

Smart Cycle Training

CASE STUDIES

JOHN PINNINGTON

Male, 63

Retired Headmaster, Norwich, North City.

Goals: Brush up on cycle proficiency, get the latest advice on road safety, improve confidence at busy roundabouts.

Summary

John came for cycle lessons in March 2014 after buying a new bicycle. He was a fairly experienced rider and regular cycle commuter before retirement but wanted to brush up on cycle proficiency before embarking on a couple of long distance cycle rides that summer. He had also noticed himself getting slightly less confident at busy roundabouts, which he put down to his age and slight decline in mobility/flexibility, so thought some advice might be beneficial.

John used his day-to-day bike for the lessons and came twice initially, focusing on road positioning, junctions and traffic awareness. He made small adjustments to the way he rode to be more safe and came again the following year for a refresher. Following advice, he also changed his routes into the city, choosing cycle paths away from busy roads with better air.

John said of the lessons, *"Matt can come to your place which is a big plus...you start at home and finish at home. You usually get more than the hour because he's generous with his time and isn't trying to squeeze money. He always gives you his FULL attention. He's available and efficient on his email...within a few days of the lesson he sends you the feedback. The process is really good."*



The following interview was conducted by an independent consultant, James Frost.

James: What were your initial goals?

John: It wasn't really about health and fitness. It was more to do with checking that I hadn't fallen into bad habits, raising my confidence on busy roads and making myself aware of what the latest advice was (on road safety)

How did you come across Smart Cycle Training?

I didn't even know that this kind of service existed before Ray Freeman (shop owner) recommended Smart Cycle Training. But I thought it would be a very wise move given that I was on a bike every day and given that I was going to do a ride across the country (Whitehaven-Byker) in the summer.

What was your initial impression of Matt?

Enthusiasm...that would be the word. He sounded...bordering on a fanatic, which didn't put me off because that's what you want in a teacher. I felt confident that I was doing the right thing.

How did you start off?

I have a road bike for longer journeys but Matt suggested I use my day-to-day bike as that was the one I mostly used.

The first thing he said to me was 'Have you got your hi-vis (high visibility jacket)? Hi-vis is even more important than the bike helmet'. It surprised me but I could see he was right, even in the day. If you're not seen then...

The other two things were to wear the bike helmet but wear it properly and make sure the straps are firmly on and then he checked my tyres for air pressure. And lastly he checked my brakes and whether the saddle was the right height. He was very thorough.

What did you cover in the first lessons?

We focused on secondary and primary position in the road, which I wasn't aware of, so that was useful. Now I often use primary position, not as much as he would...I am more compassionate to car drivers than him...but much more than I used to.

We covered left and right turns, roundabouts and junctions at a roundabout, especially where there are traffic lights and you stop and there is a little space for a bike. He would say 'which position are you going to take, secondary or primary, and which lane are you going to be in if you are going right or going left?'. Each lesson was similar but in more depth, each time through.

How did you feel after these first sessions?

Afterwards I was thinking, yes it was a good thing to have done. I learnt something and I am adjusting my cycling accordingly...not dramatically adjusting...but I have adjusted. I look round more and I take up that primary position in the road more and I am more confident on roundabouts.

Was there any follow up?

After the second session he wrote me a full email of where I could improve. It's a very good email he sent. You're told all this good advice (on the lesson) but after a month you could forget it. With the email, if I was going on a long journey I would re-read it before I went. I kept it because it's specific to me and my weak areas.

Were there any moments that you felt unsafe or unsure?

Never unsafe. Slightly uncertain and insecure when he was showing me roundabout protocol, for example if you are doing a right hand turn at a roundabout and you take the primary position and then halfway round you have to cut in on cars, take a left hand turn and look behind you. But that wasn't down to Matt, it was in case of a wayward driver or if I wobbled.

As you get older, even though I do lots of yoga and swimming, you don't find it as easy to turn...the neck isn't as flexible...so you are less secure in looking round to see if cars are behind you. I think that was a big factor in going to see Matt, even though I wasn't so conscious of it, but that's such an important movement for a cyclist to make. So knowing the correct position to be in on the road was very important to help with that situation.

Any feedback on the overall service?

Matt can come to your place which is a big plus...you start at home and finish at home. You usually get more than the hour because he's generous with his time and isn't trying to squeeze money. He always gives you his FULL attention. He's available and efficient on his email...within a few days of the lesson he sends you the feedback. The process is really good.

Did the training feel like a standardised product or tailored to your individual needs?

Oh, very much tailored to my individual needs. On the last lesson I said I would like to go into the city centre because I do a lot of riding in the city centre and although Matt's plan was to do Aylsham Road he went with my plan first.

What feedback would you give Matt?

He's a very good teacher and he knows his stuff and I am definitely better on a bike after seeing him. I would definitely recommend him to other people, in fact it would be quite a nice birthday gift to book three lessons for someone who is a cyclist.

The only criticism I would have of him is that he can be long-winded from time-to-time. So he can spend quite a long time talking around an issue which isn't necessarily helpful. But that's no big deal and part of his passion.

The other thing is that you trust him, he was what I call a good living citizen, a good person, which helps because it means you take the advice more.

Anything else you've learnt?

One thing he says, which is really good advice, is to look behind you every now and then to make the driver more alert to the fact you are there. It's like you are giving the driver a gentle warning...'go easy, I'm here ahead of you on my bike'. So Matt is always talking about awareness; road awareness and awareness of other cars.

On a slightly different note, but a very useful one, Matt was pushing for avoiding busy roads for environmental reasons, for the health of your lungs because of the particles from diesel in particular. I always went into the city on the cycle path by the side of Grapes Hill but his advice was to go via Coslany Street away from the roads. So this was a really useful side benefit and I've now adjusted my route into the city which I would do at least twice a week to avoid the main road – less traffic, better air.

Also, I had a knee operation late last year on my quadriceps tendon and I had three months where I couldn't ride at all. But once I could, the physiotherapist said that the cycling was the best thing I could do and one of the reasons why I was healing so quickly. What they do is measure the flexion in the leg each time you visit and in my case the flexion was significantly better each time.

Any advice you would give to people thinking of cycle commuting?

I would recommend cycling to work as long as the route is a reasonable one. First of all it's healthy...getting daily exercise. Secondly, it's definitely faster. Thirdly, to save money. Fourthly, linked up with the health, it's less stressful.