

The Holiday Season: A Time for Bicycles

by Laura Mappin

When holiday shoppers converge on the streets during this busy season, patience often wears thin. A few imaginative folks are taking advantage of an alternative mode of transportation to accomplish their Christmas tasks that leaves them feeling better than when they started. They are using the practical, utilitarian, manually-operated, two-wheeled vehicle, better known as the bicycle.

Our motor vehicles often cause arteriosclerosis of the roadways; but those on two-wheeled vehicles move through traffic like snakes slithering to their desired perch. They zip up the bike lane unhampered by motor traffic and get to park within feet of their destinations.

Granted, cyclists often get there more quickly, without the automobile anxieties akin to many of us, but how do they manage to carry the myriad packages they usually have? I put this question to a few local acquaintances of mine. Lelia Lee, who has cycled (and lived) long enough to be my

grandmother, has carried jigsaw puzzles piled high on her back rack. Irv Housinger has pedaled to the post office with numerous packages larger than bread boxes strapped to his bicycle. And Herb Lee has transported one of the most universal Christmas purchases—the Christmas tree—from parking lot to his home. Each of these riders used their back racks to which they secured their loads with nylon straps, bungee cords, or some type of rope.

But how do they keep their purchases from succumbing to the Pacific Northwest soggy? From my unofficial survey of Christmas shopping bikies, the unanimous answer is the all-American plastic bag. Large and sturdy ones do the trick. The purchases are placed inside the bag which is closed with a wire or plastic tie and then placed in a pannier, bike bag, or day-pack. If the largest plastic bag is not large enough, a plastic tarp is an excellent option.

Most errands probably involve transporting goods, but transporting people also accounts for a significant number of them. One creative and gutsy soul provides Christmas airport taxi service with his tandem bicycle. Jim Locnikar of Eugene captains his bicycle-built-for-two to the airport without a rider on the back. He then meets his unsuspecting visitor (relative, friend, or soon-to-be ex-friend), loads their luggage in the trailer pulled behind the bicycle, and before this new rider can call an auto cab, they're off.

Jim, who moved to this area specifically for its cycling amenities, explains why he does this: "Cars are only for emergency use—and what better way to introduce visitors to Eugene?" For his friends and relatives, this service is free. But what does he do if two visitors arrive together? He goes out twice.

Could there be any other reasons these people continue to use their bicycles even during the inclement month of December? Most enjoy getting outdoors and breathing the fresh air; they like sensing the aroma of freshly-cut, soon-to-be-decorated trees; and they enjoy hearing the Christmassy sounds ringing clear through the air. Some, though, feel there is no other option. As Lelia put it, "I just tried it by car today and it was maddening!"

Toy Tree at Fifthpearl

The Fifthpearl merchants are sponsoring a Toy Tree for needy children in Eugene this Christmas. The tree, located in the Fifthpearl shops, will be decorated with paper ornaments with the sex and age brackets of children in need of toys. The public is asked to take an ornament, purchase a gift, wrap it and return it to the tree. All the toys will then be turned over to The Salvation Army for distribution through their Family Services Christmas Center. The greatest need, according to the Salvation Army's representative Merilee Smith, is for gifts of toys for boys and girls ages 1-2 and 10-12. "We will accept gifts for children of all ages, of course, but traditionally we are lacking in gifts for children in those specific age brackets."

For further information please contact Alan Rogers of Fifthpearl Antiques or Merilee Smith, 343-3328.

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