

ahead of the curve

Carfree Living

How long would you last if you had to give up your four wheels for two? Three years ago, writer Sarah Gilbert and her husband, Jonathan Hanson, a U.S. Army Reservist, made the leap. Now the couple and their boys—Monroe, 2, Truman, 4, and Everett, 7—share a longtail bike to get around town. We asked Gilbert to give *Oregon Home's Green Living* the lowdown on family life without a car.

Why did you give up your car? “Our insurance was about to expire, and the car needed tires and we didn’t have the money for new ones. Also, I was beginning to feel guilt about global warming, and I wanted to do something. A friend told me about the Carless Diet, a program that encourages you to give up your cars for a month. We did that and then just kept doing it.”

How much money do you save? “More than \$300 a month, just in insurance and tags. Add in car repairs, and it’s more.”

Is your family healthier from all the biking? “Jonathan has lost a lot of weight. I’ve always been athletic, but since I started biking, I have a lot more stamina. Everett, who’s 7, rides his bike to the farmers markets with me, which is about a six-mile trip.”

Ever wish you didn’t have to go by bike? “Of course! When it’s pouring and my husband is gone and I have to bundle all the kids onto the bike, or, if one of the boys has a meltdown and I have to coax him back on. Things get complicated.”

Tell me about your typical loads. “It’s easy to pack things on this bike. I’ve hauled 100 pounds of oats, flour and beans from Bob’s Red Mill in Milwaukie, Ore. I’ve picked up a chicken. Once, I passed a yard sale with a stand-up quilting hoop for \$1, so I brought *that* home.”

RIDE, SARAH, RIDE:
The Gilbert-Hanson clan loves their longtail bicycle, \$1,700, from Clever Cycles (clevercycles.com) in Portland.

You know your high heels are going to prompt readers to write me. Can you really cycle in them? “With an upright bike, you have a lot more flexibility in what you wear. I can wear almost any shoe with the type of pedals I have.”

What do you do if you need to go someplace out of town? “We carpool. But people don’t realize how good public transportation is in Oregon. If we want to go to the coast, there’s a bus that goes to Seaside. My parents live on Highway 26, and the bus stops right across from their house.”

Every parent, by now, is thinking, What’s she going to do if one of her boys has a medical emergency? “I’ll do what everyone does in an emergency: Call 9-1-1. Monroe once cut himself on some glass when we were out. Blood was gushing everywhere. The ambulance came and took us to the hospital. That’s what would’ve happened if I’d been in a car. I was too shaken up to have driven.”

What’s your favorite thing about being on the bike? “I interact with people more and *really* get to experience where I am. And I love having my kids with me! It’s easy to talk to them, and it’s nice to feel them right there. If they want to stop and look at something, it’s easy to get on and off the bike. With the kids, people always wave or stop to talk to me. I can be in a bad mood, but there’s something about being on a bike. Once I start pedaling, I’m happy again.”

—Margaret Foley

