



the wheelchair in for a service a crack was found. "This never happens," he was told. He had to explain about the frame and clip-on and was told he had to remove it as he was damaging NHS property. This "brought me down again, so I did some more research".

Andrew's first complete handcycle was from Mission Cycles, which specialises in trikes for disabled cyclists. He fitted an electric motor and later a 7-speed Sturmey Archer hub. "I was absolutely over the moon," he says. "What things could I do now? I went from strength to strength."

A PHASED RETURN

The main advice for anyone returning to cycling after a life-changing injury is to take things very slowly and build up time spent on the bike gradually. Scott Weddell works for the Stroke Association, and is also a Bikeability instructor and Cycling UK member. He advises getting professional assistance.

"Lots of people come to me because they're struggling with physical effects, such as their balance," he says. "We start off by going right back to the basics and building up from there, practising techniques and finding adaptations to help them progress."

Janet started off doing just seven minutes on an exercise bike, and was "knackered, whereas previously I would have been doing it for an hour and would have been fine". At this point she couldn't cope with riding outside but was determined to do so

before her next consultant review.

She took her bike to a cemetery across the road and managed a two-mile ride. She slowly built up distance. "I was going over a couple of times a week and gradually building up the mileage. I got to know the gardeners very well!" She eventually built up to 10 miles, which she admits "took some doing".

Similarly, Andrew started with a five-mile ride on his first handcycle, building up to 30 miles and losing seven stone in the process. Since then he has become the first person to complete the Trans Pennine Trail on a handcycle. He has cycled the 60-mile version of Ride London and is now in training for the 100-mile route next year.

This slow-but-steady approach is vital to building confidence too. Both Janet and Andrew say that their own lack of self-belief was a major barrier to overcome. Andrew comments: "The hardest thing was to convince myself to do it. I'd lost a lot of confidence in myself. I'd lost a lot of get up and go."

Andrew thanks wife Chris for giving him the push to get out there, while Janet is grateful for the support of friends. She rode with a friend on an old railway line that's now a shared-use path. Riding 12 miles, they also stopped at a café. "It was proper back-to-normal time," she says. "I did a teeny bit on the road right at the end, which really helped build up some of that confidence to be on the road."

Ultimately, both have the same advice: "Just go for it!" ●

How Cycling UK can help

Cycling as part of a group can be invaluable for improving confidence. As well as led rides, which take all the planning out of it, fellow members offer support and encouragement. Cycling UK has Community Cycle Clubs (cyclinguk.org/community-cycle-clubs) all over the UK, so there's likely to be one close to you.

Access Bikes (cyclinguk.org/accessbikes) and Cycle Share Fund (cyclinguk.org/cycle-share-fund) are projects operating in Scotland. They both help people gain access to cycles when cost is an issue. Access Bikes provides funding to community organisations to buy cycles and accessories and provide cycle training for people experiencing financial hardship.

Cycle Share Fund provides funding to organisations to purchase cycles and equipment for schemes that provide people with access to a bike that they don't own – ideal for anyone for whom owning their own bike isn't the best option.

In England, the Big Bike Revival (cyclinguk.org/bigbikerevival) offers free bike-fixing sessions, led rides and skills and maintenance courses to help people keep their cycles running, while also giving them the skills to ride.

Cycle for Health (cyclinguk.org/community-outreach/health) operates in West Yorkshire. Designed for adults with physical or emotional health challenges, it is an eight-week package of support which develops skills and grows confidence through cycle training and led bike rides.

For anyone looking to try out an e-cycle, Making cycling e-asier (cyclinguk.org/making-cycling-e-asier) has offered free skills and confidence sessions and one-month e-cycle loans from hubs in Manchester, Sheffield, Leicester and Burton on Trent, and Luton and Dunstable.

