

Why Your Next Car Should Be a Bike

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Riding a bike is Justin Laidlaw's transportation of choice; here, he makes a case for why it should be yours, too



Durham native Justin Laidlaw is the founder of Buddy Ruski, a multimedia storytelling company curious about how communities are built, and has served on the board of Bike Durham since 2021.

By Justin Laidlaw | Photo by John Michael Simpson

I bought my first and only vehicle, a 1995 Jeep Grand Cherokee, in 2014. After a year of spending as much money trying to fix the car as I bought it for, my poor Jeep became a tax-deductible donation.

Upcoming Events

6:30 pm - 9:30 pm

MAY

Palmyra with Dissimilar South at DYF

Friday

EVENT DETAIL

7:00 pm - 10:00 pm

MAY

Carolina Mudcats

Friday, Five County Stadium

EVENT DETAIL

7:30 pm - 10:00 pm

MAY

Native Gardens Comedy

Friday, Paul Green Theatre

EVENT DETAIL

7:30 pm

MAY

Big Red Dance Project 2023 Spring Concert

Friday, Durham Arts Council @ 120 Morris Street

EVENT DETAIL

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Instead of searching for another vehicle, I decided to try a different approach. I traded in four wheels for two and became a full-time bike commuter.

Biking offers many benefits. Buying and maintaining a bike is much cheaper than a car, and you can kiss those parking tickets goodbye! You're never worried about the price of gas – a hearty breakfast is all you need for fuel. My friends at **Bullseye Bicycle** helped me pick out a comfortable, sturdy commuter bike equipped with lights, saddlebags and all the (literal) bells and whistles. When it's time to fix it up, the folks at **Durham Bike Co-op** have the tools and expertise to help you feel empowered about "getting under the hood" of your bike.

If you care about your carbon footprint, cycling can be a great way to protect the planet; it's zero emissions, though you might have to use the restroom more frequently from all the extra hydrating. Folks who occasionally still need the power of a car can look to the e-bike market, which continues to innovate more options for people who need to carry heavier cargo or who don't want to show up to work sweaty during those sizzling summer months in North Carolina.



"Every May, cyclists across the country rally to bring awareness of the numerous benefits of bicycling during National Bike Month. [It's] the perfect opportunity to learn more about how you can make the streets of Durham safe for everyone."



Bike commuting is also a seamless way to incorporate more exercise into your daily routine. It builds muscle strength and cardiovascular health, and it's easy on the knees. There's no better feeling than biking to the **Durham Co-op Market** for fresh fruits and vegetables knowing that you're taking care of your body now and preserving it for the future.

Riders wanting to take their biking experience to the next level can explore any number of trails and pathways in Durham. Two of my favorites are the **American Tobacco Trail** and the **Ellerbe Creek Trail**. American Tobacco Trail is a 22.6-mile "rail trail" that starts near the **Durham Bulls Athletic Park** downtown. The ATT is perfect for leisurely rides, commuting or workouts, whether you're a cycling novice or a pro. At the 7-mile mark, you can pull off at **The Streets at Southpoint** for dinner, shopping or even a matinee at the **AMC Southpoint 17** movie theater.



Ellerbe Creek Trail is a 4-mile series of trails that starts downtown at **West Trinity Avenue** and runs north toward **Stadium Drive**. The ride immerses you within beautiful nature preserves, which are owned and maintained by the **Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association**. Both the ATT and Ellerbe Creek Trail are a part of the **East Coast Greenway**, a 3,000-mile trail network that connects 15 states, from Maine to Florida. (Fun fact, 2023 was named the Year of the Trail, the largest statewide celebration of trails and outdoor recreation in North Carolina history – a perfect opportunity to explore these trails on two wheels!)




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Bike Durham hosted a group ride around downtown and neighborhoods north prior to a community meeting to discuss the Durham County Transit Plan in late February.

These trails are great ways to access many different Durham neighborhoods, including downtown. Biking through neighborhoods like **Tuscaloosa-Lakewood** and **Watts Hospital-Hillandale**, where I grew up, helps me feel the energy of the city and strengthens my connection to the community. But my favorite place to ride is always through the streets of downtown. It's easy to pull over to take a quick photo or say hi to a friend. Stroll down all five miles of **Main Street** – which highlights different types of bike infrastructure like protected bike lanes and bike boxes that are essential for building a safe, equitable city – to get a snapshot of what riding in Durham is like.

Biking is an adventure every time you saddle up. The sense of freedom when traveling by bike is one of the many reasons I enjoy it. Unfortunately, traffic violence is still a major concern for cyclists and pedestrians. People are killed each year during traffic crashes that could be prevented with more education and infrastructure.

Bike Durham is a nonprofit that “empowers all people to walk, bike and ride transit more often through events, advocacy and education.” It champions stronger policies and more action toward improved safety for bicyclists and pedestrians in Durham and has done so for 10 years now. The organization works to support folks across the city with programs like **Safe Routes to School**, which provides bicycle safety training courses and support for schools, parents and students who want to make biking and walking a safer, more viable option in their school communities.

Every May, cyclists across the country rally to bring awareness of the numerous benefits of bicycling during National Bike Month, which was established by the League of American Bicyclists in 1956. Whether you bike, walk, ride the bus or even drive a car, Bike Month is the perfect opportunity to learn more about how you can make the streets of Durham safe for everyone. Pay a visit to any one of the local bike shops or organizations mentioned here to learn more, or simply start pedaling to see bikeable Durham for yourself.

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