



Rides take place across the UK. This is Inverness



Main photo: Katie Noble, Kidical Mass Inverness

that in not too many years the boys are going to be wanting their freedom. A large junction with no specific cycling provision is annoying and sometimes intimidating for an adult. It can make an entire route impassable for a child. Reading is littered with such junctions. I knew we needed change but I didn't know how to help make it happen. Again, I felt responsible but powerless.

BETTER TOGETHER

When I saw a message early in 2022 inviting interested parties to come to a café and discuss setting up Kidical Mass rides in Reading, we showed up. The idea sounded great: a chance for kids and families to ride together, with marshals to keep the kids safe from traffic and other dangers. My husband agreed to put his years of finding ways around the town to good use by becoming Kidical Mass Reading's official route planner. Our oldest was very excited by the conversation; despite being confident riding his bike he had never yet been allowed to ride on the road.

The lady who had put out the summons was Kat Heath. She and her one-year-old son had just moved down from Inverness. Kat had played a key part in setting up the rides there, so she had experience. She became our official spokesperson and publicity planner. She managed to get funding in our first year for public liability insurance for Kidical Mass rides all across the country. She was later named as one of Cycling UK's 100 Women in Cycling for 2022.

We've seen many successes since that first meeting. Firstly, the rides have been joyous. We and the kids have made so many friends. They love riding with the crowd and look forward to them each

child. My husband grew up in Cambridge and a bike had been his primary form of transport since he was a teenager. There was no way he was going to let that change. So he kept cycling, taking time to scope out the least forbidding routes between the places he needed to go, and making sure he positioned himself defensively on the road.

In time we had another child and got another bike: my Tern GSD, an electric longtail cargo bike, on which I can take both children around the town. My husband now uses a triplet as his 'family car'. The boys love being on the bikes. I (and most of Reading) can tell when they're particularly happy as the oldest starts blasting 'Into the Unknown' from Disney's Frozen 2 at the top of his voice.

Cute as they are now, I am conscious

Cycling UK's view

Jim Densham, policy manager for Cycling UK, says: "Sadly, too few children cycle to school or for fun because the roads are so busy and perceived as dangerous. Like food banks, Kidical Mass rides and bike buses shouldn't need to exist and must not be seen as a long-term solution. But they are meeting a need in the current circumstances. We should praise the kids who are claiming their space on the road. All of us adults should respect children's voices and find alternatives to driving kids to school, or drive with extra caution around children. Our children need better transport options and safer road space for their health, their freedom and for the planet."

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