

Alice Hansen believes two-wheeled transport – of the non-motorised kind – is the answer to out-of-control petrol prices and excuses for not exercising. Here's why

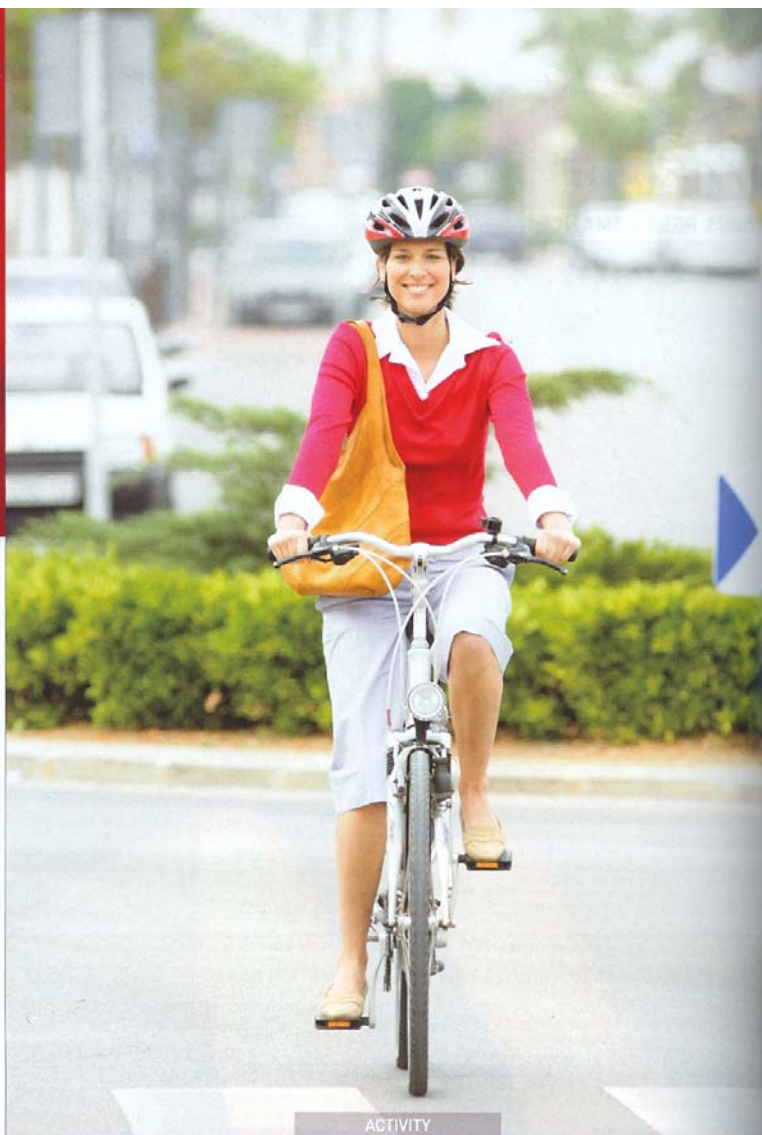
PETROL PRICES may be soaring, but that does not diminish our need to get from A to B. Getting those legs pumping, as opposed to standing by the petrol pump, might just offer an alternative that's less painful on the wallet – and the advantages do not stop here.

Hopping on the bike to get to work, run errands or enjoy a leisurely outing provides a range of health and wellbeing benefits that vehicle transport cannot offer. Not only does it get your blood circulating, endorphins racing and heart rate up, it also allows you to connect with the day.

"On the bike, you experience a greater affinity with what the day is like," explains avid cyclist and mother of five, Mary O'Halloran. "It makes you feel active and offers a sense of pride in having gotten yourself somewhere without relying on an outside fuel source."

In today's busy society, health-aware individuals work hard to maintain balance by eating well, exercising an adequate amount and tending to their general health. Despite good intentions, though, daily pressures and duties often push our health to the side.

"If you can actually exercise and achieve a goal of getting from point A to point B, which would normally be in a car, you are doing two things at once *and* conserving time," Mary says. "And if you build commuting by bike to your workplace into your daily routine, you will begin to exercise habitually. And we are creatures of habit.



ACTIVITY

Alice Hansen

WHEEL DEAL

"If you set out to do that habitual exercise as an extra at a gym, you'll think of 100 excuses why you can't make it. You won't think of 100 excuses why you can't go to work today and so you'll actually exercise 10 times a week. Who regularly goes to the gym 10 times a week?"

By building your exercise programme into a daily commute, it takes the decision out of exercising and builds it into part

of your daily life. It does not take long to establish routine, and consequently, exercise slips into life barely noticed.

Interest in recreational cycling is on the increase across New Zealand and Australia, with programmes set in place to encourage new participants to the sport. According to National Development Coordinator of Cycling Australia, Tom Skulander, "in recent times, cycling has been quoted as the new golf".



Cycling Australia, the national governing body of cycling in Australia, has seen a considerable membership rise of 12 percent in the last year. In the past three years in particular, the organisation has focused heavily on recreational cycling and education.

"Bringing together people with an interest in cycling, not just in a racing sense, we felt was an area that we should be active in," explains Tom. "We are now heavily involved with programmes and skill-development courses that teach community members how to handle a bike safely out on the road."

The programmes have been implemented in conjunction with the Australian Sports Commission and encourage participation at a range of levels. Skill courses, including J-Cycle for children and Skill Cycle for adults, cover a range of fundamental safety issues and


health benefits. They also encourage participation in competition events.

"In this time of rising petrol prices, cycling makes sense," says Tom. "Not only does it offer economic savings, but it's great for your health too. I plan to incorporate a couple of days' push-bike commute to my work in Sydney."

The benefits are countless once you are out on the bike. There is no need to scout the town for that elusive parking space; in many instances, you can ride straight up to the door. You have the opportunity to discover new territory, and take on new hills and challenges. There are no personal trainers required or expensive gym memberships. It is free fitness at your own pace.

"From a family perspective, the bikes have offered us so much," concludes Mary O'Halloran. "Riding to school each day and educating the children

about safety on the road has taught them to look out for one another as siblings. In addition, it offers a daily opportunity to share time and experiences with the children, and to bond with them."

So, if your bike tyres need some air, or even need replacing, remind yourself that it's far more cost effective to maintain two bicycle wheels than those four rubber tyres under your car. Get outside, hop on a bike and feel that wind through your hair. 

For more information, contact Cycling Australia on +61 2 9644 3002 or visit their website, www.cycling.org.au

For cycling info in New Zealand, try the New Zealand Cycling Federation on (04) 473 8386 or visit www.cyclingnz.org.nz



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