

Eco

The latest road rule: share and share alike

In Sydney, car-sharing programs are growing faster than the traffic. But it's convenience, not the environment, that is so attractive, writes **Sue White**.

When Dale Bartley and partner Fiona Court moved to Enmore eight years ago, they seized the opportunity to get rid of their car. "Repairs, tyres, oil, dealing with mechanics - it had become just another thing on our 'to do' list," Bartley says.

For four years they relied on a mix of public transport, taxis and walking. While it worked most of the time they soon discovered there were gaps that simply couldn't be solved by public transport.

"If we visited friends at night, bought furniture, or had to arrive 'fresh' we either needed a cab or had to put more forethought into the exercise," says Bartley. "When we heard about car sharing we signed up immediately."

As a member of a car-share service, Dale still uses public transport, walks and takes the occasional taxi. When he needs a car he strolls 300 metres to his booked hatch, station wagon or ute (there are 10 nearby), inserts a master key, logs his journey and drives off.

Bartley uses a service called GoGet and, for his \$30 monthly membership and a small hourly rental fee, he can take any GoGet vehicle for as little as an hour. Mostly, he books for two or three hours, and as an owner-builder he's usually carrying goods back from the hardware store.

There are systems to deal with late return of vehicles or problems, which Bartley says are rare.

Usage costs are low - from \$4.40 an hour - including petrol and insurance. Members don't worry about registration, maintenance or garaging costs.

While the concept aims to move people towards more environmentally



Pay for it only when you need it ... Dale Bartley. Photo: Marco Del Grande

sound transport, users aren't swayed by ethics alone.

"For us it's completely practical. After a year we found the money we saved by not owning and servicing a car was enough for a trip to Bali," Bartley says.

Australia has three car-share companies, and all are growing fast. After two years in business, Melbourne-based Flexicar recently expanded to Sydney with a service in Manly, and has an aggressive growth plan. Sydney-based Charter Drive, which billed itself as a premium ser-

vice for its first 18 months of operation, is about to launch a low-cost affiliate with cars carrying advertising. GoGet will soon expand beyond Sydney and Melbourne to Brisbane.

The first to take on the market, GoGet started after its co-founder, Bruce Jeffries, tired of government departments saying "great idea" but not acting. An old uni mate, Nic Lowe, convinced him they could run it faster and better themselves, and four years later GoGet has swelled to a fleet of 70 cars and 1100 users.

Australian car-share users join about 350,000 people in 600 cities in four continents.

"It is a growing niche that works in urban environments, for people driving less than 10,000 kilometres a year," says Lowe, whose business is expanding almost 25 per cent each quarter.

Their research with the University of Sydney has shown that 43 per cent of members sold their car, gave up their second car or cancelled buying a car due to their membership. This is where Lowe believes real environmental gains can be found.

"Living in the city, the biggest environmental impact we can make is cars. Sit on any main street for 10 minutes in peak hour and you'll be convinced," he says.

With each shared car keeping at least seven private cars off the road, environmental benefits come through reducing wasted use of public space, lowering pollution levels and encouraging smarter, greener use of all forms of transport.

"Even on the busiest day in Sydney, four in every five cars are parked," Lowe says. "It doesn't make sense. Car sharing is about more efficient utilisation of an asset. You don't leave a



Crowding, pollution, expense ... some drivers are more than happy to leave car ownership behind. Photo: Andrew Meares

plane sitting on the tarmac most of the time; you use it as much as you can. It should be the same with a car."

While hybrids are on their way, and electric cars are being considered, mobility is what members want most.

"We are a behavioural-change company," Lowe says. "Our cars have the same emissions profile as a Prius because of their slightly smaller engine. But we can get three small cars for the price of one hybrid. So we'd have a third of the fleet, and people wouldn't pay because they need mobility.

"However, as we pay for petrol it's

embedded into the system to use small, fuel-efficient vehicles."

Lowe believes Australia can learn from the international experience.

"In Europe car share is integrated into public transport and in Switzerland 4 per cent of cars are car share. It's possible," Lowe says.

"Here, city-based consultants are realising it's cheaper and easier to take public transport to work and use a shared vehicle for a few hours during the day."

Emissions tracking overseas shows impressive results.

Quebec's 11,000 car sharers each reduced their CO₂ emissions by 1.1 tonnes per year, and a recent study shows real potential to outstrip Quebec's targets with ease.

But can Sydneysiders book a car this weekend?

According to Dale Bartley: "If you decide at 10am Saturday, it's unlikely. But if you do it Friday night, it's usually no problem."

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