

# TAKE YOUR SEAT

A new e-trend is spinning the wheels of business in Wanaka.

**B**ouldering, bagging trout and bread delivery... New technology has seen the urban use of electric bikes mushrooming, but in Central Otago, they're being embraced off-road, too.

The large number of cycle trails, uncrowded roads and relatively low rainfall make it a perfect environment for "e-bikes", with their robust frames and 40-60km range between recharging. Wanaka baker and mother of four Ruth Heath and husband Jeremy have been using an electric-powered "cargo bike" with a 200kg carrying capacity for the past year, to deliver their stone-ground organic People's Bread and on the school run – cycling an estimated 300km a week.

As well as the obvious savings on fuel, their kids love it. "It's great not having parking hassles and being able to zip around and go faster than congested traffic in busy times," Ruth says. "It's an exhilarating experience being out in the fresh air – you're only one bike ride away from a good mood."

Fellow locals Babu Blatt and Matt Quirk recently opened a shop, Good Rotations, to promote e-bikes, including motor kits that can be fitted onto most standard frames. Blatt says they're popular both with young people "who just want a quick commute from Hawea, via the river track" and with the "sporty grey-haired" who appreciate a bit of help on the hills when they go mountain biking. This winter, Quirk is planning to use a powered bike to climb access roads to the snowline and go ski-touring for the day.

Another Wanaka company, Solar Cycles, has also got in on the act, renting out an enclosed trailer mounted with solar panels, which can charge up to six bikes at a time. Co-owner Nathan Bloxham says overseas tourists are often familiar with electric bikes and like the sustainable concept of the trailer – raving about the scenery along the river and the fishing spots they can access on the bikes via lakeside trails. Now Kiwi travellers are coming along for the ride. "A lot of electric bike 'virgins' come out the other end hankering for one of their own."

**TIM BREWSTER**

Wanaka baker Ruth Heath e-biking along the lakefront with sons Lennox, four, and Ezra, two.

SIMON DABRY