

European Car-Free Day

On 22 September, in cities all over Europe, traffic stopped while 70 million people walked, cycled and got the bus instead of going by car, to mark European Car-Free Day.

European Car-Free Day means questioning using your car for every journey, and whenever possible switching to modes that are less damaging to the environment and our health. It means reducing the amount of exhaust emissions that contain harmful poisons, such as nitrogen dioxide; it also means curbing carbon dioxide emissions that are wreaking environmental havoc all around the world.

In some countries Car-Free Day is taken very seriously - Brussels residents had to apply in writing to the Mayor for a permit to drive on 22 September. In Spain, 45% of the population was invited to try being car-free for a day.

In the UK, the Dept for Transport promotes Car-Free Day with the motto 'In town, without my car!' (<http://www.22september.org> and http://www.dft.gov.uk/stellent/groups/dft_sustravel/documents/page/dft_sustravel_503985.hcsp#top). And in some places in the UK, councils made a real effort to get more people cycling and walking – 10,000 celebrated Waltham Forest Council's Car-Free Day in Leytonstone Town Centre (<http://www.lbwf.gov.uk/index/news/car-free-day-04.htm>).

In Oxford, neither Council bothered promoting Car-Free Day this year, but luckily, Cyclox (<http://www.cyclox.org>), the cycling campaign for Oxford, did. Cyclox teamed up for a commuters' breakfast celebration with fellow campaign groups Oxford Friends of the Earth (<http://www.oxfoe.co.uk>) and Oxford Pedestrians' Association (<http://oxpa.org.uk>) on 22 September. Local councillors joined over two-hundred cyclists and walkers united under the banner "In town, without my car!".

The three groups provided a free breakfast for anyone who walked or cycled into Broad St that morning. Oxfam supplied free fair-trade tea, coffee and cereals; Oxford University Press donated 200 Morton's croissants; and East Oxford Healthy Living Initiative gave away 200 bananas.

People at the rally participated in a secret ballot to find Oxford's best and worst places for cycling and walking. The results of the vote will be announced soon.

It's hoped that next year Oxford City and County Councils can be encouraged to do things that would really make a difference – for example, to fund free bus access for the day and organise a Car-Free Fair in the city centre.

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