



Wheels for All: Inclusive cycling comes to Birmingham.

As part of the Birmingham Cycle Revolution, a Wheels for All programme has been started at Alexander Stadium in Perry Barr. Wheels For All is a national programme of events to bring cycling to children and adults with disabilities and differing needs. The centres provide a selection of alternative and adapted cycles, trained leaders and a safe space in which to try them out. While there are centres across England and Wales, this is the first time they've run sessions in Birmingham.

This newsletter will look at some experiences of cycling with disabilities and cycling with different types of cycles. It can be easy to forget that not all cycles are of the most common two wheel design, and often the disabilities that people have may not be visible. Cycling can be a great equaliser and liberator, providing independent transport, but we need to make sure that the transport network provides the right conditions for all people on all cycles.

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Getting Birmingham
in the saddle

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This issue of Birmingham Cyclist magazine is focused on cycling and disabilities. The Push Bikes website has regular updates about cycling issues in Birmingham, including updates about the Birmingham Cycle Revolution.

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➤ *As a voluntary organisation, the office is not manned on a regular basis. The most effective means of contacting us is by e-mail.*

➤ *We hold meetings on the 1st Tuesday of each month at 19:00.*

Wheels for All: Report

The first of Birmingham's Wheels For All inclusive cycling sessions started on the 22nd April, at the Alexander Stadium in Perry Barr. Kim went along on behalf of Push Bikes to find out more:

Wheels For All is a national programme of events to bring cycling to children and adults with disabilities and differing needs. The focus of their current funding is for young people aged 11-25 with all kinds of disabilities, but they welcome anyone who might not have had the opportunity to cycle. Mixed-ability groups and families/friends of disabled people are particularly encouraged.

I arrived at the stadium to find them setting up in a fenced-off service area to the side of the main entrance. While slightly uninspiring to look at, this provided a quiet area of smooth, flat tarmac with plenty of room for people to try out unfamiliar cycles. There are plans to move to a larger space in the stadium ground for future sessions when it becomes available.

They had an impressive assortment of sturdy tricycles, quads, hand-cycles, wheelchair tandems and so on in all shapes and sizes. Indeed, the one thing that was notably absent was a normal bicycle, unless you counted the one I arrived on. Cones were set out for anyone wanting to practice their fine steering control.

Everyone was encouraged to try riding anything they liked, be they disabled children, parents, or visiting Push Bikes members... My shoulders are still reminding me how much work hand-cycling can be!

One smartly-dressed adult turned up who, while not disabled, had never learned to ride a bike as a child for cultural reasons, and wanted to see if she could learn. With a bit of encouragement she did a couple of laps on a very practical step-through upright tricycle (including carrying my folded Brompton bicycle in the cargo basket to test its load-carrying ability), and left with a huge grin and a promise to return next week in some more comfortable clothes.

We also had some families of autistic children who welcomed the opportunity for them to cycle in a safe, controlled environment where they could learn at their own pace - without having to worry about interactions with strangers who might not understand they were disabled, as they might when sharing the space in a public park. This was something I hadn't really considered before, as while everyone recognises a small child (or even a wobbly adult) losing the stabilisers for the first time, older children and adults with invisible disabilities are likely to come across badly if they have issues with bike control or behaviour in a public place. This demonstrates the im-

Wheels for All: report (cont.)

portance of these kind of sessions beyond simply providing access to adapted cycles.

At the end of the session, the children were encouraged to add their own drawing or text to a poster commemorating the event. It is hoped that this will be added to over future sessions.

The sessions will run for 16 weeks from the 22nd of April, every Wednesday from 4pm-6pm at the Alexander Stadium, Walsall Road, Perry Bar, B42 2LR. Car and cycle parking (a set of Sheffield stands by the stadium main entrance) are available on site, and you're welcome to bring your own cycles

along to ride if you want. Helmets are provided, though I'd suggest that bringing some gloves might be a good idea, to prevent grazed hands if you do fall off.

► Kim

For more information about the sessions contact Ian Tierney on ian.tierney@pushbikes.org.uk or phone 01925 234213

This article can be found on our website: www.pushbikes.org.uk/content/wheels-all

Further information about Wheels for All can be found at: <http://cycling.org.uk/wfa/intro>





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My Trike Electric

I am one of the 17% of disabled people who are born with their disabilities. I have a rare syndrome which means I am partially deaf and have balance problems. I also have significant arm and hand impairments which mean that my arms are different lengths, with no movement in my left wrist and limited use of my hands, the right being more capable than the left. My left shoulder dislocates painfully and my right shoulder is now deteriorating due to over-use.

After my partner Kim and I moved to Birmingham, she met a cyclist with one arm riding a recumbent tricycle with adapted controls. She was keen for me to be able to cycle, to join her and her cycling friends, so we decided to use our savings

to buy a recumbent tricycle. Visiting Kevin Dunseath at D-Tek in Little Thetford for a day of trying out trikes, I was set up on an ICE Sprint and able to zoom off immediately!

What was revelatory was the fact the ICE trikes worked 90% for me without any modifications: Three wheels meant I didn't need to work to balance the cycle and the handlebars were independently adjustable, set up so I could manoeuvre the trike without dislocating my left shoulder. The only modifications were to put all the controls on the right side for my better hand, add a bar-end to the left handlebar for my hand to rest on, and a set of mirrors so I didn't have to look over my shoulder as much. Ubiquitous design is best for disabled users; something



Natalya at the Clent Hills on her trike.

My Trike Electric (cont.)

which is normative and naturally flexible enough to meet a range of needs with minimal adaptation, and for me ICE's designs do that.

We started out cycling up and down the nearby Rea Valley cycle path, dodging the various bollards and anti-cyclist gates. This route is flat and traffic-free, but it is difficult to maintain a decent speed due to having to give way to other path users and the many road crossings. Canal towpaths were mainly too narrow for a cycle with three wheels, and rusted-up RADAR gates and steep bridges with slippery brick surfaces were difficult to negotiate. So, as I gained confidence and my cycling fitness improved we started to venture onto the roads. The following year I successfully completed the 25 mile Macmillan charity ride from Stratford-upon-Avon: a total of 39 miles in one day, far further than I'd ever hoped to be able to ride!

Unfortunately, my disabilities mean I get ill much more often than most people, so I can't always go cycling regularly to maintain a decent level of fitness. We have added an electric assist, so we can ride to more interesting places, and Kim has to put some real effort in when we ride together. Last summer I didn't do a huge amount of riding, but with the motor helping, 40+ miles at a 12mph average was easily achievable. This meant that not only could

we ride out to Henley-in-Arden to sample the ice-cream, and see the view from the top of Clent Hill, but that I was able to participate as an equal in group social rides.

For me the sticking point is transport: there are often occasions where I'd like to ride further from home. Without a car there are limited options for doing so. Most train operators refuse to carry tricycles, and we've given up transporting it other than in a friend's car or hired van. As we were uncertain about my confidence in traffic, my trike was not intended for day-to-day transport. We prioritised what was best to ride rather than me being able to get it through the front door without assistance: To get my trike out of the house is a two-person lift, with the heavy battery pack removed. Fortunately my commute is a manageable walk, and Kim does all the errands, so I don't need to make many local journeys by cycling anyway. If circumstances change in future, I would consider getting a cheaper, simpler trike to use for local journeys so I could manhandle it more easily and would not worry as much about leaving it unattended.

 Natalya

Unabridged version with more photos on the Push Bikes website: <http://www.pushbikes.org.uk/blog/my-trike-electric>

Cycling with Epilepsy

Cycling with epilepsy? How does that work? Doesn't epilepsy involve randomly falling over, unconscious, and shaking uncontrollably? It can do, but this stereotypical seizure is just 1 of 40 different types. A common type is the absence seizure, which can be so brief and fleeting that many pass unnoticed.

I was diagnosed with epilepsy in my teens during the stress of taking my o-levels, and my epilepsy was characterised by absence seizures. Whenever I had an absence seizure, I would feel strangely disconnected from the world, aware of things going on around me, but unable to make conscious acts in response. If someone spoke to me during the seizure, I may or may not have understood what they said. Either way I wouldn't have been able to formulate a response, let alone voice it. However, if I had understood what was said to me during the seizure, I would respond afterwards, but with some difficulty.

Although epilepsy is technically a disability, an absence seizure can be as harmless as daydreaming, but occur randomly and inconveniently. They only become disabling if they are so frequent that they leave insufficient time for ordinary life (and thus they can affect learning in children). An interesting feature of these seizures is that actions

requiring no conscious effort continue as normal, and that is the reason why someone with absence seizures can cycle. I only remember having one seizure whilst cycling, but I have no memory of what happened during the seizure. All I know is I found myself on the pavement, sitting on my bike with one foot down to keep myself upright. My subconscious must have used a dropped kerb to join the pavement, and then applied the brakes and brought the bike to a halt. 'Safe mode' had kicked in to prevent harm.

As far as driving is concerned, the British government has an enlightened view about driving with epilepsy. All they ask is that you be free of seizures for at least a year, either naturally or through medication. I had my last seizure at 17, which meant my driving lessons were delayed, and then I ran into A Levels and university. I started work before passing my test, so without my bike, I would have had no personal mobility. My bike got me to and from work for a year, along a trunk road designed solely for motorised vehicles, an unpleasant experience which made me long for a car. When I eventually passed my test, only one insurance company at the time, Eagle Star, didn't discriminate against people with epilepsy. Without them, I would

Cycling with Epilepsy (cont.)

have been unable to afford to drive.

But everyone is only one seizure away from not being able to drive, and someone with epilepsy needs personal mobility as much as everyone else. Provided the nature and frequency of the seizures don't render the activity totally impractical, cycling offers an option that is never going to be provided by a private motor car. Reactions need not be so quick on a cycle, and when things go wrong (collisions with motorised vehicles excepted), the results are rarely fatal. Location

matters, of course, and if things went wrong in the middle of a busy junction designed only for motorised vehicles you would be in serious trouble, but if you are on segregated infrastructure or roads that are quiet by design, you would be much safer if you had a seizure.

➡ Robert Latham

The unabridged version of this article, with illustrative videos and weblinks can be found on the Push Bikes website at www.pushbikes.org.uk/cycling-epilepsy

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Weekly Evening Ride & Social:

The rides vary from 2 to 12 miles, depending on season and weather, with the pace set by the group. We try to use quiet routes for most of the rides, and advise on route type for each ride. Most destinations have food if you don't have time to eat after work. We try and pair you up with other members of the group for your return journey home, for example a number of the women riders cycle home together.

Weekly Saturday Morning Rides in Bournville:

A gentle ride starting from Rowheath Pavillion, Heath Road (B30 1HH) 10am each Saturday Morning.

Monthly Sunday Rides:

The rides vary in length and tend to be a bit quicker and longer than the Wednesday or Saturday rides. They

usually return to the area they start from after a leisurely lunch at the destination.

Evening & Sunday ride details can be found on the following sites:

Facebook: www.facebook.com/CycleBirmingham

Visible without a Facebook account - Click 'Like Page' and Tick 'Get Notifications' and 'Following' to ensure you receive regular updates or bookmark it in your browser if you don't have a Facebook account. There is also an older Facebook Group in existence (This older group is only visible with a Facebook account).

Twitter: @cyclebirmingham

Saturday Bournville ride details can be found at: <http://bournvillegentlecyling.blogspot.co.uk/search/label/Futurerides>



Enabling Disabled People

On the one hand, Wheels for All is great, as it will introduce Brummies to vehicles they didn't know existed, vehicles that help disabled people to get about. It's not the first such event in the UK, but it is depressing that in this country our aspiration appears to be limiting disabled people to hiring equipment that allows them to peddle around a running track for a short while. Moreover, how are they going to get there? Adapted cars are expensive and in addition to impairments that would render operating a car dangerous, no-one under the age of 17 can drive a car on the public road, yet this event has a target age range of 11–25. We have built a country in which people are required to drive everywhere, and if you can't drive then you will simply be ignored.

That group of people is a significant proportion of the population of Birmingham. According to the Birmingham Mobility Action Plan green paper, “36% of all households in Birmingham do not have access to a car and in some areas of the city this figure is far higher, with well over 50% of households not having access to a car”.

Things are rather different just across the North Sea. Cycling around the Netherlands one could easily come to the conclusion that in that country there is an extraordinary number of people with disabilities, because it's normal to encounter disabled people getting about largely unassisted, using a wide variety of vehicles that are notable for not being cars. These vehicles are



Trikes can provide mobility to people who have balance problems.

Enabling Disabled People (cont.)

used on the cycle paths, so they can be used safely despite not having the speed or (heavy) safety features of a car.

The simplest form of transport for someone with a disability is the bi-cycle. This may seem counter-intuitive, but it takes less effort to move about on a bike than by walking, so a bike can be sufficient to tip the balance from immobility to freedom of movement. A bike can of course be modified to meet the needs of the person using it. Age related disabilities are becoming common and someone in the UK who is reliant on others, due to living long enough, could in the Netherlands use a bike to maintain their independence.

Electric scooters are seen as a nuisance to pedestrians in the UK, because they can move rapidly on

a busy footway. That speed is not an issue on a cycle path. Although wheelchairs are not seen as transport in the UK, in the Netherlands they are fitted with a hand cycle attachment, providing greater speed and range. With a battery and motor, the hand chair can turn into an electric scooter. Trikes are commonly used as a mobility aid in the Netherlands, as they offer intrinsic stability but offer performance more like a bike. An electric assist, helps those who have insufficient strength to provide pedal power. Indeed, a custom-built electrically assisted trike is a standard mobility aid in the Netherlands.

For children the equalising effect of modern cycling infrastructure means that even a quite seriously disabled child can travel to school with their friends, who will also be



Access barriers like this cause issues for tricycles.

Enabling Disabled People (cont.)

cycling. In general disabled people in the Netherlands are not segregated from their peers simply because they can get about in much the same way as everyone else.

What Can You Do?

If you are in a position of responsibility and able to effect change, then I hope this article will inspire you to make infrastructure in the UK more accessible.

If you are a cyclist with a registered disability, and you find the infrastructure in Birmingham (or anywhere in the UK) obstructive, you can threaten to take your local council to court for breaching the Equalities Act. This act trumps all others, and it is likely the council

will not defend itself against your challenge. The act has already been used in this way to get one stymie gate removed in Birmingham.

Any cyclist can of course contact their member of parliament (and during elections, candidates), to ask them what they will do to create an environment in which not owning a car isn't a disability.

The more people who do these things, the faster will Britain become egalitarian.

➡ Robert Latham

The unabridged version, with more photos, is on the Push Bikes web-site at www.pushbikes.org.uk/blog/enabling-disabled-people



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Join Pushbikes

Birmingham is starting to plan better for cycling, but there is still a lot to do.

We currently have several campaigns in progress and are in frequent contact with local councils over cycling issues whether raised by cyclists or matters the councils contact us about, as they believe they might affect cyclists and therefore ask for our views. With the Birmingham Cycle Revolution

approaching its second stage, it is even more important that we influence local planners and Centro and local councils to build good quality infrastructure that increases the safety of cyclists.

Your support for Push Bikes will help benefit cyclists in and around Birmingham and Solihull.

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