

27,000 Miles of Freedom

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When John Birdsall traded in his old NIPPI he established what we think is a record. He had done over 27,000 miles in five years and so we asked him if he could put something in writing for NIPPI News which goes to owners and others interested in the NIPPI. His reply below was suitably modest.

Life with a NIPPI

"I first saw NIPPI seven years ago at a mobility show. I felt sure I could adapt one to suit me, which I did. My first NIPPI was a 2-stroke 50cc. Having driven at 4mph in my wheelchair all my life, hitting 20mph in the NIPPI was a bit scary. After a year I bought a new NIPPI a 125 4 stroke. This was more of a motorbike and I became more independent and became a biker.

I use the NIPPI for all my transport; I ride it all through the year rain, snow, wind and sometimes sun, if I'm lucky. Riding in the open air keeps you alive I think. You get waved at the thumps up or the "bikers nod of respect" by other bikers in the road. Car drivers just stare at you and cut you up (Well thats car drivers for you, in their tin boxes with the heating on).

In the winter I don't travel far. But when April gets here my diary gets full for farther a field trips. I like to go to bike rallies so I load my camping gear on the back of my wheelchair then hit the road with some biking mates. At rallies I get a lot of respect and the NIPPI gets a lot of attention.

The furthest I took the NIPPI to was Holland. We hit Amsterdam in the rush hour which was a mad one.

I have just taken delivery of another 125 NIPPI. I needed one! The old one was five years and had done 27,000 miles. I think that's a record for a NIPPI !! . The new NIPPI is quick. I hit 80mph on the A34 the other day, and I beat a porsche off the traffic lights the other day; I saw the face of the driver

disappearing in my mirror, he wasn't happy.

The new NIPPI is being shipped to New Zealand next week. I am spending six months there touring New Zealand on the new NIPPI It has to be done! I will let you know how I get on."

What John omitted to say that both he and his NIPPI are exeptional. Like many NIPPI drivers John has cerebral palsy from birth. He can neither walk nor talk. He uses an electronic communicator and an electric wheelchair to get around. All his equipment is especially adapted to suit his requirements.

When John saw NIPPI at Crowthorne, the company didn't want to sell him one, they did not believe that he would be able to drive one. But John is a very persistent man and he kept on pestering them until eventually he got what he wanted (he usually does).

The NIPPI conventionally had the front end of a standard motor scooter. This is often adapted with a foot brake or lever accelerator, but because John cannot reach far forward and could not squeeze the brakes with his fingers, not only the normal handlebars but also all the controls were totally removed. They have been replaced by a new set of handlebars closer to him. There appears to be no brakes at all - the secret is that the complete handle bar assembly is pivoted so that when John pulls it towards him the brakes come on all three wheels (similar to the old Batricar) all the other knobs and switches - lights indicators, horn starting button have been added to the new handle bar in a way that may seem "Heath Robinson" but it clearly works well. The 27,000 miles prove it.

When John casually asked for his new NIPPI to be shipped to new Zealand, the manufacturers were not surprised. They already knew of John's mileage in his old NIPPI and they also knew the adventures and travel are what John is about. Previous adventures have included Lands End to JohnO'Groats in 1993 using a 4mph shopping trike, then in 1995 a trans Iceland trans desert trek of over a 300 miles - halfway on the trike (which complained and died) and the second half unsteadily on two complaining horses that survived.

John is a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society who says "I have a passion for crossing countries. When I get an idea it does not go away until I do something about it".



