

Street Smarts: Bicycles dust cars in sixth annual 'Commuter Race'

by Ramona Turner

Bike to Work hosted its sixth annual Commuter Race on Tuesday.

During which, I and my borrowed hybrid bicycle competed against a Toyota Prius hybrid, a Zenn all electric car, a regular bicycle and a tandem bike duo.

All the bikes beat the cars by a good 10-20 minutes during the treasure hunt-style race that began at the intersection of Front and Cooper streets, made stops at The Buttery on Soquel and Branciforte avenues and again at New Leaf Market on 41st Avenue before crossing the finish line at the tiki on the Capitola Esplanade.

With a time of 36 minutes, I came in third place behind the first-place tandem team, which finished in 22 minutes. The regular cyclist beat me by four minutes. Meanwhile, the Zenn came in fourth place at 42 minutes, followed two minutes later by the Prius.

While there have been a couple of years where cars came in first place, the race was meant to show how efficient bike commuting can be, as well as to promote a cycling as a healthy commute solution both for people's bodies and the environment, race organizers said. The cyclists were able to maneuver around cars and traffic, while the two cars were stuck.

The rules were to follow road laws and be safe. I would like to think I would have come in before or around the same time as the regular cyclist had I not waited in line to pick up a pastry at The Buttery and an apple at New Leaf. The other participants said they told the cashier they were part of a race, gave them enough money to cover the item and split.

Wish I had thought of that. It was fun though. And Tuesday's weather made for a great ride. My chariot was a Twist Express by Giant, on loan from The Bicycle Trip on Soquel Avenue in Santa Cruz.

It's not an electric bike, or e-bike, which is basically a motorcycle, explained Aaron Jacobs, store manager.

"All you have to do is hit the throttle and take off," he said, noting that no pedalling is needed.

In contrast, hybrid bikes, which have been on the market since last year, provide the best of both worlds, he said. The rider benefits from a cycling-style workout, but with little boost. Its motor activates only when the cyclist pumps the pedals.

While I felt the difference, I could have used a little bit more help up the hills.

All the race participants chose their own route. Since my bike had a Sentinel video camera affixed to it, thanks to the handy work of Bicycle Trip mechanic Nate Trumble, I chose the route with the most vehicle traffic. I took Soquel Avenue to Capitola Road to 41st Avenue to complete the tasks. After that was over, I took Jade Street to 47th Avenue to Portola Drive and coasted into Capitola Village.

In the video, you'll see how I zoom by bumper to bumper traffic. There was one close call with a motorist, who didn't hear my bell ringing as I approached Soquel and Seabright avenues. While trying to obeying traffic laws, I did take to the sidewalk briefly one time to avoid the lane-jockeying of cars and buses.

Look for the video to pop up soon on the Street Smarts blog at www.santacruzlive.com/blogs/streetsmarts.

Street Smarts is written by Ramona Turner. Contact her with questions or comments at streetsmarts@santacruzsentinel.com. Read her daily [Street Smarts blog](#).

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