

I am a Bicycle Commuter

People asked for years, "Do you ride to work?" It was an assumption; obviously, as much as I ride, I must be riding to work as well. I must be living on a bike. Until recently, that wasn't the case; having two locations required frequent transfers of inventory, requiring that I have a shop van each day that I would load up with items needed by the other store, and Steve had one for product needed in Redwood City that was coming from Los Altos. We'd exchange vans several times per week, so basically I was stuck driving, whether I wanted to or not.

That was then, this is now. The "purple van" (1996 Dodge Grand Caravan) went through its second transmission several months ago, and sorry, you don't spend another \$2500 on a 14 year old American car with 140,000 miles on it. Not a Dodge Caravan of that vintage anyway, a car known to have one of the worst transmissions to come out of Detroit. So that vehicle now sits in the driveway, reminding me of its existence every time that dreadful "1 800 cars-4-kids" ad plays on the radio, and otherwise just occupying space until I figure out what to do with it. I know it's not going anywhere, but...

OK, getting back to the commute thing. The other thing that kept me from wanting to commute was having to wear a heavy backpack carrying my "missile case" (laptop with the keys to the universe) and other stuff needed between home and the shop. Wouldn't be that big a deal except for the fact that I live near the top of Jefferson so I've got a gnarly climb at the end of the ride home. But I am a competitive guy, and part of that competitiveness gives rise to figuring out how to do things that seem unreasonable. Part of that Calvin & Hobbes thing where Calvin's Dad tells him "Calvin, go do something you hate. It builds character." So I don't like a heavy backpack on my back. Solution? Panniers. Oh, but there's no way panniers are going on my Madone. Solution? Another bike! Isn't that the solution to all problems? In my case, I already have the appropriate bike; my Bike Friday PocketRocket has a rear rack that I use when riding in France, so I put a grocery bag pannier on the side, dropped my laptop briefcase into it, and voila, my commute bike!

No, it's not the same riding up Jefferson on my Bike Friday carrying a heavy load as it is riding my Madone up to Skyline, but it works, it gets me there, and that competitive thing still takes charge such that I time each ride home (best time so far, 12 minutes, 5 seconds... average runs just under 15, with most of the variation due to red lights vs green). I get home with my heart pounding through my chest (remember I've got a 400ft climb at the end) and definitely need a second shower, but it really feels good. I've avoided a couple of short (2.7 mile) car trips, and on yesterday's ride to work, I even stopped at the bank on the way to make a deposit and get change. And, even with that, it was door-to-door from home to the shop in under 20 minutes! Maybe, maybe I could have done it in two minutes less in a car. Maybe.

And while I'm at it, I'll put in a pitch for being part of your surroundings instead of isolating yourself from them. What do people do in a car? They roll up the windows, turn up the radio, play with their iPhone... they do whatever they can to try and remove themselves from driving. On your bike, you're feeling the road, your acceleration from the stop signs, you smell breakfast cooking, you notice the changing colors as you move from winter to spring, and you develop a sense of what the weather is going to be based upon wind direction and some sort of inner wisdom that comes from being one with the surroundings instead of being trapped in a moving steel cage.

Plus, I'm not paying \$4+, moving up to maybe \$5/gallon for gas! I'm actually saving real money by commuting on a bike. I'm avoiding the expenditure of either repairing or replacing a car, I'm avoiding gas, and I'm staying healthier than I otherwise might be. The world really does go by at just the right speed on a bike!