

# Healthy hobby brings bike fans together

Messaging apps make it even easier for lovers of cycling to meet with like-minded enthusiasts

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In Beijing's heavy traffic, Lin Hongcheng traveled 10 kilometers to meet friends in less than half an hour. Instead of taking a taxi or bus, he rode his 80,000 yuan (\$13,000) bike.

After living in Japan for most of the past 23 years, Lin came back to China with his family three years ago. Now he is a graduate student at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences — and a lover of road bikes.

As a hobby and a way of exercising, cycling is not as popular in China as it is in Europe or the United States. Only a few thousand people are active in about 10 online cycling groups, according to Lin.

In Beijing, people use the messaging app WeChat to find like-minded bike lovers, regardless of age or gender. Lin said his life has become more fulfilling because of the friends he has made.

For example, his friend Tian Changqing is also a road bike lover.

He is 64 years old, and if it weren't for cycling they might never have become friends.

Tian has diabetes and 10 years ago was in bad shape. He has a picture of himself from that time — lying in bed with a straggly beard, eyes half closed, receiving an intravenous drip.

"I had to take almost 10 types of pills every day and had to inject insulin to survive," Tian said.

Thankfully, he discovered road biking. At first, he could barely manage 10 kilometers per day, but now he bikes around China with friends. He not only improved his health but now enjoys life much more.

Tian said he has cycled 160,000 kilometers in total, reaching areas such as Southwest China's Yunnan province and Tibet autonomous region, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, and Heilongjiang province in the northeast. "I will go farther and farther," he said.

People have reasons to love



Cyclists gather before a riding event in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Tian Changqing, 64, has improved his health through riding bikes.

cycling, but some also have reasons for not doing it.

"School schedules are tight in China and homework can be stressful for the kids. Parents don't often support their kids' hobbies, thinking they are a waste of time," Lin said.

Chang'an Avenue, a major thoroughfare in Beijing that runs east-to-west between Tian'anmen Square and the Forbidden City, is a popular street for road bike lovers. A wide bike lane goes 12 kilometers through the heart of the city.

Lin said people regularly meet at one end of the path for a group ride.

"I often go at about 7:30 pm, because it's cooler and the traffic is better," he said. However, Lin, who rides about 400 kilometers per month, said he and his friends now prefer the separated bike paths near Olympic Park, in the northern part of the city.

Some skilled cyclists like to go fast. Lin said he can ride at 40 km/h in a protected lane and has reached a

top speed of 60 km/h on flat routes, which is hard to do in the city.

"The bike lane on Chang'an Avenue is truly wide and flat. However, there are too many tourists who bike slowly without respecting the rules and sometimes even stop for pictures," Lin said, adding that it can be dangerous for high-speed riding. Scooters and cars on side roads can also be hazards.

In group chats, people share news about riders getting injured, and sometimes killed, when cycling on the street. In early August, a rider shared a video in which a young man on a bike was knocked over and killed by a car. Group chat members mourned the unknown man and raised the safety issue again.

"It seems like car drivers are not aware of how fragile we riders are, so it's important for us to improve the safety consciousness of drivers and protect ourselves and our bikes," Lin said.

## Keeping their hands on the wheel

Specially adapted cycles help paraplegics conquer athletic challenges and improve confidence

By **DAVID BLAIR**  
and **YAN DONGJIE**

Riding a bike from the city of Xishuangbanna, in Southwest China's Yunnan province, on the border with Laos, to Beijing, 5,800 kilometers away, is quite a challenge.

Even more so when doing it without the use of your legs.

Wang Feng and Pan Yifei from China, along with with Domonic Corridan and Josh Dominick from the United States, left Xishuangbanna in April and arrived in Beijing 106 days later. Except for Dominick, they are paraplegics — they cannot use their lower bodies. They rode hand cycles — tricycles propelled entirely by hand-powered cranks.

Wang, who is from Zaozhuang



Josh Dominick teaches Guan Shilian how to ride a hand cycle in Beijing. Pan Yifei and Lyu Xianglan (right) are in the wheelchairs in the background.

in East China's Shandong province, developed acute myelitis, an infection of the spinal cord, when he was 15 years old. He has been paraplegic ever since, but that has not stopped

him getting on with his life. He works as a baby masseuse and has proved he can accomplish things few fully able people dare.

"The trip from Xishuangbanna



Lyu Xianglan smiles broadly during her first hand cycle ride. PHOTOS BY YAN DONGJIE / CHINA DAILY

to Beijing was my longest ride and my biggest challenge ever. Finishing it gave me more confidence, as well as a better-built body. I won the 5,800 km, and won myself," he said.

"For me, the biggest meaning is that I came to know that nothing could beat me down. This is a milestone in my life. It's encouraging and exciting to know that I can travel far, like normal people. I made it, and made my life."

Pan Yifei was injured in 2015 in a car crash in the mountains near the Great Wall in Beijing. He can feel nothing below chest level. But he has always been optimistic. When telling his story, he talks with hands waving, as if the incident was a normal part of his life.

On the third day after leaving Xishuangbanna, coming down a mountain in the rain, his trike turned over and he flipped several times. He was stopped from sailing

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