



She Bikes MCR

Source talks to Nes Brierley of I Bike MCR, a grassroots group of Manchester cyclists who stage an annual bike festival. Nes is a cycling advocate, instructor and enthusiast, as well as being Bike It officer for Sustrans.

Q So, how much of your life is lived in the saddle?

I'm a volunteer for *I Bike MCR*, organising the annual festival, an independent event that aims to strengthen the cycling community in the city as well as raising the issues that concern Manchester's cyclists. We work towards a car and capitalist-free city.

On top of that, I regularly organise free bike maintenance classes, cycle skills lessons and bike-building workshops, as well as other activities promoting cycling.

But it doesn't stop there. For light relief I founded the Manchester Dropouts bike polo team, which I still play for. I also initiated The Spokes – the UK's only bicycle dance troupe. We're a group of women who are passionate about encouraging cycling, especially amongst women and girls.

Q How did you first get involved in sustainable transport? I've always been passionate about it, but particularly since I first went cycle touring. Using my bike to travel around Ireland – over the mountains and through beautiful valleys – gave me a chance to experience how special riding a bike can be. A bike gives you a connection with your surroundings, letting you feel the wind in your face, and smell the new-mown grass or the salty sea air. It encourages you to socialise with strangers, and to go places that a car just can't take you. It's really a reflection of how I want to live my life – to the full, experiencing and truly living every moment rather than letting it all go by in a blur.

Q How easy is it to bike Manchester? Is it really accessible to everyone? It's very easy really. It's flat, and there are lots of other bike riders around, so you

don't tend to feel alienated. Events like the *I Bike MCR* festival, bike polo matches and the monthly Critical Mass rides (which depart from the Central Library at 6pm on the last Friday of each month) mean that it's easy to get involved and feel supported.

I think society sometimes makes us feel that we've got to rush around and get everywhere quickly, but if you count the cost, it really isn't worth it.

Q What about younger cyclists? Well, that's my day job. I work as the Bike It Officer for Rochdale and Stockport. Research has shown that 90 per cent of kids own a bike, and 30 per cent WANT to cycle to school, but only one per cent actually do it. I work with children and teachers in twelve schools to help identify what's stopping the other 29 per cent, and encourage them to overcome those barriers.

Q Why is sustainable transport so important? That's a huge question! I guess because we all need to take responsibility for our own actions. We need to start taking sustainability seriously, and stop looking for someone else to clean up our mess.

The average Briton travelled 5,354 miles per year by car between 1999 and 2001 – and a quarter of those trips were under two miles, an easy walk or bike ride. Traffic is increasing all the time, and the government's response is to build more roads. But the simplest way to reduce both traffic and road use is for

each of us to cut down on our car journeys – and instead to walk, cycle or take the train.

It can be a really empowering thing to take action like this, especially for children, in a world where it's easy to feel as though there's too much to do for one person to make a difference.

Q So, it's time to be honest, how many bikes have you actually got? Around twelve. But they're all really necessary! I've got one for bike polo, one for cycle touring, a racing bike, a mountain bike, a lovely little shopper, a social bike (also known as a pub bike...), a road bike and an old Pashley post bike. There are a few more, and then I've got at least twelve kids' bikes for The Spokes bicycle dance troupe.

Q Before you cycle off into the sunset, what's your vision for the future? I hope to create a stronger, supportive bicycle community in Manchester – one that demands some respect from other road users, which I don't think we get now. I dream of a less car-dominated city, with more people biking Manchester.