

'This is our little contribution to combating climate change'

German native explains why he has given up his car in favour of a bicycle

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For many of us the idea of ditching our cars and finding a new way of getting around probably wouldn't even cross our minds.

Cars are a part of life for most people and it's hard to avoid them unless you live in a large city.

However, for one couple who decided to give up their car late last year in favour of their bicycles, they haven't regretted it.

Hermann Glaser-Baur and his wife Marion have been discovering new places on two wheels instead and they feel much better for it, as the German-born grandad explains...

"We never wanted to be dependent on cars to be honest," Hermann said.

"We have always been taking a break from the car and it goes as far back to when our grandson Travis was small and I used to cycle about with him in a trailer on the back of the bike. He was so used to the bike that it got to the stage where he never wanted to go in the car.

"I think for both fitness and health and also environmental reasons, we did not ever want to rely on the car.

"Another aspect of it is that Marion and I are both nature conscious and environmentally conscious so it felt like the right thing to do.

"We are seeing drastic change in the climate with transport and haulage making for the largest percentage of our carbon footprint so we felt that we had to do a few things ourselves," he said.

As owners of County Derry's only active linen weaving mill, Flax Mill, located on the outskirts of Dungiven, both Hermann and Marion lead quite hectic lifestyles.

However making the transition from four wheels to two wheels wasn't very difficult for the couple who have been cycling for many years.

"I'll admit not everyone is equally able so they may not be fit to go a bike but if the public transport is good enough then there's no reason why you can't get on your bike," said Hermann.

"We are fortunate that the main Belfast to Derry route is close to us and we can get a bus every half hour.

"It would be more of a problem if you lived in the likes of Upperlands or Aghadowey, where the public transport links aren't as good.

"For us at the minute, it's a very handy mode of transport and Ulsterbus actually allow you to take your bike on the



Hermann Glaser-Baur has given up his car in favour of cycling.

bus which is a good move.

"If I am going to see a customer in Belfast and they are off the beaten track a bit, I will put the bike in the boot of the bus and will then cycle to the customer when I get off the bus in Belfast."

When asked about the practicality of moving around on a bike, Hermann is quick to point out that there are no issues.

"A Greek friend said to me 'as a man that has moved in so many countries, do you not feel restricted on an island and moving by bicycle only?'"

My response to him was a line from a famous Colum Sands' song 'the faster you travel, the

less you see'," laughed Hermann.

"But really, we have very good couriers now. Recently we have used them to ship to Latvia, we have sent cloth to Belfast for costumes for the new series of Game of Thrones and we have also sent material to England. They come to our door so it's not a big problem."

Hermann has however stated that the North is missing a 'meaningful system of bicycle lanes' which he believes would keep cyclists safer on the roads.

"I am used to travelling in other places and operating in

other places and it can be very busy on the roads, however I will say that Irish drivers are more on the careful side - it's the underdeveloped infrastructure which is the main problem.

"The majority of drivers are quite good but we really are missing a meaningful system of bicycle lanes.

"Berlin, Amsterdam and Brussels all move on bicycles. The people there have all learnt from being congested. Having hundreds of cars on the road and just one or two people in each one, is it really needed?"

The dad-of-two says that

travelling by bike can be time consuming but he believes it is rewarding in many other ways.

"With work you have to value your time, however with bikes, what you are saving in terms of insurance, tax and fuel, you are probably losing in time.

"However, we do feel a lot better for getting on the bike - it's that get up and go feeling that you get.

"Obviously in this country the weather is a hindrance at times and you do need weatherproof clothing when cycling but we still try to get out on the bike every day.

"This is our little humble con-

tribution to combating climate change, we may be cursed for being on the road on a bicycle but we honestly think we are doing the right thing."

Just recently, Hermann's wife Marion invested in a new bike - a British made Pashley cycle - and they also have plans to restore a 40 year-old tandem bike which they hope to cycle throughout England.

"With all the cars, motorbikes and that, we have always gone back to the bike," said Hermann.

"We are going to keep the cycling up but maybe eventually we will get a little electric car to complete the fleet."