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Extreme commuters: For these three, every day is Bike to Work Day

By Philip Armour

Commuting sucks, everyone agrees.

Some people, however, have figured out that biking to and from work can be an action-packed adventure that transforms that soul-crushing drudgery and wasted time into something more physically productive -- and entertaining.

Wednesday's Bike to Work Day is a great reminder that the miles between home and work can, in fact, be fun challenges -- something to look forward to, not dread.

Especially when Community Cycles is giving away free coffee and snacks, as the organization will be from 7 to 9 a.m. Wednesday at more than 40 breakfast stations around Boulder.

A large number of area workers deserve credit for saving money and staying healthy by commuting with their bicycles on RTD buses from Denver, then biking to their jobs in Boulder. And one Boulderite has even been spotted commuting on a unicycle.

But these three riders -- call them Boulder's most extreme bike commuters -- are in a class of their own:

Dave Kingsbury

Age: 45

Job: Cognitive anthropologist for Boulder ad agency Crispin Porter + Bogusky

Route: Nederland to Gunbarrel

Commute: 25 miles or 1.5 hours one-way (takes bus to Nederland in the evening then rides home from there)

Not a rabid environmentalist or a car-hater, Dave Kingsbury is just intense and hyper-focused. He craves the release of physical exertion and has bike-commuted year-round an average of three days a week -- rain or shine -- for the last 21 years to

various jobs in the Boulder area from his house near Nederland at 8,100 feet.

"People go on biking vacations to do what I get to do every day," Kingsbury said. "One of my alternate routes through Gold Hill involves 7,000 (feet) of descent before reaching Gunbarrel. That's pretty unusual.

"Bike commuting keeps me out of prison," he added. "It's a sanity thing. I have to decompress."

To cover ground faster when he reaches Boulder, he switches out his mountain bike for a single-speed cyclocross bike, which he stores in a bike locker at RTD's Walnut Street station.

Seeing the landscape change with the seasons is a draw, too.

"The animals, the flowers, the weather -- it all changes and evolves every day, even though you cross the same terrain," he said.

But Kingsbury likes to mix it up and has dozens of routes to work, including the occasional three-mile flat-water paddle across Gross Reservoir, which he's dubbed the Canute.



Courtesy Dave Kingsbury

Dave Kingsbury snapped this photo as he paddled his bicycle across Gross Reservoir -- part of his commute from Nederland to Boulder.



Photo by Paul Aiken

Chuck Gartrell commutes from the Black Hawk to Boulder every day.

Chuck Gartrell

Age: 27

Job: Salesman at Full Cycle on Pearl Street

Route: Black Hawk to Boulder

Commute: 25 miles or 1.5 hours one-way (takes bus to Nederland in the evening then rides home from there)

Chuck Gartrell's standard 25-mile route from Black Hawk to Full Cycle on Pearl Street is about half dirt roads and half pavement -- including a stretch on the Boulder Creek Path.

If he has time, though, the amateur mountain-bike racer likes to divert into Golden Gate Canyon State Park and, eventually, Walker Ranch, which can turn his morning commute into a 35-mile ride of one-third single track, one-third dirt roads and one-third pavement.

“It’s a privilege to ride these hills every day. I’m lucky,” he said. “And it’s great training for my racing.”

His pride and joy is a custom-built titanium Spot with 29-inch wheels, the only bike he ever rides. It weighs a feathery 23 pounds, almost as much as his stuffed backpack, which usually contains a jug of home-brewed coffee, breakfast, lunch and a change of clothes and shoes.

“My favorite part of the ride is this one spot off Magnolia Road, where the views are indescribably beautiful,” Gartrell said. “I like to stop there and have some coffee and check the weather patterns over the Continental Divide.”

45 weeks a year. That’s about 8,100 miles in one year, which wears down nine sets of tires and five chains.

“It’s still so economical to ride your bike like this,” he said. “I get my workout, and it’s such a nice way to de-tune.”

He also pointed out that 10 percent of business at the Trek Store of Boulder (which will offer free bike tunes on Wednesday morning) is devoted to bike commuters, most of whom tend to average three-to-five miles a day.



Mara Auster / For the Colorado Daily

James Sharpe, service manager at Trek Store of Boulder, bikes down Moorhead Avenue on his way home to Broomfield on Friday. Sharpe rides to and from his home in Broomfield about 40 weeks out of the year.

James Sharpe

Age: 39

Job: Service manager at Trek Store of Boulder

Route: Broomfield to Boulder

Commute: 18 miles or 52 minutes one way

James Sharpe has his commute down to a science.

“It takes me 52 minutes,” he said. “No more, no less.”

And he rotates five bikes, depending on the conditions: a cyclocross bike, a touring bike, a road bike, a single speed and a mountain bike.

“I probably have 30 in my collection, including a tandem, but most of those are not suited for the daily grind,” Sharpe said. He’s been bike commuting in Boulder more or less full time since moving here in 1990, and has been pedaling this commute for the last four years -- an average of 40--