



WHY BOTHER? — You Know You Want To

LET ME GIVE YOU THE GOOD NEWS FIRST (SINCE THERE REALLY IS NO bad news): riding a bicycle is fun. It's that simple. That's why I do it, and that's why you should, too. Sure, there are other reasons to ride a bike, and we'll get to those in a minute, but you need to know that riding a bicycle is more fun than driving a car — even on rainy days. As a matter of fact, I hate getting wet, but don't mind riding my bicycle in the rain (properly attired for the weather, of course). I can't explain it, but there it is: even the rain is more fun on a bike. And those warm, sunny days are beyond compare when you are on your bicycle.

There's just something inherently more pleasant about being out in the world on a bicycle, versus being stuck inside a car, watching the world go sailing by the tinted windows. Even with the windows rolled down, it's just not the same. The joy of cycling

must have something to do with being out there under your own power, the feeling of being so much more in control of all that is going on around you, and all of that unfiltered fresh air. It gets to you. Sure, you drive the car, but you *power* the bike. You are both engine and engineer. It's all you, and it feels great.

So many of us learned to ride a bike as a child, and did ride a bike right up to the day we got our driver's license. After that, the bike was cast aside, and it was all about speed and power and four wheels and dual exhausts and, well, somewhere along the line we lost track of something there. Sure, the car is faster and takes less physical effort, but there's still something missing in the experience when you drive. The drive might be exhilarating, but the car is not all that satisfying. More often than not, we're stuck in traffic and, harkening back to the days of the horse, it doesn't smell all that good. Especially if you get a lot of them in one place. (Cars or horses, either one.) We all see the car commercials that show empty roads and wide open vistas, but the reality of the world is quite different. The car, once a symbol of freedom of movement, is now a static display on a road clogged with millions of other cars, all wanting to go, go, go — but all stuck in traffic and going nowhere fast, their drivers stuck behind the wheel of a machine that cannot move because *everyone* wants to move. I see this every day — as I pedal by them on my bicycle. It's sad, really. If only they had ridden a bicycle instead. Maybe next time they'll ride a bike. Maybe?

Bicycling For Your Health? Good Idea!

Aside from actually being able to get somewhere when the city is gridlocked with bumper-to-bumper traffic, there are other

great reasons for riding a bicycle instead of driving a car. Your personal health is a really good reason — maybe the best reason of all. Bicycling is a wonderful low-impact form of exercise. It's easy on the legs and knees (much easier than walking or running), and you really don't have to go at it like a crazy (sweaty) person to get the benefits of a good workout on a bike. Even a modest pace on a bicycle should be good for burning about 400 calories an hour, and it takes very little to boost that pace and burn even more. You can do this — at your own speed.

You've heard the old adage about weight loss being all about diet and exercise, but here's the truth: if all you did was ride your bicycle all day, even at an easy pace, you probably wouldn't have to worry about what you ate — only that you ate *enough*. Sounds like fun, doesn't it? Of course, we all can't just drop what we're doing and go ride our bikes from sun up to sun down. But many of us can ride just a little every day, and every little bit helps. My normal day sees me riding for at least 40 minutes, 20 in the morning and another 20 in the late afternoon. No, it's not an epic ride either way, but it's enough to help — and it makes me feel good. On my days off, I ride a little more, and it feels even better.

Riding a bicycle, even a little bit, helps work your heart and lungs and keeps your legs limber and your muscles in shape. You even get an upper-body workout with the steering and balance. You're constantly turning your head to see what's going on around you, working your neck muscles, and the brain is going full blast trying to process all of that information and take it all in. Congratulations — you're multi-tasking just by riding a bike! Yes, you can ride a bike without breaking a sweat if you



want to. I do that all the time. No need to work too hard at it. The whole idea is to have fun and maybe get somewhere in the process. Even around the block is a whole new experience compared to driving in the car. From the seat of your bicycle, the neighborhood you thought you knew (by car) becomes an entirely new adventure on two wheels in the wide open great outdoors. You're going to see so many things you never saw before, you'll wonder how you missed so much of it. (And why you waited so long.)

In addition to the considerable physical benefits of cycling, there's a wonderful mental side to it as well. This goes beyond the mundane mental exercise of watching for traffic and balancing the bike as you pedal along and wonder if that dog over there is on a leash or if we are about to go for a race. Bicycling instills the rider with a sense of great anticipation on every ride. Where will you go next? What will you see there? And does that rear tire look soft to you? It's a never-ending parade. There's always more to take in and another place to go. (But be sure and check those tires before you go. Especially that back one.)

In the original bike boom in the 1890s, the bicycle was seen as the most welcome replacement for the horse, in that the bike required very little care, both in use and in storage. When not in use, it could be parked in the hall for weeks at a time and totally ignored. Try that with a horse — any horse. Even a small horse. And let me know how that works out, will you? Of course, the original advantage of the bicycle over the horse was much more daring, if not actually scandalous, in those staid and proper Victorian times: the bicycle could convey a man or a



woman (or a man *and* a woman) from the crowded urban city to the rural, empty countryside without the need for anyone to know. No need to rent a horse and carriage, no need to deal with stable hands or the men at the local livery. Just wheel your bicycle out and go. *No chaperone*. It was positively unheard of. What was the world coming to? Oh, my!

That same thrill of being ever so slightly scandalous can still be had today, just by riding off on your bike. Take off across town on your bicycle, and no one needs to know where you are. Few people will see you, and fewer still will recognize you. Most of them aren't looking for *you* anyway — they're looking for your *car*. (How many times have we all heard, "Didn't I see you parked at ..."? No, that was my truck. I was inside.) Fool them. Be invisible. Ride a bike — it feels good to be adventurous. In this day and age of instant and constant connectivity, the idea of traveling totally detached and out of touch with the rest of the technical, modern world most certainly does have its appeal. No phones to answer, no messages coming in, nothing to reply to. You are your own person, if only for an hour or so as you ride your bike. You can go where you like, when you like, and change what you like in a heartbeat — and then change your plans again. The bicycle offers you a freedom the car could never equal: the freedom of traveling virtually unseen by the rest of the world. Use the power wisely, my young apprentice. (But have fun!)





The other side of that power of invisibility is the sense of empowerment it gives you to be able to go somewhere on your bike. Remember the feeling you had as a kid, the first time you rode your bicycle out of sight of your house? That feeling is still out there, waiting for you. And it still feels *good*. That feeling of accomplishment and wild adventure can be a real boost, even if all you do is pedal over to the local store you've been to (by car) a thousand times. You did it! All by yourself! On your bike! Ha! Take *that*, world! OK, OK, let's not get carried away here. Not yet, anyway.

Still, if you ride your bike on a regular basis, you do tend to get an elevated sense of self-worth that could never come from driving a car to the very same places. To drive to work is drudgery. To ride a bike to work is adventure! (Even if you still do just end up at work.) Whoever said it was all about the journey and not the destination was probably riding a bicycle. Maybe it has something to do with the benefits of the exercise involved, or the mental rush of being out there in the wind and sun, with everything all around you, without the car to protect you, but a bicycle ride across town does more for your ego than driving your car across town ever could. No matter what car you drive.

So it comes to this: if you want to feel good, and feel good about yourself, go ride a bike. You don't have to go fast or go far, but you do have to go. Get out there in the wind and the sun (or under the moon!) and see the world around you as you haven't seen it since you were a kid. It's still out there, waiting for you to come back. All you need is a bicycle and a little practice, and the world will be your oyster. *Your oyster?* I never did



understand that phrase. And I never did care for oysters. How about this: the world will be your happy beagle. Doesn't that sound like a lot more fun?

In It For The Money? That Works, Too

We've talked about health, now let's talk about wealth. Here's a screamingly obvious fact of life: riding a bicycle is less expensive than driving a car. *It's not free*, but it is cheaper. That last statement is really important, and yet often overlooked by people who are looking into bicycling, but then go into sticker shock when they see what a good bicycle can cost. Or a great bicycle, for that matter. Yes, if you want to, you *can* pay as much for a bicycle as you would for a car. (I'm not joking here. You really could. Honest.) The difference is, a bicycle that expensive would be absolutely top-of-the-line, a hand-made work of art — and the car would be just a car. If a thing of beauty is a joy forever, as Mr. Keats says it is, then a fine bicycle is all that and more. Did Keats ride a bicycle? If he did in 1818, when he wrote “Endymion” (and the above line about eternal beauty and joy), then he must have been among the first in the world to do so, and would be astounded by the beautiful bicycles we ride today. Bicycles, in this regard, are much like everything else in life: you get what you pay for.

I have a bicycle I bought over thirty years ago. I paid a tidy sum for it. I paid a tidy sum for it by *today's* standards. It is, in the words of Keats, a joy forever. And I know that because for what I paid for that bike, I get a lot of joy: all I have to do is pump up the tires and that bike is ready for an epic ride right now — thirty years later. It has not aged. It has not suffered. Try that with a



thirty-year-old car. Of course, I also have bicycles I have paid *nothing* for, and they're nice, too. The thing is, you get more for your money with a bicycle than you will ever get with a car. The quality is there at a much lower price point. Often for free.

But how much will you save if you ride a bike? That's what you want to know, isn't it? First off, you have to understand that most of the expense of owning a car doesn't come from driving it. It comes from simply owning it. That means it can just sit there, doing nothing and going nowhere, and it will still cost you money. (How's *that* for annoying?) The car payments, the insurance, the depreciation — the entropy — they all go right on, day after day, year after year, whether you drive the thing or not. By not driving, you save a little on gas, a little

on oil, and maybe some wear and tear on the tires (that are aging anyway as we speak). Oh, and your battery's going flat, too, you know. If you

want to ride a bike to save money on your car, you're going to have to sell your car — and let's not get hasty here. It's OK if you ride your bike and keep your car. You will save a little. Just not a lot. You need to know that.

I once figured out that my truck was costing me one thousandth of its purchase price every day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. That really adds up. I still have the truck, but mostly, I ride my bike and still save a bundle of money. Here's how: since I ride my bicycle to work, my wife can use our truck to go shopping and run errands. Since we don't need to buy a second vehicle for me to go to work (it's only three miles/five kilometers between my home and the office), she doesn't have to get a job to pay for the second car we don't need. So she stays



home, I pedal to work, and life is good. Yes, the bicycle really can save you a bundle of money if you do it right.

The other place where the bicycle can save you money goes back to the bicycle helping to keep you healthy. Healthy people spend less time and money being sick. Sounds stupid when I put it that way, doesn't it? Let me try this again: by using bicycling to maintain your health and fitness, you need not spend money on a health club you won't use, a neglected home exercise machine that will just take up space, and any number of medications and medical services you might need if you didn't get out there and pedal that bike just a little. Keeping yourself healthy, keeping the weight off, and moving around on a bicycle is by far the best prescription for good health and long life that you can have. And it's certainly among the cheapest. More money saved right there. Maybe a lot more. You're welcome.

So what does it cost to own a bicycle? It would be foolish for me to quote a price that would make no sense to you by the time you read it here, so let me put it like this: if I spend one-tenth of what I make in one week on my bicycles for required maintenance in one year, that's a lot. That's just to replace worn-out tires and tubes, buy tube repair kits and replace the odd broken cable. And that would be a very busy year for me for bicycle maintenance. Now yes, it's true that I really do spend a lot more than that on my bicycles, but it's almost all voluntary. Once you buy the bike and get it set up the way you want it, the day-to-day expenses are below minimal — they are virtually non-existent. It's very easy to go for long stretches of time — for months — and not spend anything at all on your bicycle. But when the time comes, you need to know that you



will have to. Things do wear out. Tires, tubes, cables, chains, they will all need to be replaced in time. Even seats give out eventually. (Mine and the bike's.) Every time I have to spend some money on my bike, I think about how much I'm saving not having to maintain a second car. That makes me smile — and I usually end up spending more on my bike.

Saving The Planet — One Bike At A Time

One big angle for many bicycle riders is the environmental advantage of riding a bike instead of driving a car. You don't have to be a hard-core green earth activist to see that riding a bicycle is a good idea from an earth-loving global point of view. Even if you only ride a little, that means you're driving a little less. And that's good. Sure, in the big scheme of things your not driving your car today probably won't tip the scales toward green to any great (or even noticeable) degree, but *you* know you're doing it, and that does count for something. Seven billion people on planet earth, and you rode your bike today. Go team.

Seriously, it does matter, and it may help more than you think (and certainly more than I'm letting on). If you ride your bike, people will *see* you riding your bike — and then maybe they'll ride *their* bike. It could happen. You could start a trend. Be a movement. Lead the parade. All on your bike. While Lao Tzu always went on about a long journey starting with a single step, any great movement starts with a single person. In your town, that one person could be you. You could make a difference — all by riding your bike. Then again, you might ride alone for years and never know if you've done any good at all. Life's funny that way. I'm laughing on the inside.



One thing I have noticed is this: as I have ridden my bike over the years, I have become more aware of how I live the rest of my life, and often choose to do better than I did, greenly speaking. I would never portray myself as some great environmental guru, but a good friend of mine did recently label me a “green freak.” To my face, no less. I’m not sure it was meant as a compliment, but I took it as one. *Cool*. I *can* be taught! And I am doing better. I do try to make better choices. I recycle, I bring my own bags to the store and yes, many times, I ride to the store on my bicycle. Around here where I live, that must be all you have to do to earn the title of “green freak.” Our standards are noticeably lower here, it would seem. So do keep that in mind: if you ride a bicycle, you run the risk of developing a certain *reputation*. Not to mention a whole new (greener) outlook on life. It’s just a chance you’ll have to take. It’s OK. It’s worth it.

As a cyclist, your view of the environment — or what’s left of it — is going to be considerably enhanced — make that tainted — by all that you will see around you as you ride. The real world outside is not always green and lovely and pristine. The hand of man is not always kind. That’s the polite, poetic way of saying there’s a lot of trash out there along the road, and we put it all there ourselves, one stupid piece at a time. If that doesn’t make an environmentalist out of you, nothing will. Of course, getting out on the road on your bicycle also gives you the chance to do something about that. I’ve picked up some pretty cool stuff out there over the years that other people have thrown out. Whole bicycles even. One man’s trash, and all that. Go team, indeed.



I have to warn you: once you've been riding your bicycle for a while, even just around your own neighborhood, your friends and neighbors, your coworkers and relatives, will all look at you differently. Sometimes they'll squint. You are no longer the person they thought they knew. Now you are a *bicyclist* — and that, to many people who are not, is a whole different sort of animal. Your reputation will change. I'd like to say it will be for the better, but hey, it's your reputation and none of my business. But everyone who knows you will think differently of you, and people who don't know you will make stuff up. You will be The Cyclist. Can you handle that? It will be a new image for you. You'll be your own action figure. It could be a good thing, but many people look at a bicyclist — even a practical one — as something less than normal, instead of something more.

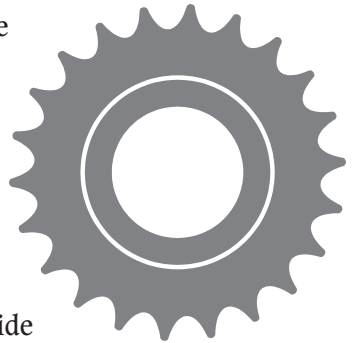
H. G. Wells once famously said that he did not despair for the future of the human race when he saw an adult on a bicycle. That's great, Herbie, but out here in the modern (car-driven) world, an adult on a bicycle is more often cause for concern and question, and that question would have to be: "Why aren't you driving a car?" The trick here is to look like you mean it. If you're going to ride your bicycle (and you are), then by all means *ride* your bicycle. Sit right up, back straight (good posture!), hold your head up high and give everyone you meet a big smile and a friendly wave. Hey, blow them a kiss if you like. Really confuse them. Too many people ride bicycles like it was the result of some unpleasant court order. Don't be a grouch about it. This is fun, and that fun should show through when you ride. If riding a bicycle isn't more fun than driving a car, there's something wrong and we need to fix it. Maybe the



tires are low. Have you checked the brakes? Is the seat too low? Check the tires first. Make the bike ride all the fun it should be, and it will show. People will envy you. No, really. They will. They may not actually say that they do, but they do. They told me so.

That Edgy Counter-Culture Thing

The other angle, when it comes to your image on a bicycle, is to jump right in with both feet and really embrace that cool, edgy, counter-culture side of bicycling. It *is* different. In far too many modern societies, it is not yet a common, everyday thing to see an adult on a bicycle. (In Wells' day, yes, but now, sadly, not so much.) For a large part of the modern mechanized world, to ride a bike is a very different thing. It stands out. *You* stand out when you're on a bike. In a very small way, if you only ride a bike and not own a car, you have denied the government a certain amount of taxation and regulation. Not enough to get on anyone's naughty list, mind you, but enough to maybe save yourself a little pocket change — and make you look larger than life to those who drive. Since I have my feet in both worlds, my reputation on either side of that fence is nothing special. I drive, but I also ride. (Or do I ride, but also drive? I suspect the latter.) It's either the best of times or the worst of times, and I'm never sure which. Still, there's no denying the counter-culture aspect of bicycling, and for many that angle does have a certain draw and charm. Be the Cyclist. Even when they aren't looking.





You can take that bicycle of yours and build a whole new image — a whole new life — around those two wheels. You can be the secret rebel you always wanted to be — the one you promised yourself you *would* be, way back when. Traveling by bike you're under the radar and off the map. Nobody's fool (but your own). Go ahead, live life on the edge. Ride a bicycle like you really mean it. Give the hat a bit of a tilt. Wear two kinds of plaid. Just remember what I said about asking your Mom before you get that tattoo.