

“Karen’s Great Cycling Adventure”



I have always loved sport and being active, but for so long it took a backseat to raising a family. Finally my kids were grown up and independent and I found myself with time for me. I wanted to return to being active, but my body was no longer able to do, or even wanted to do the things I had done previously.

I tried this and that but still my body complained. The doctors said ‘Avoid impact on your joints’, so what does that leave me?? Swimming or cycling I was told. Well I wasn’t going to cycle, that tight lycra, fighting with cars on main roads most definitely wasn’t me, so I swam. Apparently swimming wasn’t for me either coz something in the water didn’t like my skin or vice versa, so it looked like I might have to try this cycling thing if I wanted to be active.

The boys had bikes they didn’t use so it wasn’t going to be expensive, but me being me I had to do some research first. I came across some free classes being offered by the City of Salisbury for people that hadn’t ridden for a while that were looking to get back on a bike. This was meant for me, so I took the plunge and enrolled and went. I was a bit nervous and didn’t understand half of what was being said, then came the bit I was dreading, the practical part of the class, actually getting on the bike. Well I survived, I didn’t fall off and I actually liked it.

I followed this up with the other classes in the series, I can’t even remember what they were about, but I do remember being given some maps and being told about off road trails and secondary roads, so I didn’t have to mix it with traffic if I didn’t want to. This might even be doable.

I now had my basic knowledge, time to take the next step. No, first it was time to procrastinate, make excuses, too hot, too cold, too wet, too windy, too tired, you name it, I thought of it. Finally the bike got dug out of the shed, it had flat tyres, I pumped them up, but it still had flat tyres, it had been sitting for a few years. I didn’t remember much from the classes, but I was thinking that I might need new tubes so I went down to the local bike shop. They just happened to be having a sale at the time. I didn’t get the tubes, I ordered a new bike.

I picked up my bike a week or so later and did a few trial rides around the block. I had to do this now, there was no going back. I dug out the paperwork from my classes and found the info on the cycling groups that the council had created as the next step. The one that took my eye said all the right things ‘easy’ ‘flat’ ‘beginners welcome’ so I contacted the number. I was committed, I had to go now, I don’t go back on my word. So I went and that was the beginning of a wonderful journey.

At first I rode once a month with this beginners group, they were a great bunch, very supportive and I didn’t have to wear lycra or mix it with vehicles coz we rode on sealed trails, trails that I didn’t even know were there and were so beautiful and peaceful. I started to make a few cycling friends, the coffee stops after the rides gave us a chance to socialize and share experiences and hints. I learnt that I might have to relent on this lycra thing and bought myself a pair of padded lycra knicks for comfort, but only wore them under normal clothes, so this wasn’t really wearing lycra.

Before long once a month wasn’t enough so I started to look at other rides in the group that had got me started, Cycle Salisbury. I went from once a month with the beginners group to once a fortnight with a couple of groups within Cycle Salisbury, then to trying to ride once each weekend. I was amazed at the cycling experiences I was hearing from some of the more experienced riders, I just had to get out and do some of this stuff, so I started researching again.

There are so many groups and/or rides out there, which ones do I try? I was still a virtual beginner not even capable of 15 km rides and my speed was slow. I was lucky coz I had a very supportive husband, I call him my support crew, he would drop me off and be there at the end to take me home. It was a luxury not many have, I could have pulled the pin at any stage during a ride, call him and he would be there to pick me and my bike up. Having that knowledge probably gave me the courage to attempt rides that on paper looked quite a challenge for me, but I never attempted anything I didn't think I was capable of. This sometimes meant only selecting to do half a larger ride, and be collected at a specific point. Although I had thought differently several times during some rides, I have never had to opt out and call my 'support crew' to pick me up before the predetermined end point, maybe that's the stubborn streak I have or my competitiveness from years of sport when younger, but something I have pride in.

Along my journey I have met some fabulous people, most are so very supportive. One special lady that I call my riding buddy, we are so very similar in so many ways, our love of cycling, our physical cycling capabilities and life philosophies in general. We support and encourage each other and started to expand our wings together, attempting rides outside the Cycle Salisbury group. Our first attempt was a Bike SA ride called Gear Up Girl, an all female ride to support females riding. We did the shorter 'easy' 15km River Ride. It almost killed us. We stopped a million times to rest and recover, but we eventually made it. That was a huge step in our cycling progress, we had tasted the wider world of cycling and wanted more.

Along with our regular rides we started to enter more Bike SA rides, being very selective making sure they were within our physical limits, although they did push them. We joined other groups and started to ride new and exciting trails and events, even riding with an interstate women's' group that was over in Adelaide for the Tour Down Under. I have started hosting what I call a Twilight Pootle (a word I have fallen in love with that according to the Oxford Dictionary means "Move or travel in a leisurely manner")

I am now proud to say that I have ridden on the closed Southern Expressway in Amys Ride, Bute to Wallaroo, my first experience on an open road ride, and our latest expedition was to ride in the Big Red Ride from Glenelg to Outer Harbour and return. This one was a biggie as it was just short of 50km, totally on the road (yes mixing it with vehicles) and all participants were required to wear the lycra jersey. We were the last group in, but we got there and everyone was so proud. I ride at least once, often twice on weekends, usually ride home from work one day a week (I haven't quite mastered 2 ways yet as its 15km one way), I have my midweek Pootle and whatever else I can fit it. My aim this year is to ride at least 1,000km and to crack the big 50 km in one ride.

So here I am. I can wear lycra (maybe not quite as well as some, but I don't care), I can ride on the road (not that I intend to) thanks to the new laws I do actually feel a bit safer and if not I can divert to a footpath. I most definitely am having fun doing an activity that I thought initially wasn't for me.

I hope my story can inspire just one person to give cycling a try, there are so many different opportunities out there, one might be just the right fit for you. You will never know until you give it a try.

