

Supermarket Challenge 2007

By Steven Muir

Two children in tow, a weeks worth of groceries to collect and it's **pouring** with rain. Is it better to take the car or go on the bike? A group of people in Christchurch found that the bike was generally the better option despite the heavy rain. The Supermarket Challenge began in Cathedral Square around 4pm on Friday 23rd February 2007. There were three pairs of bikes and cars, one pair going 1km to Pac'n'Save, another pair going 3km to Merivale Fresh Choice, and another traveling 6km to Countdown Church Corner. Each bike was equipped with front and rear child seats, a home-made trailer for groceries, and raincoats.

A safety briefing noted the most significant danger of the event that is responsible for killing 2-3000 New Zealanders a year – the danger of developing a habitually inactive lifestyle. Car drivers were urged to do some exercise with their children after the event, to avoid developing this habit. Annette King (Minister of transport) noted Christchurch's great cycling assets and how important cycling is to a healthy economy and environment, and then blew the cycle mounted airhorn to start the riders and drivers on their way.



Annette King's opening talk



Steven giving the safety briefing

Tim Barnett was the car driver going on the 1km route to Pac'n'Save Moorhouse Ave, with some borrowed children and mother to help. They arrived at exactly the same time as the bike rider but unfortunately one of the children on the bike needed a toilet stop which put them behind by about 5 minutes. The bike gained a couple of minutes back with some fast loading of the groceries directly into the bike trailer crates they had transferred to and from the shopping trolley. However, Tim maintained his lead on the return journey and made good use of the one-way synchronized lights on the way up Madras Street, arriving at the square three minutes ahead of the bike. He did use six plastic bags compared to none on the bike, and his icecream was slightly more melted. Both claimed to enjoy the journey and rated it 4/5 for enjoyment, so it was a very close contest in all ways.



Pac'n'Save rider preparing to leave the Square



Tim Barnett arriving at the Pac'n'Save



Departing Pac'n'Save



Have to swap children around so there's no fighting over the front seat.



Heading down Colombo Steet



Highly scientific icecream testing

The 3km journey to Merivale Fresh Choice was lead by the bike rider who had a clip on tandem for one child to ride on (with trailer on the back of the tandem) and a front child seat. They were much faster than the car in heavy traffic down Papanui Road and arrived at the supermarket 15 minutes before the car. This lead increased to 25 minutes by the time they returned to the square. Unfortunately they were also faster than the photographer so we didn't manage to get many photos of them. Icecream consistency was similar and the car shopper used 7 plastic bags compared to none for the bike. A screaming toddler disrupted the ambience of the car (traffic congestion didn't help either) and she rated her enjoyment at 0/5, compared to the rider who gave it 5/5.



Merivale Fresh Choice bike returning to the square. Note tandem with trailer behind.



The slightly smaller than anticipated crowd

The 6km trip to Church Corner Countdown was very close with the bike leading by 2 minutes on arrival at the supermarket. The rider had a slight advantage in this case only carrying one child due to the younger one being sick. They also made use of the pleasant cycle paths through Hagley park, Riccarton Bush and past the University. The car on the other hand had a difficult decision to make about whether to select Riccarton Road or Blenheim Road, neither being particularly appealing. The return journey was quite a different story with the bike extending its lead to 27 minutes when they got back to the square. The driver became frustrated with traffic on Blenheim Road, and turned left past the main Riccarton town centre, and made for Riccarton Road, which improved their speed until they hit the Riccarton roundabout where they were held up for quite some time. Eight plastic bags were used by the car and none by the bike. The car had harder icecream in this case with the bikes icecream having become quite soft after half an hour out of the freezer. The car rated their enjoyment at 1/5 and the bike at 4/5.



Countdown driver and rider getting ready



Heading down the road



Swapping trolleys at the supermarket



Packing directly into bins saves time



Departing the supermarket



Kids love to look at trailers



Better on the bike in this traffic



Even better though in this traffic – enjoying the cycleways through Hagley Park.

15.6mm of pouring rain that fell that afternoon and, being the organizer of the event waiting around in the square, I was feeling less-than-positive about the weather. I was therefore a little skeptical about how positively the riders rated their enjoyment of the ride. I questioned them closely as to whether they *really* enjoyed the ride or whether they were over-rating it, just so I didn't feel so bad about dragging them and their kids out in such terrible conditions. However they insisted that they genuinely had a good time on the ride, despite some initial reluctance to get out on the bike in bad weather. The bad weather certainly made the traffic even worse than it normally is at this time of day and gave the bikes an extra advantage. The goods in the bike trailers survived very well despite not making use of covered bins – a testimony to the amount of packaging that exists even without extra plastic bags. The goods carried on the trailers weighed around 37-38 kg.

A disadvantage of the bad weather was that there were not as many takers for free chilled drinks from the fridge trailer, or people wanting to try out the kayak trailer and other load carrying bikes being demonstrated. The kayak trailer would be ideal for any multi-sport enthusiasts instead of carrying canoes on top of a car - far better to bike your boat to the water and get double the training in one evening.



The fridge trailer with free drinks



20kg ice + 40kg drinks remained cold for over 36 hours and towed along nicely.

The Supermarket Challenge 2007 showed again that bikes with trailers can do remarkable things, and that if you can overcome the psychological barriers of getting on the bike despite the bad weather, it can actually be a lot

more fun than taking the car. The trailers used were constructed for between \$20 and \$50 – less than a single tank of petrol. This cost could be recouped in a few weeks of using the trailer instead of a car as well as receiving the additional health, social and environmental benefits.

Learn more about how to make your own trailer from scratch or by using a kitset at www.cyclingchurch.org.nz or email: iwanttoseesupermarketcarparksfullofbiketrailersandnotcars@cyclingchurch.org.nz

Keep an eye out for the next Supermarket Challenge in 2009 which will be held on a Saturday at around 10am in order to give the poor cars more of a fair chance.