Most people consider paved roads to be the natural habitat of cars and trucks and looking at most major cities in the world, they would be correct. However, this was not always the case. In fact, it was cyclists in the late 1880s that pushed for the improvement of roads for the sake of safer biking which eventually paved the way for the proliferation of motorized vehicles in the early 1900s1. What would the world be like if bikes had continued to be the primary mode of transportation? Let’s explore a few ways bikes size up to cars.

One of the most appealing aspects of bike transportation is the cost. According to the 2022 AAA Driving Costs Fact Sheet2, the average yearly cost of owning and operating a car is upwards of $10,000. This includes the price of fuel, insurance premiums, maintenance, registration, and other associated costs. The average annual price of commuting by bike is around $3503, a 96.5% reduction. The price of the average new car in the United States just hit a record high in 2022 of just over $49,0004. In contrast, the average new bicycle has a $1,500 - $2,500 price tag, another reduction of around 95%. Even high-end bike models, including electric bicycles top out around $6,000, so when considering the cost of a vehicle, bicycles beat cars hands-down.

One of the biggest advantages of motorized vehicles is the convenience. Cars have roofs, windows, heating and air-conditioning. They can carry heavy loads from one place to another and are much faster in emergency situations. These conveniences, however, often come at the cost of the operator’s health. The average American spends close to sixteen days behind the wheel of a car each year5, which is a lot of time that could be spent exercising. Regular aerobic exercise has been shown to lower resting blood pressure levels in sedentary older adults7 and one 2010 study8 found a correlation between the amount an employee commuted to work and a decrease in the number of sick days they claimed annually. Exercise also has a profound impact on mental health, offering at least a three-fold decrease in symptoms of depression in college-aged students compared to students who didn’t exercise regularly9.

It’s true that bicycles have to contend with cars on the road and, as a result, their riders are subjected to air-borne pollutants from their exhaust. However, studies show that cyclists actually experience less cumulative exposure to air pollution than those in cars and even pedestrians during similar commutes5, so the health benefits of biking outweigh the risks in that case.

Cars are a convenient way to get from point A to point B, especially for folks in rural areas, but for city drivers, choosing to bike a few days a week would benefit their mental and physical well-being. Biking is cheap, fun and can accomplish most of the same tasks as a car can with the right gear and a little preparation. So let’s get out there and share the road!

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