the things in this article and enjoying it, even as new trains with less space for bikes put many parts of Britain out of bounds to a cycling family. Our response was to buy a roof-rack and rent cars with gutters, which was good until we couldn't rent one old enough to have them! In 2004 'improved' rolling stock also came to Surrey, and that's how the train operators – of all people – persuaded us to get a car!

Suddenly we could go where we liked, when we liked, with whichever bikes we liked – and so cheaply. I kept records of every penny spent on that car. After seven years it comes to only 24p per mile!

The first cycling casualty of car ownership was my weekly commute to work via the supermarket with a bike trailer. It's six hilly miles each way, but I kept cycling the other four days. Then work moved to an office 12 miles away. I'm no fitness freak. I don't want extra training, but I reckon twice as far, half as often, should keep me just as healthy. Now I ride only on nice days.

It's a shame, but that's life in Britain. Some big things need to change for more than a passionate minority of us to travel sustainably. Rail fares have doubled in real terms since 1975, whilst the cost of motoring is about the same now as then. I'm afraid the 'great car' nettle has grown too strong for any party to grasp, in which case we must wait for it to wilt from natural causes. Maybe that won't take too long. I'm doing my bit!



Left: Adam Coiffman

If a load is too big to carry by bike, order from a supermarket online and get it delivered. Almost any bulky item can be delivered for a reasonable cost.

With cycle-training and decent bikes, the school run needn't be a nightmare

### Going further...

If it's too far, or your options for a pleasant ride are limited, take the train. It's not often that you'd need to ride more than ten miles from a station and rarely more than 20. Local services carry at least two (often four) bikes most of the time. The advertised maximum is often only enforced at peak times into urban areas.

Folding bikes are always carried. This applies to bagged bikes too, but most of the bags you can buy are too bulky and heavy to ride with – so make your own from ripstop nylon.

Arrangements can be more certain from a mainline station with longer-distance services; most have six bookable bike spaces. Some take tandems. Otherwise a standard tandem can be split with S&S couplings – from about £500 if fitted when you order a tandem, more if

fitted afterwards ([www.sandsmachine.com](http://www.sandsmachine.com)).

National Express and other coaches are possible for bagged and folding bikes, but there is less certainty that they will be carried – refer to Cycle Aug-Sept 2008. Local buses will often carry compact folding bikes, such as a Brompton or perhaps the Mezzo D10 (both reviewed Cycle June-July 2011).

However, long distances could be more feasible than you think. Build yourself up through your local CTC group's rides or audax events (Audax UK, the long-distance cycling association, [www.aukweb.net](http://www.aukweb.net)). I only found out what I was capable of in my late 30s, riding from Chepstow to Anglesey return in a weekend.

Got to reach an early start audax or sportive event? Arrive the day before and stay overnight. The cycling can be a good warm-up, and a train ride relaxing compared to driving. On a race-ready road bike or MTB you're limited in what you can carry, but Carradice saddlebags are capacious and quickly removed (from £39, [www.carradice.co.uk](http://www.carradice.co.uk)). You could even fit slicks to your MTB and carry foldable knobbies to swap over when you arrive.

Holidays could start closer to home, especially for younger children, where pedalling to the nearest campsite and beyond is adventure itself. Going abroad? Train and ferry take you to some great destinations – Ireland, Holland, Normandy, Brittany, Northern Spain (connecting to the bike-friendly FEVE coastal railway) to name a few. European Bike Express run dedicated coaches for cyclists and their bikes to France and northern Spain ([www.bike-express.co.uk](http://www.bike-express.co.uk)).

### Cycle storage

Your most useful bike(s) need to be quickly accessible and ready to ride or you'll resort to the car. The lucky few have a garage. Otherwise you could consider a secure garden shelter (from £469, [www.trimetals.co.uk](http://www.trimetals.co.uk)).

If you need to limit spending, storing and maintaining, go for a versatile high-quality bike that meets several, or all of, your needs. For many, this will be a 700C-wheeled touring bike (such as the excellent Spa Cycles Ti Touring, from £1450, reviewed Cycle June-July 2011, [www.spacycles.co.uk](http://www.spacycles.co.uk)) or a hybrid/trekking bike. Or you could adapt a pre-loved 'old-school' hardtail mountain bike (steel Specialized Rockhoppers are perfect) with slick tyres and carrier racks.

To ensure you keep riding, have a 'hack' bike handy for rainy winter days or when theft is a worry.

### Join the car club

What's left in your travel diary? If you're down to just a few journeys that a car is really useful for, why not join a car club? This provides quick and convenient access to a car, with trips bookable online and pricing favouring short hires. For longer periods or longer trips, go to a conventional car hire company. Or perhaps you could share car ownership with friends? See [www.carplus.org.uk](http://www.carplus.org.uk). Or just arrange a lift: [www.liftshare.com](http://www.liftshare.com).

You may even be able to live without a car entirely, and then your bike mileage will really surge. Savings can easily exceed £2,000 per year. Use this online calculator to find out how much you can save: [www.eta.co.uk/car\\_cost\\_calculator](http://www.eta.co.uk/car_cost_calculator).

Now which bikes did you have on that wishlist?