

Life cyclists

On your bike: increasing numbers of Australian professionals are opting to hit the road on two wheels.

WORDS **RENAE LEITH-MANOS**

CYCLING HELPS YOU LOSE WEIGHT, keeps you fit and reduces stress. It is an avenue for meeting new people and a great way to see the world. For the past six years Australians have bought more bicycles than cars. Hundreds of cycling events take place around the country each year with participation rates up 15.3 per cent (2001-2004) and steadily climbing. Some of Australia's largest companies are getting in on the act by sponsoring rides; CEOs are taking up the sport and giving their staff time off to cycle during the working week. Even Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott is a big supporter of this green mode of transport.

"An ageing population and changes in the employment structure within the corporate world – which has seen more people work part-time, particularly in place of retirement – have brought about an increase in physical activity among people over 35," Cycling New South Wales CEO Kevin Young says. "People have concluded there is more to life than spending 12 hours a day in the office."

Increases in transport costs including fuel, tolls and public transport have also had an impact on the two-wheel push, with more people opting to cycle to and from work.

"In Europe, cycling is the second largest sport behind soccer in terms of both participants and fans," Young says. "The Tour Down Under in Adelaide attracts 495,000 spectators each year – more than the Formula One event."

Experts say that all you need is a basic bike, energy and information on local routes.



PHOTOGRAPHY: ADRIAN COOK

CYCLING



PROFESSOR IAN FRAZER

Director, Centre of Immunology and Cancer Research, University of Queensland; 2006 Australian of the Year

"WE'VE BEEN LIVING IN BRISBANE for 21 years and I ride from home to work every day – about 14km each way. It's a great way to keep fit, get fresh air and let go of any problems. About 80 per cent of the trip is on bike paths. Brisbane has a lot of them – many don't link up with each other, but at least there are some. Whether or not you can ride to work depends on where you live, as Brisbane is quite hilly.

About a third of the University of Queensland population cycles. Academics don't think it's a great idea to spend a lot of money on cars – they don't have a lot of money to spend on anything.

Cycling for me started as a kid and I never stopped. I grew up in Edinburgh, Scotland, and rode to school every day, then to university. I have cycled through every sort of weather and in many different countries around the world. Years ago I learned it's best not to cycle in fresh snow. My wife Caroline and I were in Cambridge on another sabbatical, I rode every day and she joined me. There are more bikes than cars in Cambridge as there's nowhere to park.

My bike is a basic model. I know some people who go out and spend \$10,000 on a bike and another \$5000 on wheels, but that's not me. Bikes get damaged when you use them every day. Mine was about \$700 all-up, so it's not too expensive to fix.

[Since being named Australian of the Year] I give about 10 talks a week all over Australia, so my riding has decreased. I can't cycle all the way to Perth from Brisbane and, while it might be acceptable to turn up to work on a bike, it's not yet trendy to turn up to a conference in sweaty bike gear." >



PHOTOGRAPHY: ADRIAN COOK

CYCLING



JUDY SLATYER

CEO, Lonely Planet Publications, Melbourne

“THERE’S NOTHING BETTER than the feeling of exploration and freedom, not quite knowing what you will find. When you travel by bike, you’re in it – you feel it, see it, smell it, touch it. You get lost and find yourself again.

When I was single and in my 20s, I went overseas for seven months. I couldn’t afford a car, so decided to go by bike. Everyone thought I was mad – I even did a self-defence course before I left – and the night before I left I was subject to a lobby campaign from family and friends. I was in tears wondering what I was getting myself into as I had only ever ridden my bike to school. But that trip got me completely hooked.

Since then my partner Pete has joined me, and we have circumnavigated Sicily, cycled in Paris and ridden from Rome to Salzburg. In Australia we do smaller tours and cycling weekends. Every Easter about 20 of us cycle somewhere in Australia.

I went to France this year for the Tour de France and sat in a Radio France media car. The Tour is a wonderful event. Everyone watches it for free as the race passes through little villages. All of the local produce is on show; it feels like a true celebration of France.

At home in Melbourne, I cycle to work every day from Essendon to Footscray, which is not long enough – it takes about 25 minutes. Any clothes I wear have to be able to be squashed into a pannier [cycling bag] and must be scrunch-free.

When I travel by car or train, I feel caged in. There’s nothing better than being in a village in Spain, finishing a day of cycling with a beer in a local cafe and spreading out your map to find yourself surrounded by 20 locals all arguing about the best route to take the next day.” >



Alannah MacTiernan

CYCLING



ALANNAH MACTIERNAN

West Australian Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Perth

"I AM A SUNDAY CYCLIST who doesn't wear lycra, but enjoys looking at the city from the back of a bike. I don't crouch or ride a racer, but ride a normal cruiser and sit high in the saddle to get a bird's-eye view of things you don't see from behind the wheel of a car. From a bike you can see how the bits fit together in terms of architecture and city planning.

I love the European tradition from the 1940s and '50s where the Italians and French wore their day clothes and rode bikes to work – they still do it.

I like the idea of having cycling integrated into your everyday life. My daughter took me cycling one Mother's Day. From then on I saw the city and cycling in a totally different way."

POPULAR BIKE ROUTES

- **Melbourne Beach Road (St Kilda to Mordialloc), Bay Trail, Yarra Trail**
- **Sydney Parramatta to Sydney Olympic Park, Prospect Waterways and Cycleways**
- **Brisbane River Loop, City to Airport**
- **Adelaide River Torrens Linear Park Trail, Riesling Trail**
- **Perth Perth to Fremantle along the river, Kings Park, Swan Valley**
- **Hobart The Commando Circuit, Around the Channel**
- **Darwin Nightcliff foreshore, Esplanade.**

CRAIG BINGHAM

CEO, Portfolio Partners, Melbourne

"I PLAYED A LOT OF SPORT over the years and have a lot of injuries as a result. A few friends introduced me to cycling on Sundays and initially the appeal was that every ride ended with a coffee. Cycling is the new golf among many men my age, as a lot just don't have the time for golf. Aerobically, it's great for the body and it doesn't put strain on the joints.

Cycling is a very accessible sport. You can do it at leisure, as often or as little as you like, and both men and women can enjoy it. Mentally, I can stay a lot fresher for longer, my concentration sustains with the riding.

I started working at Portfolio Partners in February 2001 and introduced cycling as a tool to change the work culture. It has become a focal point for the employees. It started off as one ride a week, on Sunday mornings, now 60 per cent of the office staff ride and sometimes at lunchtime we go for a ride around Albert Park Lake. I ride five days a week, about 200km in all, each week."



Craig Bingham

ALANNAH MACTIERNAN PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBERT FRITH; CRAIG BINGHAM: ADRIAN COOK



MIKE MCKAY

Olympic gold medallist with Oarsome Foursome (1992 & 1996), Melbourne

“THE ROWING FINAL at the Athens Olympics was the first day of the rest of my life. I haven’t rowed since, but I’ve done a lot of cycling. I’m a better person when I’ve been for a ride. Riding is egalitarian, it’s something anyone can do, regardless of age, weight or fitness levels. It is such a simple pleasure to get out on a bike and enjoy the day. I sometimes see wiry riders in their 70s overtaking guys in their 20s. Cycling is good for the legs, the heart and lungs, and you are weight-supported.

A couple of us pioneered cycling 20 years ago while training for the Olympics. We’d ride home from training as a cool-down and clock up 300km a week. After a big training session we’d still have lactate in the system and getting on a bike for 25 minutes or so was a great, non-stressful way of recovering. People thought we were a bit too driven at the time, cycling after heavy training sessions. There was some criticism and fears we’d get sick. But it worked out well and I’ve never stopped riding.

When you’re involved in a team sport there is a huge social element and sometimes getting on the bike was a great way of having time-out on my own.

Now my rowing days are behind me and I’m co-owner and director of Fitness 2 Live. We find health and wellbeing solutions for large corporations and cycling is increasingly on the agenda.

There’s a great social culture around cycling, too, with coffees at the end of a ride. Every day of the year groups head off on rides, at all hours. And they’re really encouraging of people joining in. I got involved with my cycling groups simply by asking around. They always let everyone know on the internet when a ride is on.” >

PHOTOGRAPHY: ADRIAN COOK

CYCLING



CON BASTIRAS

Director, Con Bastiras Architects, Adelaide

“THE MOST UNIQUE THING about cycling for me is that you can travel long distances propelled by your own energy. I’ve been interested in riding since my school days. When I was 20, a group of us rode to Mount Gambier from Adelaide. [After that] we knew anything was possible and I got into racing.

The challenge of racing is the continual experiment with your body. Each week, depending on my times, I can gauge if I’ve eaten right, put on any weight and how I’ve trained. It’s a weekly experiment with my body. There are different categories you race in – the veterans and masters grades for over 35s, and the elite category where you can race against Olympic riders – and everyone has a handicap.

I stay fit so I can ride, not the other way around. I train a lot through the week and ride a minimum of 200km.”

Con Bastiras



GETTING STARTED

These organisations can locate cycling routes and groups in your area:

- **Bicycle NSW** www.bicyclensw.org.au
- **Bicycle Victoria** www.bv.com.au
- **Bicycle SA** www.bikesa.asn.au
- **Bicycle Queensland** www.bq.org.au
- **Bicycle Tasmania** www.biketas.org.au
- **Department of Planning and Infrastructure WA** www.dpi.wa.gov.au
- **Pedal Power (ACT)** www.pedalpower.org.au
- **Darwin Cycling Club (NT)** www.darwincyclingclub.com

CHRIS RISSEL

Associate professor/co-director, Health Promotion Services, Sydney South West Area Health Service

“WHEN OUR CAR WAS STOLEN from in front of our house in Petersham during the Olympics, it was the catalyst to get me back on my bike in order to get our eight-year-old daughter Elly to school – in NSW, if you’re riding with a child under the age of 12, you can ride on the footpath.

A lot of Sydney people think the traffic is too busy, but there is also a lot of infrastructure for cyclists that they don’t know about. I am part of a BUG (Bicycle User Group) that has regular organised rides. There are about 50 of these groups around Sydney and they’re very social and include dinners as well as rides. I’ve got three bikes: one main bike, a racing bike and a fold-up bike, which was expensive, but extremely useful. I throw it in the back of a taxi or on the train and ride from the stop to wherever I am going.”

BIKE TOURS & HOLIDAYS

- www.grasshopperadventures.com
- www.worldexpeditions.com
- www.intrepidtravel.com
- www.peregrineadventures.com
- www.bicyclingworld.com
- www.randonneetours.com
- www.experienceplus.com



Chris Rissel