

MAKING THE SWITCH

Miriam Yagud, Bristol

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Long before it became trendy to be 'green', Miriam Yagud and her family were mindful of their impact on the environment. But whilst everyone else was starting to recycle and compost and monitor their energy usage, Miriam took the radical step of cycling everywhere and giving up the daily use of her car. In fact, she decided to share it with another family! Here, Miriam tells us how she did it:

Why did you decide to share your car?

Three years ago, our new year's resolution was to use the car less as I wanted to improve my health. If we car-shared, it wouldn't be there to use, so we started car-sharing with another family whose car had recently died on them.

But why car-share? Why not just leave your car alone?

It was mostly to reduce costs, as my illness meant working part-time, but our friends also wanted to reduce their car use for environmental reasons and to dissuade their teenager from being car-dependent and use her bike more.

So how was the transition to cycling everyday?

For the first 2 months it felt like we'd lost a member of the family! There was a horrible empty space outside the house and more than once I wanted to call the police to report a car theft.

Sometimes it was cold and wet. Cycling in the cold winter nights was horrible and only the commitment we'd made to our car-share family kept us to the plan. We literally gritted our teeth and toughed it out through those first difficult winter weeks. Before we car-shared, we thought we used our bicycles a lot, but we realised that was an illusion. Whenever it was dark, rainy, uphill, or we were tired, we couldn't just jump into the car.

What were the benefits of switching to your bike?

The first benefit we felt was an immediate 2/3 reduction in car costs. We found out how expensive it is to own and run a car: £2000 plus petrol per year. After 6 months, we needed the car less than the half-share we had, and due to a new job, our car-share family needed it more. We now have the car one weekend per fortnight. We have an easygoing arrangement so if plans change, we negotiate extra use.

Cycling and walking from A to B means we've discovered some attractive routes through Bristol's back ways and parks, which is a lot more relaxing than sitting in congested traffic. Other benefits include 5 people now getting daily exercise and we all know our area better because we are walking and cycling and using public transport and meeting people we didn't know before.

You must feel healthier now, but didn't you feel more tired after a day's work at first?

I definitely felt more tired for the first 3 or 4 months until the routine kicked in, but being without the car toughened us up. Now we are definitely fitter, if not thinner, and think nothing of cycling across town in all types of weather, and it really does take a lot less time to get about on Bristol's roads.

What were the keys to your success?

We had a clear written agreement we made to fit our own needs, but a flexible approach to the car-share. We have very reliable car-sharers and we keep the car well maintained. We also have a joint separate car-share bank account which we pay into, and all car costs except petrol are paid out of this.

Did you encounter any problems?

Just one – we had a misunderstanding about depreciation after the first year because we didn't discuss it enough at the beginning. If you decide to include depreciation in the car-share contributions, this amount will be taken out by the owner of the car to cover the cost of replacing the vehicle. It's not a shared amount unless you all co-own the vehicle. Our car-sharers could have paid us half the value of the car as we had just bought it, but they decided not to as it was cheaper for them. That's alright as long as everyone understands how the depreciation amount works.

What about joining a car club or just hiring a car when you need one?

There's a car club in Stroud and Nailsworth, but that's too far from us and we found them a very expensive option. It's cheaper to own a shared car. For example, we all went on holiday for a long weekend to Wales. It cost us 1.5 tanks of petrol (about £50) plus £5.70 car-share rent for that week. The quote from the Bristol car club worked out to £170, so we made a massive saving with our own car-share.

What are some other considerations for people who are interested?

Our friends lived 2-1/2 miles away in north Bristol – that's about as far away as we would consider. We had looked for a neighbour in our street but everyone we approached was unwilling to have that intimate a relationship with a neighbour. I have found this the main obstacle to sharing resources in my neighbourhood. I know this isn't a personal thing – we're very friendly! It's a cultural thing.

When we started, we lived in inner city Bristol. All local amenities were within 10 minutes cycling distance, including a local rail station. We now live in a rural town and are involved in a group to develop a cycle route that will link 5 schools, a railway station, 3 villages and 2 towns. We would like to car-share with another local household but haven't found anyone yet. The car sits outside most days and nights as we walk or cycle or car-share to events. We think it could have even greater benefits in a rural area.

So the bottom line is...?

It's a great idea and it works! It's a lot cheaper than hiring or city car clubs, and there's a lot of flexibility. The financial savings alone give you enough for an extra holiday per year, but more importantly, we all found that not having easy access to a car meant we crammed fewer things into the week and the pace of our lives felt much more relaxed and less stressed.

Facts and Information

- Lift-sharing is when two or more people share a car and travel together. One of the people travelling is usually the owner of the vehicle, and the other(s) usually make a contribution towards fuel costs.
- Car clubs provide their members with quick and easy access to a car for short term hire. Individuals or groups can either join established car clubs or create their own club simply by establishing who the members are and which vehicles will be shared and on what terms.
- Benefits of car-sharing, lift-sharing and car clubs include:
 - Reducing the number of cars on the roads.
 - Reducing climate change emissions and improves air quality.
 - Providing a real solution to transport problems of rural areas.
 - Offering employees and employers a wider variety of transport options.
 - Reducing the need for private car ownership.
 - Saving money – traveling with others can reduce transport costs by up to £1000 a year!
 - Encouraging more active forms of travel such as walking and cycling instead of driving, which contribute to healthier lifestyles.
- Important tips to know:
 - Security is key to any car-share or lift-share arrangement. It is important that all members of the agreement feel comfortable and secure. If you are establishing your own car club or lift-share scheme, make sure you feel confident about all parties involved by using identity checks before finalising the agreement.
 - Drivers are not permitted to make a profit from providing a lift; however, the contribution from passengers can include an appropriate amount for depreciation and wear and tear. 'Fares' must be decided in advance as the driver is not permitted to pick up passengers along their route.

Further Resources

- To join an established car club (sometimes also known as car sharing), check out www.carplus.org.uk or www.citycarclub.co.uk, or if you're specifically in London, check out www.streetcar.co.uk
- To sign up with the national lift share programme, check out Liftshare at www.liftshare.com
- If you wish to replace a journey by cycling or walking but don't want to travel alone, why not check out the cycle and walk buddy scheme who can partner you with a travel companion: www.walkbudi.com/Default.asp?uxi=0&cr=check www.bikebudi.com/default.asp?uxi=0&cr=check
- For extensive information on sustainable transport and information on the National Cycle Network, which offers 10,000 miles of walking and cycling routes check out the Sustrans website at www.sustrans.org.uk