**My experience of ‘Ditching the car’ and cycling to work.**

Firstly, a disclaimer - I don’t think of myself as a ‘cyclist’. One of the oddest things about selling my car and commuting to work on a bicycle is that to others, you instantly become a ‘cyclist’. Those who know me well understand that nothing could be further from the truth. I have however, over the past year come to realise that nearly every preconception I had about riding a bicycle was wrong and I now want to encourage others to give it a go too.

So why do I say I am not a cyclist? Well, until a second-hand bicycle arrived as a Christmas gift, I had not really ridden a bicycle since primary school. The reason for the bike arriving was a purely practical one, I simply wanted to get from my house to the train station faster than walking, but as someone who was looking to reduce his environmental footprint, I didn’t want to drive. The journey was about 1.5km, and took 20 minutes to walk, but my wife could get into town in five minutes on the bicycle.

The bike duly arrived. Not wanting to be totally unprepared, I checked out some guides for cycling on the roads from Cycling UK. As it turns out, there is some truth in the saying, “it’s like riding a bicycle,” and one straightforward trip to the shops later to collect some groceries and I felt a lot more confident.

Now that I had established that I could get from home to the shops, I knew that I wanted to try to cycle to work. However as a GP, I also needed to be able to get to home visits during the day, and I wasn’t sure how I would go about bringing my lunch into work. Lots of barriers my mind existed to justify not changing what I had always done. But change does not have to be big, or done all in one go, and so I picked a Tuesday morning in February 2020 and decided I would try cycling to work.

Choosing a midweek date meant that I could leave a change of clothes in work, and just pack my lunch in a backpack. Everything else could be brought the day before and taken back the day after.

The commute was to take me along the A56 from Frodsham, between the two bridges, and on up Sutton Weaver before coming into Runcorn. I would then be able to come through some of the residential areas and through Town Park. The whole journey was about 6.5km.

I loved it!

I arrived at work feeling good, having done some exercise having been able to enjoy some great scenery through the park. Sure, there was a hill, but what goes up must come down. Even on the uphill, changing to a lower gear and taking it slow and steady was all that it needed, one pedal at a time. Coming home in the evening, there is nothing like cycling back to help a stressful day to dissipate.

There was now no looking back as I knew that I could do this. Very soon I was cycling every day. I have come to embrace my panniers as my best friends. They make my bike versatile and carry my work clothes, keep them dry and they hold my shopping as well. Even home visits were not an issue as I simply put my equipment into my pannier and set off.

But what about all those other barriers my mind had created? I had assumed that riding along the road, particularly the A56, would be terrifying experience, and that cycling would take much longer. But our roads are so full of traffic that cars don’t go anywhere fast, they just take up lots of space. Of course, anyone who has driven to Frodsham will know the traffic queues back from Fluin Lane to the swing bridge, and beyond. Suffice to say, this is something I haven’t had to worry about and although my commute is around five minutes longer now, the trade off of 40 minutes of exercise built into my day is well worth it.

And the weather? I started this journey in Winter and if it rained I put on a coat and some waterproof over-trousers. If it’s cold I put on an extra layer but whilst we like to complain about the weather in this country, I find the rain is never as frequent or as heavy as you think and it hasn’t stopped me yet.

The final straw for my car came when I went to Northwich. “Battery draining while not in use,” the car told me. The reality was that my car was just sitting on the driveway. My wife had a car, which I would be able to use it for the few times I needed to go further afield, so in the end it was a very easy decision.

The car was sold.

That was June 2020, and as I write this in September 2021 I still don’t own a car. We dropped to a one car household and even that car will spend most of the time sat on the drive. I feel healthier, I lost 5kg in weight and I have saved a small fortune in petrol, car insurance and vehicle excise duty. I don’t regret my decision and I am glad I challenged my preconceptions.

It would be remiss of me if I didn’t leave you with some medical guidance as food for thought. The Chief Medical Officer recommends that adults should be active daily, with at least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) over a week, as well as strength building activity twice a week. Yet 33% of men and 45% of women don’t reach this target and more worryingly, 1 in 5 men and 1 in 4 women do less than 30 minutes of any physical activity a week. Building activity into our daily lives, such as cycling to work or the shops, is a simple way to improve our health without needing to carve out time from our busy schedules.

 Patrick Eakin. October 2021

 Ref : Full Article by Patrick Eakin on ‘Ditching the car’ vEdits