

BACKCHAT

BY JOHN COONEY

We Must've Looked Awesome!

I GOT MY FIRST BIKE WHEN I WAS eight. A second-hand 'do-up' that my dad had done up – a half-size two wheeler for a half-size boy. And I remember feeling like the luckiest kid in Hamilton.

I learnt to ride with no hands. I learnt the meaning of agony, when the chain slipped and I came down hard on that bar. I learnt how to fall off and take gravel-size chunks out of my knees. And I learnt how to lose control going flat-out downhill and crashing into a parked car.

As I grew (slowly) so did my bikes. And later, in my teens, a friend and I built a tandem that took us to Raglan and back. Emboldened by that epic trek, we tried to circumnavigate the Coromandel Peninsula – but our overloaded tandem broke down just 10 punctures from home. My friend and I took shelter in a road-workers' hut, and next morning caught the bus back.

EXPERIENCES LIKE THAT, PLUS the inevitable arrival of my first car, spelled the end of my career as a cyclist. And, apart from a mildly painful pedal around some vineyards last year, my decades since have been mostly bike-less.

Until last weekend ...

It's my wife's fault, really. Her knees ache, you see. And her foolish doctor told her to try cycling. So she's been



on at me ever since. And my resistance failed last weekend when I gave in and bought bikes!

Hers is yellow. Mine is blue. And our matching fluoro helmets and vests can be seen from the moon!

Our inaugural flight took place last Saturday, when none of the family was watching. A shaky start exposed the ravages of time, and cornering proved a challenge. But those long-forgotten skills returned as we wobbled off down the road.

People kept staring, but they were just jealous – in our fluoro colours on those shiny new bikes, we must've looked awesome! An older couple overtook us on the footpath, but I wasn't worried – they obviously weren't going as far.

When we finally came to a halt, my wife's knees were stiffening up and my bum was burning-sore. But watch this space: We have seized the day! We are living dangerously! And in a month or two we will ride again!

JOHN, GRAPEVINE'S FOUNDING EDITOR, HAS SPENT THE WEEK REFLECTING QUIETLY ON A RATHER SOBERING QUOTE: "GEE, THIS BIKE-SEAT SURE IS COMFY, SAID NO ONE EVER!"

I'M A BOMB SQUAD TECHNICIAN. IF YOU SEE ME RUNNING, TRY TO KEEP UP.