

## New cyclist

# DAVID FORBES

*Thanks to the Inclusive Cycling Experience, David Forbes was able to start cycling for the first time in his life. Tiia Jaakola spoke to him*



**U**ntil recently, 55-year-old David Forbes had never been able to travel great distances easily, nor enjoy the outdoors and exercise as much as he would have liked. Living with cerebral palsy, which mostly affects his legs, means that walking is painful even after a short time. While he tried cycling as a kid, David lacked the ability to balance well and couldn't master it.

That all changed last year, when he heard about Cycling UK's Inclusive Cycling Experience programme, which offers free cycle loans and try-out sessions to people with disabilities. David started attending sessions at the university campus in Inverness, where he lives, and was able to give cycling a go without having to invest in a non-standard cycle. Such machines often come with hefty price tags.

"It's a huge benefit of the project," he says. "It's not until you try something that you'll know if it's going to work for you, how you're going to actually manage. If it's something that appeals to you, you can look into getting your own bike. They have something that will get just about anybody on their way and, if they don't have it, they will investigate what they can do. The folk are very knowledgeable."

Inverness is undeniably hilly, and because of that, many of the programme's cycles come with e-assist. The one David has been using doesn't but the organisers, Iain and Katie, have recently acquired an electric handcycle that will support him even more on his cycling journeys.

"Both Iain and Katie are very good at paying attention to the different needs of all the people, without making a big thing of it," David says. As part of the programme's tailored support, the three of them quickly identified a cycle that suited David's needs best. He has difficulty getting on and off, and he can't turn the pedals with his feet. A hand-cranked trike, however, works perfectly. David also finds keeping his feet on the platform a challenge, but noticing this, Iain attached a pair of foot straps

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so David can keep his feet steady. This means he can put more of his weight down as he works the hand-cranks.

David goes to the sessions whenever he can – three or four times a week since last summer. The sessions take place in an unusually flat area for Inverness, but that's not where his ambitions end. Now David has access to a trike with e-assist, he wants to expand out of the campus, use the trike to go to the shops and slowly build it from there. He's started thinking about buying his own cycle, too, to see what options are out there.

"I think I've done it long enough to know it's not a passing phase. I definitely enjoy it and feel the benefit. I just like being outside, even if it's raining. Otherwise I would be more or less stuck in the house."

David says he's felt a big improvement in his fitness levels. "Put it this way, when I started, I used to come home and fall asleep. Now I don't – that tells you a lot."

Cycling has helped David in ways beyond getting fitter, too. It's inspired him to start visiting his local library more, which he calls a "use it or lose it" establishment, and which he's happy to be supporting. "I think because I'm exercising more, I generally have a bit more interest in life in general. It just encourages whatever you want to pursue – opens your mind up to the possibilities. I'm travelling distances that I could never hope to walk or travel in my wheelchair. Being on a bike has been transformative." ●

## Inclusive Cycling Experience

Launched in 2024, the Inclusive Cycling Experience supports disabled communities in Greater Manchester and Inverness to start cycling. The scheme offers free try-out sessions and non-standard cycle loans to enable people to consider cycling as an option for everyday journeys.

The fleet of cycles includes a wide range of bikes and cycles, in different sizes and with a variety of adaptations to meet different needs. At the try-out sessions, experts will be on hand to assess skills and requirements and guide participants to find the best cycle and get riding quickly. The programme is funded by the Motability Foundation.

[cyclinguk.org/inclusive-cycling-experience](https://cyclinguk.org/inclusive-cycling-experience)