

# Bicycling has become viable transportation

## option

By JOE MITCHELL

About two weeks ago, I was driving on U.S. 380 between Bridgeport and Decatur, listening to National Public Radio's "Marketplace" program.

The discussion was about the "Peak Oil" theory developed by geophysicist M. King Hubbert which asserts that the world's oil supply reached its "peak" production in the 1970s and that the current supply is rapidly depleting. The depletion will accelerate over time, resulting in catastrophic consequences for a civilization dependent upon a cheap supply of abundant fossil fuel.

As if Hubbert's predictions of a Mad Max world in our imme-

diately future were not frightening enough, the program segued into a phone interview with Texas Oil legend T. Boone Pickens. Pickens stated in no uncertain terms that the price of a gallon of gas would exceed \$3 throughout the country by the end of this year. This would most likely mean prices approaching \$4 per gallon in Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and other coastal metropolitan areas where fuel taxes and market forces are more stringent than the rest of the nation. (The referenced program is available for download in both mp3 and Real Audio formats at <http://www.globalpublicmedia.com/news/432/>)

Still, people in the U.S. will give their last penny to keep driving. Why? Americans, and especially we Texans, are devout individualists. It is the reason the automobile is predominant in our society. Mass transportation alternatives are generally shunned as "modes of last resort" and persons dependent upon such are for some reason viewed as moral failures.

We hate waiting in lines for buses and trains not so much because we despise the waiting, as much as we detest being dependent upon someone else to get where we need to go. We like to hop in the cars that we paid (or pay) for, then drive ourselves to our destination.

No one else is involved. We get there and back when we are ready. In our cars, we control the speed we travel, the interior temperature, the radio, we can even sing to ourselves without being greeted by looks of consternation.

In our cars, it's all about us. Oddly enough, in our drive for individualism, we become dependent upon our automobiles. A strange symbiosis develops. When our cars break down, we break down.

"How will I get where I need

to go," we ask ourselves. We cringe at the thought of asking for rides or, horrors, using mass transit (an extremely limited alternative in Wise County) while the car is in the shop. Your routine must change to match someone else's - whether it's your spouse, a co-worker, a bus driver or a neighbor. We feel powerless, dependent, un-American, and even worse, un-Texan.

I sold my car in the summer of 2001 before I moved to

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Sacramento, Calif. Unlike Texas cities, Sacramento has a very efficient light rail and bus system. I used the system to get to work and around town when I first moved there. It was initially a fun adventure. But after months of waiting at bus stops and light rail stations, and sharing my space with lots of strangers, I became weary of the routine.

Being too cheap to buy a car, I dusted off my Schwinn Mesa Mountain Bike, thinking, "Oh,

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I'll ride the five miles to work maybe once a week to get a little exercise and a break from mass transit monotony."

Little did I know how much I'd like it. I felt great when I got to work. Within two weeks, I was a daily bicycle commuter. I started waking up and getting to work earlier and earlier. Within six weeks, I'd dropped more than 20 pounds and had thigh muscles as hard as rocks.

I began to notice the bravado

of other bicycle commuters, and noticed my own developing. I began to pity automobile drivers. Sure, they get there on their own, but, on a bicycle, you get there on your own power. It became obvious that bicycling for transportation is not some sort of Left Coast environmental snob ethos. It is an expression of rugged individualism, an endeavor that is much more cowboy than granola-cruncher.

In future columns, I'll explore bicycling as a viable transportation alternative in

Wise County. With gas prices soaring, what would be a better fit for a place as ruggedly individualistic as this one?

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