

# INSPIRED TO GO BY BIKE!

## What inspires people to start using a bike for everyday transport like shopping or getting to work, school or leisure?

Of course you are much more likely to *stay cycling* if road and path conditions feel safe and welcoming, but it often also needs a spark or a push to *get started* – whether it is a friend, climate concerns, personal health, setting your children an example, or many other reasons.

**So Spokes ran a competition to ask ..**  
***What was your cycling inspiration?***

This factsheet explains the inspirations, in the words of the real people who experienced them.

## Top motivations were...

- Friends and relations, example or persuasion
- Climate and environment concerns
- Personal health and fitness
- Concern for one's children's future
- Opportunities provided by e-bikes
- Journey reliability and/or speed
- Work colleagues
- Seeing other people on bikes
- Living near cycling infrastructure
- Wanting an alternative to going by car
- Overcoming a medical problem or injury
- Wanting to join in a charity ride
- A helpful bike shop or the Bike Station

## Health, Environment and e-bike



**Fenella Watson**

An e-bike has transformed my cycling habits. Instead of cycling occasionally when the weather is good, I can cycle to work most days. It also enables me to get up hills with a toddler on the back! I bought a toddler seat and began taking my first child to nursery when she was 9 months. I'm looking into buying a trailer, to take two children in all weathers to school and nursery.

I cycle because I enjoy the exercise and time spent outside. I pass farms, pastures and a quarry, and enjoy the changing seasons. Soon I'll begin stopping for blackberry picking. I don't have the time or patience to go to a gym, and cycling is my main form of exercise. I like showing my daughters that being active is for everyone. I like reducing my carbon footprint, repaying all those times I cheated and took our toddler for a drive in the car just to get her to sleep!

## A perfect storm of inspirations

My inspiration to cycle was a perfect storm in the 1990s.

1. I had two young children under five and a full time job. I wanted to be with them during my spare time so going to the gym wasn't on but I was desperate to keep fit somehow.
2. Bus lanes were being installed along part of my home to work journey. I was commuting in my single occupancy car and feeling guilty about it.
3. My employer decided to offer a choice of taking cash instead of a company car.

It was an easy decision. I gave up my car and commuted by bike. I never regretted it and surprisingly hardly ever needed to use the bus even in Winter.



**Stella Thomson**

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## My children and their future Charlie Wood

Like many people, I've cycled since childhood albeit mostly recreationally. The inspiration to having cycling as first choice, has come, as with much of the positive inspiration in my life, from my children.



**Looking to my children's future, there are so many reasons – climate change, physical and mental health and air pollution for example – to choose cycling over**

**the car, but the real inspiration for me is that cycling with my kids is simply real quality time with them.**

It mostly takes us longer to get places, and we have to plan ahead more, but the benefits are way more than worth it. We talk more than in the car and, other than when forced to take the kids onto some of Edinburgh's less inspiring roads, I'm told I'm *"a lot more fun to be around"* (i.e. a lot less stressed) than when driving.

We're so much more engaged with each other and the area we're travelling through. We stop more. We stop for shops, cafes, playgrounds, interesting trees, a weird minibeast or plant in the hedge, or just to admire the view, something we wouldn't do with any other mode of transport other than walking. I'm not "Dad's Taxi," it isn't a chore, it's something I look forward to.

As a family, our use of bikes to get around definitely started as a practical means of transport but it is now becoming a recreation, and to me this seems like the right way around to approach cycling.

## My friend

Gareth Davies

My good friend, who I have known since school days, has been cycling for many years, whilst I was quite happy travelling round in my car. **Then one day my friend offered me a ride on his e-bike.** He'd had to go from a bicycle to an e-bike due to a knee replacement.

The thrill I got just riding up the road and back again was fantastic. We are both now in our seventies and I hadn't ridden a bike since - well I couldn't remember it was so long ago.

**I've now bought myself an ebike and I use it more than any other form of transport. I now have back problems which have affected my walking, but the problem seems to disappear when I'm riding my bike.**

The calmness I feel when riding is wonderful and has improved my mental and physical well-being. I have found many roads and lanes I haven't been down for years or never. I see things I missed when whizzing by in the car. There's hardly a day where I don't now go for a ride!



## Workplace inspiration

Katherine Ivory

**Back in January, I had a passing conversation with my chief executive about getting our organisation (with quite a car culture) more oriented towards sustainable travel.** After much discussion, we agreed to launch a cycle challenge to underline our corporate commitment to sustainability and well-being, physical and mental.

We decided to enter a workplace team for the annual Pedal for Scotland and I took on the task of recruiting and motivating a diverse group of a dozen

colleagues who'd signed up. Some were already cyclists, some lapsed, and one had done virtually nothing previously. So, plenty challenge to get everyone to the start line, and finish and, hopefully, continuing to cycle, whether for fun or everyday travel.

Building group identity was key – we're a large organisation, and people didn't necessarily know each other. We created an email list to share ideas and information. We talked about The Bike Station, the corporate Cycle to Work (useful) and the amazing Spokes maps - incredibly valuable in finding good routes around the city. We had coffee meet-ups and persuaded our Sustainability officer to sponsor a couple of Bike Breakfasts, to raise the profile of cycling more widely.

We've all benefited personally from signing up. Fitter, we've made new friends, and have all taken our cycling to a new level – in some cases, now becoming regulars. The complete-novice cyclist has even booked a cycling holiday up the Outer Hebrides next month!



## THE JOY OF CYCLING

Many people mentioned the huge enjoyment they get when going by bike. However this was not the reason they started cycling – it was a great discovery later!



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## Seeing people on bikes

Nick Connor

After graduating I moved to Edinburgh, with a one hour commute to Kirkcaldy for work. Years, stones and pounds piled up until I was overweight and unhappy. Eventually I found a job 4 miles from home, but I was still overweight, with a "commuter" mind-set. I'd take my single occupancy car each day, sit 30-40 minutes in traffic jams, with other lonely drivers, getting more and more frustrated, at the whim of roadworks and accidents which dictated journey times and my blood pressure. The only plus was I got to listen to Radio 4.

**After a couple of months I started noticing people on bikes. For a start, they were moving while I sat still, they were a lot thinner than me, and many didn't look like "proper cyclists" with shaved legs and lycra, but just "people on bikes" going about their business.**

At this point I became "bike curious". Would it be possible for me to try it, get to work consistently, in a

shorter period of time, while maybe getting a bit fitter into the bargain? I decided I'd give it a go.

I bought a cheap second hand hybrid for £not-very-much, and tried it on a nice sunny day. It was a revelation. My commute time shortened by 15 minutes and I arrived to work invigorated, loving being in the sunshine and exercising in the process. I got back the feeling of freedom which I'd had as a child, a smile on my face and actually looking forward to the ride home!

That was 10 years ago. I now commute every day by bike, rain or shine. I've become a better cyclist so my commute is even quicker. I've lost over three stone. My wife and two kids now ride with me on weekend trips and my kids and I cycle to their school every morning. Taking the first step to try cycling has changed my life and lifestyle and I can't imagine a future where I'm not riding every day, it means that much to me. Without a doubt, cycling has made me fitter, happier and healthier. But I do miss Radio 4 in the morning!

## My dad

Wendy Morgan

My dad encouraged me in middle age to cycle again...

*My lovely dad said ditch the car, we'll cycle, you and me.*

*We'll look across the fields afar, there's so much more to see.*

*It'll save on fuel and be more fun and calm our weary minds.*

*Traffic jams will be all done, the last of daily grinds.*

*My partner now is cycling mad and loves the hills and glen.*

*Thank you Dad, I am so glad you spurred me on back then.*

## Avoiding buying a car

John Forbes

**I was inspired to take up cycling seriously by handing back my company car.** I was changing jobs and the new job did not provide a car. Encouraged by my partner Kate, a Spokes member, I decided to use a bicycle as my main mode of transport instead of buying a new car.

My new job involved a lot of travelling, but it was mostly to Glasgow, Ayr, Aberdeen and Inverness, all of which are easily accessible by train. The commute to my Leith office was also well served by a combination of the canal towpath and North Edinburgh cycle path.

Nevertheless, I was rather nervous – how would I cope in bad weather? What about our walking weekends and holidays - and the shopping? How often would I be late for work because of a puncture?

However, after more than 10 years, I have not replaced the car and bicycle is still my main mode of transport!

The key factor is that you don't have the option of just "taking the car" so you plan more carefully. Instead of occasional "large shops", I shopped more often. Rather than ad-hoc hill walking, we booked our bikes on the train, systematically visiting each West Highland line station - and our hill walking weekends actually

increased! I was fitter and healthier too! We even managed to put a tent and rucksack on the back rack and cycled from Aviemore station to our Loch Morlich campsite.

We then

used our bikes to explore Rothiemurchus forest adding to our enjoyment of this wonderful location.

Kevlar tyres mean that I have very few punctures, and winter tyres help in light snow. In extreme weather, I take the bus or work from home. For anything too bulky, I hire a van through the City Car club or use a taxi.

**I encourage anyone who is concerned that they might not be able to cope without a car to give it a go – you might be surprised how easy it is to adapt to a new, healthier, cheaper and lower carbon lifestyle!**



## CYCLING AS A CHILD

Most entrants mentioned cycling as a child - but nearly all said they stopped or greatly cut back once an adult.

It was only a new inspiration which motivated them into using a bike for everyday journeys as an adult.

A likely **policy lesson** is that whilst encouraging child cycling is great, this will often *not carry into adulthood* unless there are also new, adult, motivations.

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## Lifetime of inspirations Katharine Wake

**Katharine was our competition first prizewinner, with a whole list of inspirations through different life stages.**

- ◆ ferried about in a child seat on the back of my mother's bike (more than half a century ago)
- ◆ semi-autonomy on my trusty tricycle (including a feisty mile of freedom when I escaped from Sunday school early without telling anyone)
- ◆ my best friend and I were free-range kids, using bicycles as our access to adventure

Now on to the office job - cycling faltered as I tried to dress more smartly. What inspired me to start again?

- ◆ Shorter and predictable journey time by bike = longer in bed (exercise paradoxically facilitating sloth!)
- ◆ Workplace secure bike parking, changing facilities, showers, lockers – sartorial sacrifice no longer required
- ◆ Care for the environment – I briefly owned a car but relaxed when I sold it and reverted to my bicycle as main transport mode - conscience clear again
- ◆ Solidarity as cycling morphs from eccentric to normal
- ◆ Cycle route growth, enhancing safety and enjoyment

**What will keep me inspired as the years roll on? All the above, but underpinning it all is the overwhelming feel-good factor – the physical joy of cycling.**



## Medical inspiration Neil Munro

In my mid-twenties a back operation to repair a burst disc brought an insistence from the surgeon to ditch running and football in favour of exercise that would place less stress on my lumbar region. Try swimming and cycling he suggested. So I was inspired to visit my local bike shop and was soon wheeling away a mountain bike with thick knobbly tyres and flat handlebars - the surgeon recommended something upright as stretching over a road bike wouldn't do for my lower back.

Initially, I just used it to pootle about town at weekends, but then commuting to work. Over time, I increased my commuting days and started cycle occasionally at weekends, with friends or on my own, before signing up to do organised events – Pedal for Scotland, St Andrews to Edinburgh, Pedal for Parkinson's.

More disc problems a few years ago curtailed my cycling but I've volunteered at several cycling events and I've taken a bike mechanic course to do most of my own repairs. This year I've been able to cycle again without pain and discomfort and I've really enjoyed regular commuting and a couple of longer weekend rides.

Cycling throughout my adult life has certainly helped keep me fit and active. I intend to keep riding well into my old age even if it means going electric or adding stabilisers again to help me keep the pedals turning!

## Climate concern

Andrew White

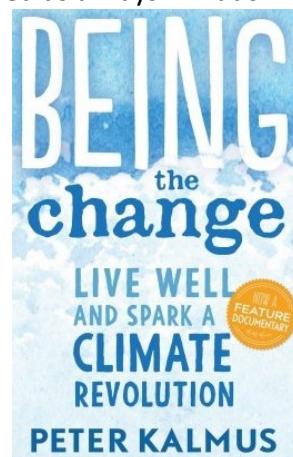
My frustration with lack of action on the climate crisis began to boil. My mind responded as always 'What's the point, what can you do?'

**Then this beautiful book was gifted to me, 'Being the change: live well and spark a climate revolution' by climate scientist Peter Kalmus. I found myself motivated to do something.**

To distance myself from fossil fuels, I committed to walking to work every day during February. Three miles out, three miles back - it was something I could control. The month flew by and my confidence grew. I began to notice the wonder and beauty around me. Now I was finally seeing Edinburgh, and all I had changed was how I got from A to B.

I was motivated. I pumped up the tyres, dusted off the helmet, and charged the lights. I was cycling again, and loving it. Active travel is more than a workout and consistent commute. It brings community, experience, and a sense of belonging somewhere that the 2-ton private tanks and rolling sardine cans can't bring.

Getting on two wheels has brought immense joy and I've done all I can to share it and inspire others. The climate crisis is here and with that is fear, disruption and change. But it's an opportunity to bring about a better, fairer world. It's a catalyst to bring about a society that lives in harmony with biodiversity and puts people first.



## SOURCES OF INSPIRATION & HELP

- ◆ The stories have been shortened to save space. The full competition report is at [spokes.org.uk](http://spokes.org.uk), 16.9.2019 blog
- ◆ Spokes factsheets at [spokes.org.uk](http://spokes.org.uk) : documents : advice - Workplace Cycling; E-bikes; Be a Cycling Flat-dweller; etc
- ◆ TheBikeStation.org.uk for low-cost refurbished bikes, DIY repairs; learning to cycle; bike maintenance classes.



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