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Mom gains fitness with pedal vehicle

By Linda Stout

ITHACA — Elisabeth Harrod bought her family a new vehicle near the end of 2006 that uses no gas, something she's happy about now as prices rise.

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As the owner of a New York Pedicab, the kind used in New York City fleets, she said she has found quieter routes and grown far more comfortable transporting her children, now 7 and 9. The pedicab is essentially a mountain bike with a cab.

"It was hard at first, and it feels like second nature. I notice it in my life in general. I'm more energetic, able to run up stairs," she said.

She gets asked to provide rides all the time, but explains it's her family vehicle. It's not only for the children, though. She uses it when she has a lot of baggage, and she and her friends enjoy nights out at the movies, arriving there by winding from the Southside on to Fall Creek Pictures.

Her transportation is a workout, she said.

"I've got that built into my day like farmers of old, so I don't need to go to the gym," she said.

She was more interested in the environmental aspects, wanting to adopt this mode of transportation to do her part to save on the footprint a gasoline vehicle creates. She and her family moved downtown from EcoVillage at Ithaca on West Hill with that in mind. She takes up the caboose on Saturday Cyclovias that go from DeWitt Park to the Ithaca Farmer's Market at 10 a.m. on Saturdays.

Other transportation

Harrod also has another vehicle to get her family to the Farmer's Market and to a prime view for fireworks — a canoe that her family puts in Six-Mile Creek in front of their house on North Titus Street. They can paddle out to the Cayuga Inlet near Cass Park. It's the same canoe she and her husband used on their first date.

Ithaca isn't Venice, but there's some getting around to be had by boat in the city, to a number of restaurants and businesses. Harrod also figures she could easily canoe to GreenStar Cooperative Market, where she works part-time in addition to helping with her husband's contracting business. There's a little ladder near the State Street bridge behind GreenStar where she could tie up, she said.

But even environmentalists who bike and canoe sometimes need a car, so Harrod just joined Ithaca CarShare. Her previous occasional car sharing had been more informal, and she'd worried about hurting her friends' vehicles. She's planning to use it to get her son to horseback riding lessons in Brooktondale.

Her bicycle and the pedicab are her main modes of getting around. She prefers the personal nature of being on a bike and often runs into friends in a way she wouldn't in a car, she said. Parking is easier, too, she said.

She gets a lot of attention in her unique vehicle, most of it positive.

"People ... talk to me, and it happens every time I'm out. They always comment about the gas prices, and they say someday we'll all gonna have to get these. It's just too expensive to put gas in our cars," she said.