Down up pedals, down up down

I am a cyclist, I have been for one week now. I have wanted to be a cyclist for about 18 months, but apart from riding to the corner deli when we ran out of milk say once every few months, I have never really ridden. I’ve always had a bike but have never considered it a form of transport before, despite observing several friends getting around primarily on bikes.

It all started when I decided to ride all the way from Hamilton Hill to Sth Freo (for a guerilla movie on Hulbert St). It would normally take around 15 mins to drive. My partner had just had the snip so was not riding anywhere and could stay home with our 3 year old. It was cool autumn evening and there was a seemingly easy route to take and after hearing me bang on about how I want to ride more, my partner had put lights on my bike in an effort to eliminate my excuses for not riding.

I was very nervous; apparently more nervous than my partner prior to his little procedure. I wondered how dark it would be out there. How I might cross the busy intersections. How I would get back up those hills on the way back. How sweaty I would get. Anyway with a shove from my partner I did it. It was exhilarating! I was flying down the hills in seventh gear (the biggest one on my Malvern Star) I didn’t even have to pedal for that bit, and I didn’t die. I walked my bike over the busy intersections and arrived in one piece, not even very sweaty. At the end of the movie I met a new friend and rode home with her most of the way.

I was so excited about my adventure that the very next day I rode to the bike shop and had a big basket fitted to the back and new spongy bits inserted in my helmet (the old ones were perishing and bits were falling into my hair). I have ridden to a few other things close by, but if I were really a convert, really committed to being a cyclist (as Tim told me I now was) I had to ride to the…Park and Ride to get to work. This would make an impact on our weekly car miles.

In order to make my goal reality I told everyone I could I was going to do it. During the week my friend at work (who is over 50) who rides from Leeming to Northbridge every day marched me down to the maintenance guys and held my hand while I was issued a key for my locker. She showed me where the showers were (7 years in the same workplace and I had no idea we had showers!). The day I had determined to ride was going to be 38 degrees and I also had to work to 6pm so I would be riding through Coolbie at night. No excuses, I had to do it. I nervously packed my bag and went to bed. It was a sleepless night but I got up early got ready and rode to the park and ride.

The hardest bit was riding to the fly over right near my house - all up hill. I nearly turned around back to the comfort of my car. The funny thing is that I never really thought of Hamilton hill or Coolbie as being hilly, but as soon as you get on a bike, they seem to rise out of nowhere, menacing big hills. I guess it’s similar to when you try to garden you think, ‘geez has summer always been this dry’ (probably not quite, but you get the idea, sustainable living means you become acutely aware of your natural environment).

So the Coolbie stretch was okay, I am trying to remember the joy of the downy bits of road (not the pain on the uppy bits). I was overtaken by a bus – no problems. I walked my bike over North Lake Road, all good ( I pushed the button to cross the road as pedestrian and then ran over, the lights went bip bip bip and I was already on the other side but the cars still had to wait – sucked in! Hm, was I getting a complex?). I then came upon a beautiful flat and treey stretch along Farrington St. Great cycle path, cool and perfect. I slowed down and sang ‘down up pedals down up down, gotta get across to the other side of town…’ Even the part of Farrington that I thought would be tough and up hill as I approached the freeway was fine. Then down the cycle path that ran along side the freeway and oh, hello, lots of riders in lycra. They were friendly and nodded and smiled and me just because I was on a bike. Did they know it was my first time? Did I look out of place with my cut off jeans shorts and my big basket at the back. No mind. I was enjoying it so much, the freeway bit was fine with trees in between the cycle path and the freeway. Then I saw my destination, my Mecca. White tiles gleamed and swirling throngs of cars whizzed by and around it. I had made it! It had taken 30 mins.

I triumphantly cruzed in to the bike cage. I must say I noticed strange, stiff feelings in my legs as I dismounted. I locked up my bike and treated myself to a ride in the lift upstairs. Beeped through the smart rider thing, then reversed to purchase myself a Gatorade (which I never do!). I got on the train and had to stand. I sipped my drink and slowly pondered if I had overdone it. I felt all hot and cold and sweaty and for a minute or two thought that I might actually die. But I didn’t. Gatorade may just have saved my life. I was feeling okay by the time I got to work and perkily announced my achievements to the security guard who congratulated me then asked why I didn’t ride the whole way. I just ignored that bit.

Then I had to have my shower. Call me a prude but I was unnerved at the idea of being naked at work, even if it was in the basement in the girls shower rooms in a shower cubical. Anyway I tried not to think about it and I desweated my self and dressed in normal work clothes and took the lift (again) up to my desk. I proudly told all my colleagues my amazing feat. They were all very impressed, particularly my cyclist friend who gave me a big hug. I feel like I’m in the bike riders gang now. I know where those curious little bike paths lead and I feel special and fit getting on my bike. I must have had a bit of an endorphin rush because I did have a very productive day even though I could not wait to get back on my bike to try the ride home…which was great!