

**Smith: If you can swing it, car-free life is admirable**

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I celebrated World Car-free Day in style Wednesday.

I hopped in my Toyota, drove 25 miles into downtown Madison, and (here's the cool part) cruised into a parking spot almost right in front of L'Etoile!

Yes, I scored one of those nearly impossible spots right on the Capitol Square.

I know you're jealous, but I'm not even sure it was luck. It might be because the other 49 people at the car-free day event arrived on foot, bicycle or the bus.

We munched croissants and drank coffee as we listened to Dane County Executive Kathy Falk talk about how she's walked to work for 20 years. Susan Schmitz of Downtown Madison Inc. was dressed in bike togs, having pedaled the 7 miles from her West Side home.

Mayor Dave Cieslewicz took the microphone and said he plotted it out and thinks he can get through the two weeks of the car-free challenge with getting in his car only twice. It made me feel a little bad about that 30 pounds of carbon dioxide I created while racing to the car-free news conference. (Not to mention the gas burned by my husband taking our daughter to school, because I had to leave before she was ready.)

If County Kathy and Downtown Sue are car-free, and Mayor Dave is car-lite, I'm car super-sized with cheese sauce, and, yes, fries.

I'm not proud of it. But about the only person at the press conference whose life sounded remotely like mine was Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton. She told me she so admires the work of car-free day sponsor Madison Environmental Group, and its president, Sonya Newenhouse. But Lawton said she can't do the two-week car-free challenge because she has "almost no waking hours under my control. "

Amen, sister.

I'm not racing around on important government business. My errands are of the late DVDs-dentist appointment- work-gym-work-grocery store- soccer game-"I thought *you* were getting the milk" variety.

I know it's possible to live car-free. My brother and his girlfriend do it in downtown Chicago, where they take the el or walk to work. My friends did it when they lived in Germany; they had an S-Bahn station a block from their house and she didn't work, so the daily bicycle ride to the neighborhood grocery was doable.

Last time I looked, we don't live in Europe, or in an American city with great mass transit. Of 1,000 communities that participated in Wednesday's World Car-free Day, just six are in the United States and two are in southern Wisconsin - Madison and Evansville.

Evansville Mayor Janis Ringhand was on hand Wednesday to challenge Mayor Dave, since Evansville has 169 of its 4,200 residents signed up to reduce their car use during September. Of course, she did have to drive the 25 miles to Madison to throw down the gauntlet. But she says that in a suburb where more than half the adults commute to work in other cities, reducing, not eliminating, car use is the goal.

It's a great goal, and people who want to try it can sign up for the two-week challenge at *[www.madisonenvironmental.com](http://www.madisonenvironmental.com)*.

In fact, I encourage everyone to do this immediately.

Can I have your parking spot?

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