



Push bikes to work

You know the benefits of cycling to work. But how do you convince your colleagues?

Rob Ainsley has some suggestions

Go on a city-break in Copenhagen, and a few things take you by surprise. How the mermaid is smaller than you expected. How the price of beer is much larger. And how its broad cycle lanes teem with cyclists in the rush-hour spate. The contrast with London – the city with Britain's most visible cycle-to-work cohorts – grates like a buckled wheel. A third of Copenhagen commuters go by bike, most in normal work clothes, bare-headed, on town bikes with mudguards. In London it's more like three per cent, most in laserbeam jackets and Lycra. Provision for cycling is better in Denmark, sure. But not ten times better.

So, given the many advantages of cycling to work, why can't we persuade more of our colleagues onto bikes? I canvassed opinions from some online forums. It wasn't a scientific survey, but the 50 or so most detailed replies gave plenty of advice based on experience.

And doses of realism. In many places, people feel, all potential cyclists already cycle anyway. As LustingMyPinarello from Rotherham laments, 'even with all the moaning that people do here about fuel cost and parking and traffic, there is only me who cycles every day, and one other who cycles on odd days... All shrug and say roads are too unsafe.'

Show, don't tell

Yet people can be persuaded. And what works best seems an all-round, softly-softly approach: calm persistence in persuading employers to improve facilities for cyclists (parking, showers, Cycle to Work schemes such as Cyclescheme

– cyclescheme.co.uk); being the friendly-expert face of cycling, giving informal advice on buying, finding routes and practicalities, rather than moaning about psycho drivers; and showing by example that you arrive perkily, smart, on time, without complaining about the traffic or leaves on the line, and having actually enjoyed your gentle pre-work workout.

For instance, Jonathan from Cambridge persuaded one colleague to start cycling to work 'by showing him how he could save time cycling, rather than sitting in a traffic queue in a car or bus. He's a busy guy, with two young sons, and, like me, he realised also that cycling permits exercise fully integrated into one's day.' John Hunter, another respondent, said 'the only thing that has persuaded people to commute is simply me riding in every day.'

Another John, from Bristol, rescued a colleague from the cheap-bikes trap: someone buys an 80-quid chainstore instrument of torture to try commuting, then quickly gives up, believing it's 'cycling' that's unpleasant rather than the bike itself. When his co-worker Mr B did just that, John managed to make him see sense: 'He eventually realised that if you buy cheap, you buy twice. He now has a nice Cannondale commuter bike, and does the ten-mile journey in 45 minutes.'

Ruth Martin, in south London, offered observations on persuading women to bike-commute that were echoed elsewhere. 'The reasons they don't are: a) they don't want to get to work looking like a sweaty monster; and b) they're scared. I recently convinced a colleague she can cycle to work using the Grand Union

Canal towpath and several of the Royal Parks for most of her journey, and we're going to give it a dry run together this Sunday.'

Problems bypassed

Punctures, all correspondents agreed, have effectively been banished by modern reinforced tyres such as Schwalbe Marathon Plus. (I cycled every day in London for ten years with Specialized Armadillos without a single puncture.) Track pumps were also frequently recommended.

Standard LED lights, cheap and small enough to keep a spare set handy in the pannier, can run almost all winter on one set of batteries. And, as Jonathan enthused, 'the recent revolution in dynamo-driven LEDs (e.g. Busch and Müller) means there's no more recharging of batteries, and the lights can be permanently and securely mounted on the bike. Another problem solved through technology!'

Even clothing is hi-tech. Everyone regards a quality breathable jacket (cycling-specific or not) as an essential, well worth the outlay. And several mentioned Rohan's smart-casual range of miracle crease-free clothing: for cycling in, or unfurling from the pannier to change into.

Which raises the issue of what to wear. There are two distinct camps here. Some (generally those with commutes of, say, five miles or more) embrace the whole 'cyclo' look – Lycra, luminescence and all – and change into more sober attire at work. The others simply get on their comfy town bike in pretty much what they work in.

Looking the business

Oft-quoted stats suggest you'll only get genuinely wet a dozen times during a typical year of rush-hour commuting. Few respondents mentioned rain at all. It doesn't seem to pose much of a problem in practice, especially with a quality breathable top. Lycra shorts or longs are no problem when wet; and even cheap, compact overtrousers for the normal-clothes riders will keep contents unmoistened in all but the most vicious cloudbursts. (In extremis, my experience suggests the fastest, simplest way to dry sodden trousers is to keep them on



rather than hang them on a radiator – luckily something I've only had to do twice in a decade!)

For change-at-work, there are several tips. David Lukes of Lambeth summed up a common routine: 'I carry the occasional set of clothes or shoes and, every Monday, a towel and five sets of socks and undies, which I keep in a desk drawer. The towel gets draped over the computer under my desk, which dries it nicely after the shower. I'm lucky that my company has a cavernous wardrobe, but I'd improvise if not. The clothes are carefully packed and they un-wrinkle somewhat in the wardrobe before I wear them.'

Wet-wipes were recommended by many (such as Simon of Swansea) as a quick, reasonably effective alternative to showers, though over half the respondents (mainly the normal-clothes riders) said they simply cycled steadily enough not to sweat. Certainly my central London commuting decade was pretty much perspiration-free. Traffic signals for me are a welcome chance to stop and enjoy the view or ogle the bike

(Top) Co-workers coming in by train? They need a folder (Above) Explain that a bike means few delays

Challenge your workplace

The CTC Workplace Cycle Challenge is a proven programme to get more people cycling for transport, whether they're occasional cyclists or have never ridden to work before.

Workplace Cycle Challenges have been delivered at the following locations: Swindon, Colchester, Taunton & Bridgwater, Darlington, Wolverhampton, Leicester, Manchester, Cambridge, Chichester, Southampton, Oxford, Ashford, Milton Keynes, Lewes, York, and Leighton-Linslade. The results have been consistently inspiring, with occasional cyclists riding more often and 84% of non-cyclists planning to cycle more after the programme has finished.

For a brochure about Workplace Cycle Challenges, or to read a summary of the results, visit www.ctc.org.uk/workplace, where you'll find information and links.

Got the bug? Start a BUG!

CTC can provide you with all the support and information you need to set up a Bicycle User Group (BUG) in your workplace. For more information, visit ctc.org.uk/workplace. Setting up a BUG is easy and costs £50 a year, plus a £25 set-up charge. Call 0844 736 8451 and ask for a BUG membership pack.



next to me, rather than an invitation to beat the red light.

Folding-bike flexibility is clearly attractive to many normal-clothes cyclists utilising trains or buses. In some parts of central London, the posh-togs on a Brompton is a standard sight at the ASLs. The other week I got chatting to a High Court judge in a London pub; he had his Brompton with him, tucked under the table. His roll from house to train, and train to City, is happily done in his Armani suit. (If I ever come up in court over a bike incident, I hope I get him.)

Ruth Martin offered the woman's perspective on clothing. 'You can pretty much get away with cycling in your work clothes from October to April. I carry a satchel with a suit jacket in it and swap it with my fluoro one when I get to work. And you can cycle in heels, you just need the right pedals and a bit of practice. And if it's raining, I take the train – you don't have to cycle Every Single Day. In the summer, I take work clothes in my (quite girly, from Bobbins) pannier – it really does help if you have showers at work – and keep client-meeting-heels under my desk.'

More effective commuting

Though the rucksack 'n' road bike combo is common, most commuters recommend racks and panniers as the easiest, least sweaty, way to cart

stuff around. Special laptop panniers are available, though my netbooks have survived clattering over London potholes and bobbly canal towpaths in conventional panniers, cushioned by fleeces or waterproofs. Really good panniers aren't cheap – over a hundred quid a pair – but they last. I can't tell you how long Ortliebs will stay waterproof in daily heavy-duty use before wearing out, as I've only had mine eight years.

Cycle training is useful, even for the experienced and confident. Many councils provide subsidised or free sessions. It certainly isn't kiddie cycle-proficiency stuff (such as the amusing 1971 film *Betcher!*, tinyurl.com/cyctrainvid). Training provides real-life techniques for the traffic coalface, and you may be surprised to learn that you're not being nearly assertive enough. Perhaps if providers retitled 'Cycle Training Lesson' as 'Superadvanced Megariding for Power Commuters', male take-up might improve?

Route-knowledge is power, and your council will have lots of free cycle maps and brochures: get plenty, and carry spares – I've given out countless London cycle maps to curious work colleagues and people lost in the street. Such maps often suggest back ways and shortcuts you wouldn't have discovered, and having a variety of routes to call on makes it a pleasure to incorporate other things – shopping, social calls, sightseeing, that quick-drink – on

(Left) Stock up on free cycle maps and point out best routes by bike (Right) Luggage on the bike: less sweat

your way to or from work, with the enticement of no parking or public transport problems.

Pleasure before business

The respondents to my informal survey came up with dozens of suggestions for encouraging cyclists – and many opposing views on their effectiveness. Bike breakfasts, bike buddying schemes, a cycle-to-work week, 'bike doctors' at work, a cycling section on the intranet, lunch and evening rides, maintenance workshops, lunchtime talks from the local cycle campaign. Some found these worked, others didn't. There's no one guaranteed method: what catches the imagination of your non-cycling colleagues will depend on specific conditions at your workplace.

But there does seem one general truth. The main reason people don't cycle to work – from my online straw poll of car and train commuters – seems plain inertia. 'I could, maybe I ought to, but I guess I'm just too lazy', was a typical response.

Which does suggest our counter-message. Because, like the respondents, I cycle-commute not because 'I ought to', but because it makes getting to work fun. I arrive feeling alert, fit, and alive. Surely everyone, employers and employed, wants that. So never mind the city-break to Copenhagen: let's get a bit of Copenhagen to come to us.