



Summer of Cycling - the finish line

The idea was to encourage everyone with an interest in cycling to share the fun and introduce just one friend, neighbour, colleague or family member to cycling.

In 2012 a national campaign was run between March and October which aimed to encourage more people to cycle. The 'All Party Parliamentary Cycling Group' and 'The Bicycle Association' alongside the force of 23 cycling organisations aimed to double cycling this summer.

The Summer of Cycling brought together a whole host of organisations from charities, NGOs, industry manufacturers and retailers, as well as major UK cycling event organisers. It is very much a collaborative effort, with racing organisations promoting the Summer of Cycling just as easily as local cycle campaign groups or cyclists like yourself.

By 19 October 2012 - nationally - 663 people had pledged to get a friend on a bike online <http://www.summerofcycling.net/>

The Newcastle Cycling Campaign was an early adopter of the Summer of Cycling and in April asked locals to "nominate their bike buddy". There was an article in the local newspaper, Katja was filmed by Carlton, and off we went.

What happened next?

Here are their stories

- newbie - Kym
- re-starter - Fiona
- bike buddies - Scott and Nicky
- bike buddy - James
- regular cyclist deciding to get training - Cath
- comments from our recent travel survey – Councillors
- on the finish line – Katja
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Kym's story

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I've been cycling for about 6 months now and enjoying every minute of it, surprisingly as I tried it a couple of years ago and didn't find it as exhilarating.

It has helped that I have a circle of friends who are excited about the sport like I am. It's pretty much an adventure every weekend we try to check out a different cycle routes every ride which we never new even existed. The scenes which we've come across have been breathtaking, to feel the wind blowing in your face, pounding on the beautiful terrains which sometimes takes your mind off of a really tough ride. I feel it has also helped me to push myself that bit harder if I'm riding with a buddy especially early Saturday mornings its easier to drag myself out of bed knowing that someone'll be waiting for me.

My only drawback would be the group of kids who sometimes congregate along some of the cycling paths I've ridden, I've found this quite intimidating and because of the negative press that these groupies are often tagged with I've missed out on great rides as I wont ride if I haven't got a cycle buddy riding with me which is such a shame, especially on days like today.

As long as my friends continue to enjoy the experience as I will and are available for weekend rides I will continue to ride.



Fiona's story

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After over 16 years of not cycling, I decided I needed to get back on a bike to see if I still could cycle and if I enjoyed it. I contacted the local cycle training provider and booked myself in for the free bikeability level 1 course. There was three of us in total, and the tutor. We began with a quick run-through of how to inspect the bike for road worthyness and the basics of getting on and off the bike safely. We quickly progressed to riding a short distance and stopping, turning corners and emergency stops, swerves etc. My biggest problem was that I keep taking my feet off the pedals whenever I want to stop or turn, still need to work on that!

I was surprised at how quickly the skills came back and was very pleased with myself that I managed to go on the road for the second part of the session when we put in to practice what we had learned. I did enjoy being back on a bike and have booked one for a few days for a holiday, the intention is to buy a cheap bike and just get out and practice!

Another reason for wanting to get back in the saddle was that I'd really like to cycle with my son once he gets to that age, cycling to school and so on... rather than running alongside him! I have to admit, that I do worry about our roads though, a lot of them aren't really made for kids on bikes.

And as a driver it raised my awareness as to how much space I'd be comfortable with a car leaving to overtake me, and has hopefully made me a more courteous driver.



Scott and Nicky's story

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Scott: The main obstacle that Nicky has when cycling, is that a lot of the roads and streets do not feel safe. Even 20mph streets can feel unsafe due to uncontrolled car parking and drivers doing stupid things.

Nicky will keep riding, but at the moment it will not be her main mode of transport.

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Nicky: I feel safer walking and using the Metro to get to work, than I do cycling. Don't feel safe on the roads due to lack of cycle lanes or good sized cycle lanes. Cycle lanes and road surfaces are not looked after (potholes, faded lines). Bad weather makes me not want to cycle (cold, wet etc).



James' story

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I ran an event during national bike week to encourage my colleagues to cycle to work. Breakfast was provided for anyone cycling to work, our bike2work scheme provider loaned three trial bikes for the week, I sourced cycle-maps to hand out and offered a bike-buddy service.

I generally aim to promote cycling year-round but national bike week provides a good focus point.

I had been trying to encourage one of my female colleagues to try cycle commuting, as she had previously said she was keen to do so. I had given her maps and route guidance previously but she seemed to need a final push, so I offered to show her a good, quiet route which she could use.

We met early enough to make it a comfortable ride to work and I used cycle paths as much as possible, trying to avoid the worst traffic.

After that one day she continued to cycle almost every day thereafter (until she changed jobs last week). Progress was stifled somewhat by her bike being stolen a few weeks after starting to cycle-commute but her enthusiasm wasn't dented as once she got hold of another bike she resumed cycling.



Cath's story

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I am a regular bike commuter but earlier this year my workplace changed and I went from being able to travel off road virtually all the way to having to consider joining in with the traffic.

I've got to admit the thought daunted me as I didn't have much experience of riding on inner city roads. And my first couple of attempts didn't do anything to help my nervousness – I was using the most direct route, with two-lane traffic, busy right hand roundabout turns and lots of pinch points. Following some scary experiences I would get off and push at certain points. It became a stressful part of the day, rather than something enjoyable as it was before and I started finding excuses not to ride in.

Of course I couldn't stay away from my bike for too long, and I worked out a quieter route through more residential areas (though still not without its hazards). During this time 'cycle training' kept cropping up, so I thought I'd give it a go, in case there were things I was doing that caused misunderstandings with other road users. The trainer came to my home and we rode the route to work, with him riding behind and supplying me with comments and advice as required. I chose to take the original busy route so that I would be prepared for more difficult things in the future.

The first thing he asked was where I rode on the road – it turned out I tend to sit a bit close to the gutter! The trainer really pushed the importance of getting out into the middle of the lane at traffic lights, at road intersections where you're going straight on but traffic might pop out, where there are pedestrian islands that narrow the road so much it would be dangerous if a driver tried to get past, at roundabouts etc. His line was that a bike has as much right as a car to be on the road and not to worry if people are getting impatient - just make sure you're in a position where they can see you and they can't squeeze past and do something stupid. I do think that's easier said than done at times, when you have a truck bearing down on you etc, but I can certainly see the sense in it.

Other than that it turned out I was doing everything as I should be - just the usual common sense approach really. We did keep going over 'observation' and the need to be constantly on the watch and listen for other road users doing unexpected things – not saying that this was a good thing, we did talk about how much nicer it would be to have safe, dedicated spaces - but of course the training can only aim to make the best of what we've got at the moment.

I think the training was sensible, and I can understand the view that by delivering training you either increase numbers on the roads or give those that also use cars a better understanding of what it's like to be a cyclist in traffic, but it's a shame that the whole focus is about keeping yourself safe, rather than riding technique or any of the nicer things that I was able to consider when I rode my route with dedicated cycling space. I still get scared on a regular basis on my way to work, and based on the training that's not because I'm doing anything wrong.



Councillor comments

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Not a cyclist. Will never be a cyclist.

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I do not cycle as past experiences have not been pleasant.

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I haven't cycled since I was a child. We must make cycling in the city a safer and easier experience.

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I support your aims but I'm not a cyclist.

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I am not a cyclist but would like to see more routes for safe cycling throughout the city. It is something which can be done by the whole family and provides exercise at the same time. Perhaps I would even try!

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I tend not to cycle currently for three principal reasons (a) there is not an obvious safe route to cycle from my home to the Civic Centre; (b) I do not currently have the required level of fitness to cycle that distance and (c) the Government's discontinuation of the cycle to work scheme means I am less inclined to buy a bike.

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I am an occasional cyclist but at 67 avoid busy roads (I live in Gosforth). I have recently heard of two accidents on Great North Road.

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For the last 3 months I have been trying to make more cycle journeys around Newcastle, including the 4 miles to work every day and also to and from the Civic Centre. I enjoy it (on the whole) but am now much more acutely aware of the problems (particularly inconsistent cycle lanes) that make it difficult to cycle more. I have identified a number of junctions and points on my own journey to work that are inadequate for cycling. I am currently trying to cycle 3 - 4 days per week. The hills in Newcastle also make cycling more difficult, but I am gradually getting fitter!



Katja on the finish line

Thanks to the Summer of Cycling team, its organisations and groups. It's been a rollercoaster journey this summer. The stories speak for themselves. And of course the journey to a cycle-friendly Newcastle, Tyne and Wear and Britain does not stop here. We are a nation that finds it hard to fully embrace cycling.

To me it's clear. We must provide for cycling, give it space to move safely to work, school, shops and visit friends. Provide an alternative to the car, which unfortunately reigns supreme on our streets and roads, dominates communities, and often suppresses community cohesion, splits neighbourhoods and blights our towns and cities.

Society sees cycling as an activity that requires extra kit, specialised gear and expert training - only to then still not fully endorse the people on bikes in our streets. Or as research demonstrates, for society cycling is something that kids and the less well off do. We have to stop thinking about cycling as a sport activity reserved for the superfit risk-takers, children and disadvantaged.

We have to challenge that popular view.

Cycling is not an extra-curricular enrolment, no, it is a serious form of transport and ought to be treated as such with investment levels to match. Cycling also requires fairness in Britain's law and courts. The recent call *British Cycling* for fairer justice for cyclists and CTC's Stop Smidsy campaign both make that clear.

The masses will come, but they do ask for space, safe and fair provision. Today people are cycling despite not because of the conditions. It's a minority activity that's reached saturation point. The severe limitations in infrastructure have taken us as far as we can go with it. We now have to remove the road block to unleash cycling. As for the attitude of people who already cycle, they find ways to enjoy and have fun using bicycles, see photos overleaf of two recent Newcastle weddings.

Closing, I will use Cath's words. As a fellow bike commuter, this is something that I feel too - on a daily basis - when you quite simply do not have the choice of route or purpose.

"I still get scared on a regular basis on my way to work, and based on the training that's not because I'm doing anything wrong."

Katja Leyendecker
October 2012
Summer of Cycling [website tag](#)

Newcastle Cycling Campaign



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