

Why my e-bike changed my life

By Kristin Blume

Before kids, I used to commute from Weston Creek to the inner north on my trusty Scott hybrid. I got to know the back routes to avoid the worst swooping magpies (well before crowd-sourced *Maggie Maps*), I was fit, and I loved that little kid feeling of roaring down the hills and gliding along the flats.

Then I had my two kids and the time just wasn't there any more. After a few years as the babies grew into kids who started riding, I was no longer fit. So when I saw that my work had a salary sacrifice scheme for e-bikes, I thought 'why not?'. I had ridden e-bikes at work and while they did feel a bit different to a regular bike, the 'whee' feeling was there, with the bonus of not working up a sweat in my work clothes.

The process was very easy; I got in touch with an e-bike company and they helped me pick the right bike for me. Lots of paperwork, similar to a car lease, but all very straightforward.

For the first 12 months, I rode to work and back a handful of times. But then came the COVID lockdown.

To maintain our sanity, we took the kids on a three kilometre loop ride each day (the furthest the four year old could manage). Riding every day for six or seven weeks helped me learn how to really ride my lovely bike, and so when we started going back to the office, I was hooked.

These days, I ride my e-bike all over the place – where before I would have driven every time:

- To school and back for drops off and pickups without parking hassles
- To work on my office days – a 25 km round trip in wind, heat or cold because the extra e-bike power takes the hassle away
- To shops or the markets, towing a kid cart that is too small for the kids but ideal for a week's shopping
- Around the lake or for a nice coffee stop somewhere.

I wondered before I got the bike: Will it help my stress levels (like my old bike did)? The e-bike is great for my mental health and wellbeing. On a stressful day I can choose maximum pedal assistance and let the wind blow away the stress as I gently pedal along. Or make myself work hard to move the bike, forgetting my stress by the time I'm home.



Kristin with her new e-bike

Will I get fit? The more I ride, the more I move under my own power, and the less the battery goes down. And the fitter I get! This was a pleasant surprise, but when you think about it, your legs have to move to make the bike move – and I find I use lower levels of pedal assist now I am fitter. I have bike rider's calves again!

It may be hard to choose the bike over the car: Everything I need is already on the bike (pannier bag, built in lights, locks attached to the bike), so it offers the convenience of a car trip and is faster for a two kilometre trip anyway.

Will I actually use it: Changing habits is hard. For me, the lockdown and then the school routine was a great way to get used to jumping on the bike for short trips. This helped me move on to using it for spontaneous trips, and the work commute too. I always get organised the night before so there is no excuse to not ride.

Will the battery last: Range stress is pretty common with electric cars, and I had the same worry about my e-bike. I have yet to ride far enough to run out of assistance. I can usually make it to work and back (25 km) with at least 60% charge left on my battery. It just takes a little planning to make sure you charge the bike after any long rides and use less assistance to make it last longer.

I could talk about money, but while I hardly ever fill my car up these days, that's not the reason I love my e-bike – it's the joy of being able to jump on a bike without arriving somewhere all sweaty that keeps me converted.

If you are thinking of making the

jump, here are a few things to think about:

- Does your work allow you to salary sacrifice an e-bike? Is leasing an option? (I went through a Melbourne-based company, but there are a few around).
- E-bikes can be expensive up front, but the savings in petrol do add up.
- Can you try a bike (or two) before you buy? They do feel different to a regular bike, and a lot of bike shops let you borrow one for a few weeks to make sure it fits for you.
- Accessories are worth investing in too – can you add a basket, panniers, bike lock and lights to the bike so that you can jump on for spontaneous trips?
- You do get what you pay for. Because I planned to replace car trips, I decided that investing in a top range bike was better than upgrading a car.

There are lots of great e-bikes around now so head to a bike shop and see what you can get without your budget!

Happy riding!

Kristin is a public servant and has been a Pedal Power member since 2010

