

Professional dog walker

LYDIA MAXWELL

During lockdown, **Lydia Maxwell** began a new career: her dog-walking business, *Dogboxx*, which uses e-cargo trikes.

Tiia Jaakola spoke to her

The best part of each day during lockdown for Cycling UK member Lydia Maxwell was when we were allowed outside for exercise. She was bored, and her work as an English teacher was drying up. Daily walks with her dog led to chance meetings, and through the grapevine Lydia learned of a woman who walked dogs while on furlough “so she didn’t go nuts”.

Someone was needed to take over, however, as the woman in question was pregnant. Lydia was happy to oblige. As she’d always been a dog lover, it was the perfect antidote to being stuck inside. Soon Lydia was taking on more dogs and, before she knew it, it had snowballed into a full-time job.

Unless she’s cycling, it takes Lydia ages to get to the bigger parks in south-east London, where she’s based. She initially bought a secondhand cargo trike, but as the business picked up pace, she soon needed an electric one to do more trips.

Although Lydia had cycled for transport all her life, getting used to a cargo trike didn’t happen instantly. While on a regular two-wheeler you lean into a corner, on the trike you have to counterbalance. You have to go slowly and carefully, and that’s easier if you stick to back roads and bike lanes. “If you go too fast you can end up with one wheel off the ground, like a wheelbarrow that’s about to flip,” she says. “It definitely took some figuring out.”

Dogboxx now has two electric-assist Christiania trikes, and Lydia has hired an assistant. While some manufacturers offer models described as dog friendly, Lydia prefers the Christiania due to the high sides that make the dogs feel safe and secure, while allowing them to “poke their noses over the edge and see what’s going on”.

One of the downsides of the Christiania is a lack of suspension,



so if they hit a bump the dogs will feel it, but Lydia clips their harnesses in so they can’t jump out even if they wanted to.

For anyone thinking of incorporating a cargo bike into running a business, Lydia has some tips. She says that the right model depends entirely on what you’re transporting, so you should try as many different ones as you can, and she suggests taking whatever you’re wanting to transport with you. She recommends attending a cargo bike event or getting in touch with specialists such as the “very nice people at London Green Cycles”, who let her test lots of different brands.

You also need to really think about the route, she says. The Christiania is as wide as a standard wheelchair, and Lydia describes getting to grips with it as “quite an eye opener” for experiencing what wheelchair users have to navigate – such as dropped kerbs, cobbled streets and narrow sections. She says she gained a new appreciation for London’s “fabulous” Cycleways.

Although more inclusive infrastructure, such as parking for wider cycles, is being introduced in Southwark, there’s plenty on London’s old streets that needs a rethink. And sadly, some measures, such as chicanes designed to force motorbikes to slow down, can make things harder for wheelchairs, buggy users or trikes.

One of Lydia’s favourite things about her job are the reactions of passers-by. It’s the way it brings joy to other people, who sometimes stare open mouthed and come up to take photos, saying the trike full of dogs has made their day.

Though bad weather and inconsiderate road users can be a nuisance, Lydia is happy that her job allows her to be outside with dogs all the time, and says cycling gives her a sense of freedom. “It’s a dream come true”, she says. ●



The dogs are clipped into the trike by their harnesses so can't just jump out
Below: 'head in the wind' fun

Loads of fun

The Christiania Straight Light is a spacious box trike that’s designed specifically for the transport of up to four children; it can have a rain hood fitted. This model weighs 38kg, with a cargo volume of 270L and maximum box load of 100kg. It costs £2,874 from London Green Cycles, and will be similar elsewhere.

All cargo cycles can be pricey, which puts them out of reach for some. If your employer offers the Cycle to Work Scheme (cyclinguk.org/article/guide-cycle-work-scheme), you can make considerable savings by buying one that way. Or you could transport cargo, pets or kids with a cycle trailer instead. Cycling UK members get 10% off Bike Trailer Hire, should you want to try one out. Head to our website to find out more: cyclinguk.org/member-benefit/10-bike-trailer-hire