

Would you pick pedal power over petrol?

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Families in Aberdeenshire find out if it is easy to swap the car in rural locations.

By Rachel Bell
BBC Scotland reporter

How easy is it to drop the car when living in rural Scotland?

That is exactly what six families in Aberdeenshire have been finding out as part of a pilot project.

For one year, the volunteers have been given electric bikes - with the aim of challenging their travel behaviours.

Here are the experiences of three of those households, in three different locations, but with one common challenge - picking pedal power over petrol.

'It has just been transformational for us'



The Smith family signed up to the pilot project

Martin and Sarah Smith live in Drums, about 10 miles north of Aberdeen, with their two young children.

For the past eight months, they have been loaned e-bikes as part of the pilot scheme through Aberdeenshire Council.

It has been an especially big hit with four-year-old Penny.

"Instead of just driving to nursery, I can plop her on the bike and we can cycle in together and it was a lot more engaging," her father said.

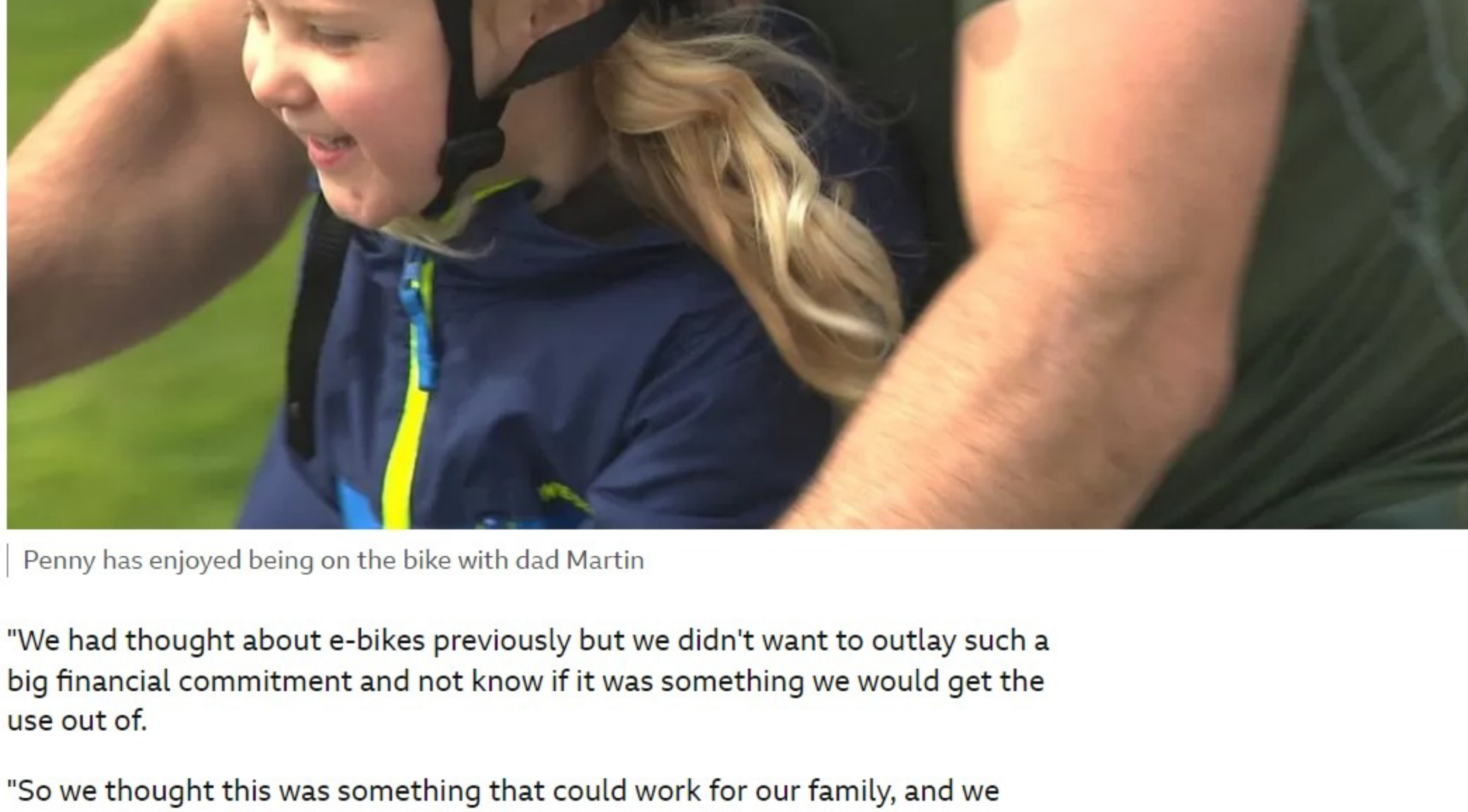
• E-bike sales boom despite high prices and confusing rules

"We have both loved it. It's been great. It opens up avenues.

"I think at the moment there's a bit of a challenge for us in terms of the commute. My work is 25 miles each way so to plan ahead and try to budget the time without sacrificing family time would be a challenge at this moment."

Mrs Smith said they saw a post on social media looking for families to take part in the behavioural change pilot.

"It was something we thought looked quite exciting," she said.



Penny has enjoyed being on the bike with dad Martin

"We had thought about e-bikes previously but we didn't want to outlay such a big financial commitment and not know if it was something we would get the use out of.

"So we thought this was something that could work for our family, and we were exceptionally fortunate to be chosen as part of the pilot.

"We will cycle down to the beach.

"If you want to go anywhere on a distance you pick up the car keys and you don't give it a second thought. There's not a bus route here so to have the option of the e-bikes now, it has just been transformational for us."

'The biggest challenge is the weather'



Tim MacLaren is finding the e-bike means he is less tired when he gets to work

Keen cyclist Tim MacLaren lives in Kintore, and regularly makes the 15-mile commute using his normal road bike.

Lately, however, he has been using the e-bike in the 12-month trial.

"It makes a big difference on the hills," he said. "The battery only takes you up to about 15mph with assistance and after that you lose any assistance. It is then just a big heavy bike. I can't quite get that speed.

"But I'm less tired when I get to work.

"For commuting, it's superb. The battery lasts to work and back.

"The biggest challenge is the weather - the dark, ice, cold."

'It has made me think'



Charlotte Milburn has enjoyed the e-bike option when the elements have been kind

The most remote participant is Charlotte Milburn, who lives in Strathdon.

"You read about schemes in cities and this was an extreme rural area," she said of her decision to take part.

It is a beautiful setting, but living 1,300ft up is not without its problems.

• Electric bikes 'could help people return to work'

"It's nearly three miles to the nearest shop and another 20 to the nearest supermarket," she explained.

"Now I've got this I can get back up the hill in about 12 minutes from the village instead of half-an-hour, so that's made it a lot more accessible, definitely.

"We had the snow, then we had storm Arwen, and then we had more storms, so over the winter it's had very little use I'm afraid.

"It has made me think, and there are times when I've definitely used the bike when I would have used the car, that's for sure, but not always able to, that's been the problem.

"It's brilliant in the summer."

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