

NOT JUST A BIKE... IT'S A PHILOSOPHY

ZiPee Bikes, London



Naomi Aptowitzer and her son suffer from asthma, which countless studies have shown to be linked to the rise in transport pollution. Inspired by her experience riding mopeds in Thailand, Naomi tells us about her social enterprise ZiPee, which stands for Zero input of Pollution from emissions into the environment.

ZiPee sells electrically-assisted pedal bikes which more closely resemble a scooter than a traditional pedal cycle. Riding a ZiPee bike can be more convenient than a conventional bike – travelling further with less effort. ZiPees can travel effortlessly over 10 miles at nearly 20 mph - more than enough speed to run your errands.

Other advantages to electrically-assisted bikes such as Zipee include reduced emissions into the environment and also financial savings on insurance and registration fees. Overall, operating costs for personal electric vehicles are about 1/20th the cost of operating a comparable liquid-fuelled unit.

Electric bikes are extremely quiet, so they cut out a lot of noise pollution that causes considerable stress to people living near streets with heavy traffic. As they do not produce any exhaust fumes, you stay clean and so does the air around you. The batteries have a three-year lifespan, after which ZiPee Bikes will seek out a battery recycling firm to recycle their used batteries and will encourage their customers to do the same, either through themselves or independently.

For people who cannot afford to purchase a scooter by themselves, ZiPee Bikes have a solution which not only saves people money but is also furthermore beneficial to the environment – shared ownership of a ZiPee bike. This may be a good idea for people who only need a scooter at specific times, maybe for commuting during the week, or just at weekends. The ZiPee website can

help find the perfect partner and gives lots of guidance on setting up the arrangement.

In order to build up confidence in riding a ZiPee, it is recommended to go on a one-day course, which aims to educate riders with the help of experienced Traffic Patrol Officers. Their role is to share tips and hints to safer riding, together with assessing the rider's ability. At the end of the day, each rider will receive written feedback that can be taken to an Authorised Training Body.

“I enjoyed the freedom of riding a moped in Thailand, so on my return to the UK, I decided to invest in setting up a more eco-friendly solution.”

Naomi Aptowitz, ZiPee Bikes

ZiPee Bikes also offers public, private and voluntary sector workers the opportunity to benefit from the 'Cycle to Work' scheme that allows employers to purchase a ZiPee for employees. The employees can then pay it off through small amounts from their salary every month. To promote healthier journeys to work and to reduce environmental pollution, the 1999 Finance Act introduced an annual tax exemption, which allows employers to loan cycles and cyclists' safety equipment to employees as a tax-free benefit.

Last year saw ZiPee Bikes set up the People's Environment Initiative (PEI) as another part of their social enterprise. This is a ZiPee-led project which involves Camden Youth Services (London) to get young people's thoughts on their environment. As part of the project, the social enterprise was one of the sponsors of the UN World Environment Day in June, where they donated a bike for the raffle.

The PEI's current project is working with a group of young pupils in a secondary school in Bow, engaging them with the issue of alternative transport, such as electric bikes. They provide consultancy services and offer the students vocational training for the future. With the potential rise in production of electric and electrically-assisted pedal bikes comes the need for maintenance and servicing.

In particular, some of the training is focused on raising awareness on environmental issues, especially pollution caused by road traffic and the consequences of using fuel-driven vehicles versus electrically-powered vehicles. The training also includes practical experience of working on an electric bike, research skills using the Internet and other resources, project management skills, and so on.

The PEI engages everyday people on a grassroots level with fun and educational projects about the environment, and challenges the car-centred lifestyle by providing a viable, hassle-free, economic alternative that can offer a solution to the problem of clean air, asthma and traffic congestion. “I believe this is best practice in delivering awareness of the need for a change in lifestyle habits and choices,” says Naomi.

Facts and Information

- In modern Britain, road transport is the greatest air polluter, accounting for just over half of the total nitrogen emissions and about 90% of total carbon emissions, and it is still increasing!
- Pollutants created by petrol and diesel include carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, particulate matter (PM-10s) and other volatile organic compounds (VOCs), such as benzene, that have proved to be carcinogens.
- Electric bikes are properly known as Electrically Assisted Pedal Cycles, and as long as they cannot travel above 15mph, they are not classed as a motor vehicle. Therefore, the owner does not need a helmet or a driving licence and can use cycle paths.
- A new version of electric bike only supplies electric power if the rider pedals. A pedal sensor is a device which detects if the pedals are turning – and only enables the throttle if they are. A bike of this sort is called a Pedelec; a bike without a pedal sensor is called an E-bike.
- Electric bikes are not completely emission-free; we must also consider the carbon emissions from the electricity used to charge them. The only truly sustainable methods of travel are those powered solely through our own efforts – walking and cycling.
- Being physically active will help keep your heart healthy as well as providing other health benefits. Incorporating active travel – walking and cycling – into our daily routine can help improve public health by reducing coronary heart disease, stroke, diabetes, cancer, obesity and mental health problems. (*Source: Sustrans and British Heart Foundation*)
- Two-thirds of all car trips in the UK are 5 miles or shorter. If these trips were instead made by walking or cycling, each year we could save 3-4% of our total carbon emissions. (*Source: Sustrans*)

Further Resources

- To find out more about ZiPee Bikes, visit www.zipeebikes.co.uk. If you're interested in the People's Environment Initiative, visit the online forum at www.zipeebikes.co.uk/forum/.
- For more information on electric scooters, visit www.elctric-scooters-info.com.
- For more information about the Cycle To Work scheme, visit the Department for Transport's website at www.cyclescheme.co.uk.
- For information and pricing on folding bikes, electric bikes, and other alternative transport, check out www.atob.org.uk.
- There is now over 10,000 miles of the National Cycle Network, providing safe and convenient routes for walking and cycling throughout the UK. For more information and maps, visit www.sustrans.org.uk.