

Two wheels or four wheels?

Beijing bicycle loses kudos to the private car

Massive throngs of cyclists with more than 10 people riding side by side during rush hour were a common sight in Beijing until a few years ago. But cyclists no longer feel so comfortable when riding the streets. Although more roads have been completed, there is a lower proportion of cycle lanes. Cyclists complain about their morning battles with the increasing number of motor vehicles. To ease the traffic problems, the Beijing municipal government has readjusted its overall urban-development policy by promoting public transport. More bus routes and rail transport will open to the public. Commuter and planners shared their experiences with China Daily staff reporter YU NAN.

It is 7:30 am. The rush hour in Beijing has just begun. Zhu Jie, a woman in her 40s, skillfully rides on her rather old Phoenix bicycle, quickly immerses herself into the congested road, and completely ignores the fleeting cars brushing past her.

She has insisted on riding a bicycle to her office at an advertising company, some 10 kilometres away from home, for many years.

It takes her nearly one hour to cycle the journey each way.

Even though her family bought a car two years ago, she refused to let her husband drive her to the office and said she was used to riding a bicycle.

"It's not a bad way to exercise and a bicycle is more flexible than a car to avoid being late at the office because of traffic jams sometimes."

Although the rate of bicycle use is still higher than that for all other means of transport, it seems the number of people like Zhu who stick to the bicycle as their daily transport has declined in recent years, as more and more Beijingers take to the railway, bus or private car, according to Liu Xiaoming, professor and vice-president of Beijing Polytechnic University.

Having studied transportation management for many years and having worked as transport consultant to the Beijing municipal government, Liu is now responsible for the comprehensive layout of the Intelligent Transport Systems for Beijing.

"Statistics show that, 10 years ago, the average distance that Beijingers cycled was 10 kilometres and now the number is four," Liu added.

Decline of bike 'kingdom'?

Over the years, the bicycle joined the giant panda and Great Wall to become one of the three most important images of China in most foreigners' eyes. A common picture in big cities such as Beijing was a massive throng of bicycles filling the streets during each day's rush hour.

But the rush-hour scene is a bit different now in Beijing. Commuters crowd in bus and railway stations and thousands of private cars illuminate the city with their red brake lights in long queues.

"It is not as convenient and comfortable to ride a bike as before," complained Zhu.

"Cycle lanes are getting narrower in most of the newly built or rebuilt roads, such as Xiwai Dajie and the Second Ring Road. In some streets, an extra line for sedans is even drawn within the bicycle lane."

"The change may benefit car drivers but, for us, the narrow lanes make the trip more dangerous and uncomfortable."

Wang Haiyun, a 53-year-old newspaper editor, reluctantly stored away her bicycle, which had accompanied her for more than 10 years, in the parking lot in the basement of her new

apartment building.

"It's no longer practical for me to ride a bicycle to work after I moved to a house out of the city centre area," Wang said. "My office is located beside the eastern Second Ring Road while my home is outside the western Third Ring Road. The distance between the two is about 12 kilometres."

"I prefer the subway now, which only takes me half an hour one way," Wang added.

Beijing Polytechnic University's Liu said: "As the city grows larger and more people move out of the central areas, which are mostly occupied by shopping and business centres as well as government buildings, it's natural that public transport and enthusiasm for private cars become popular."

Indeed, it is not a wise idea for younger white-collar workers to ride a bike to the office while wearing their fine professional suits, facing exposure to car exhaust fumes and having to fight for space with motor vehicles.

Tian Zhonghua, a 28-year-old software designer who works in the Shangdi High-tech Base in northern Beijing's Haidian District, said few of his colleagues rode a bicycle and there was not a single parking lot for bicycles near his workplace.

"It's not feasible to ride a bicycle while wearing a shirt, tie and business suit. It is not comfortable," he said.

"A bicycle is suitable for children, college students or for retired people but not for us."

Even though the bicycle is no longer a favourite mode of transport for some Beijingers, the rate of bicycle use still topped all other means of transport, including cars and public transport, over the past five years, according to statistics issued by the Beijing Transport Development Research Centre, a think-tank for the municipal government.

The number of bicycles in Beijing has continued to increase over the past few years, reaching 10 million by the end of last year.

Quan Yongshen, director of the centre, said: "Bicycles will continue to be the main means of transport for Beijing residents in the coming years although the number of private cars has increased by a large amount."

"Furthermore, increasing the number of cyclists will be an effective way to curb air pollution and ease traffic congestion in urban areas. The government should encourage the use of bicycles for short distances and routine commuting by creating more bicycle parking lots and widening cycle lanes."

More cars, more roads

Perhaps fuelled by an ever-growing economy, more and more Beijingers aspire to having their own car.

Testament to the car's growing popularity can be found in Beijing's ever more popular driving schools as well as in car dealerships.

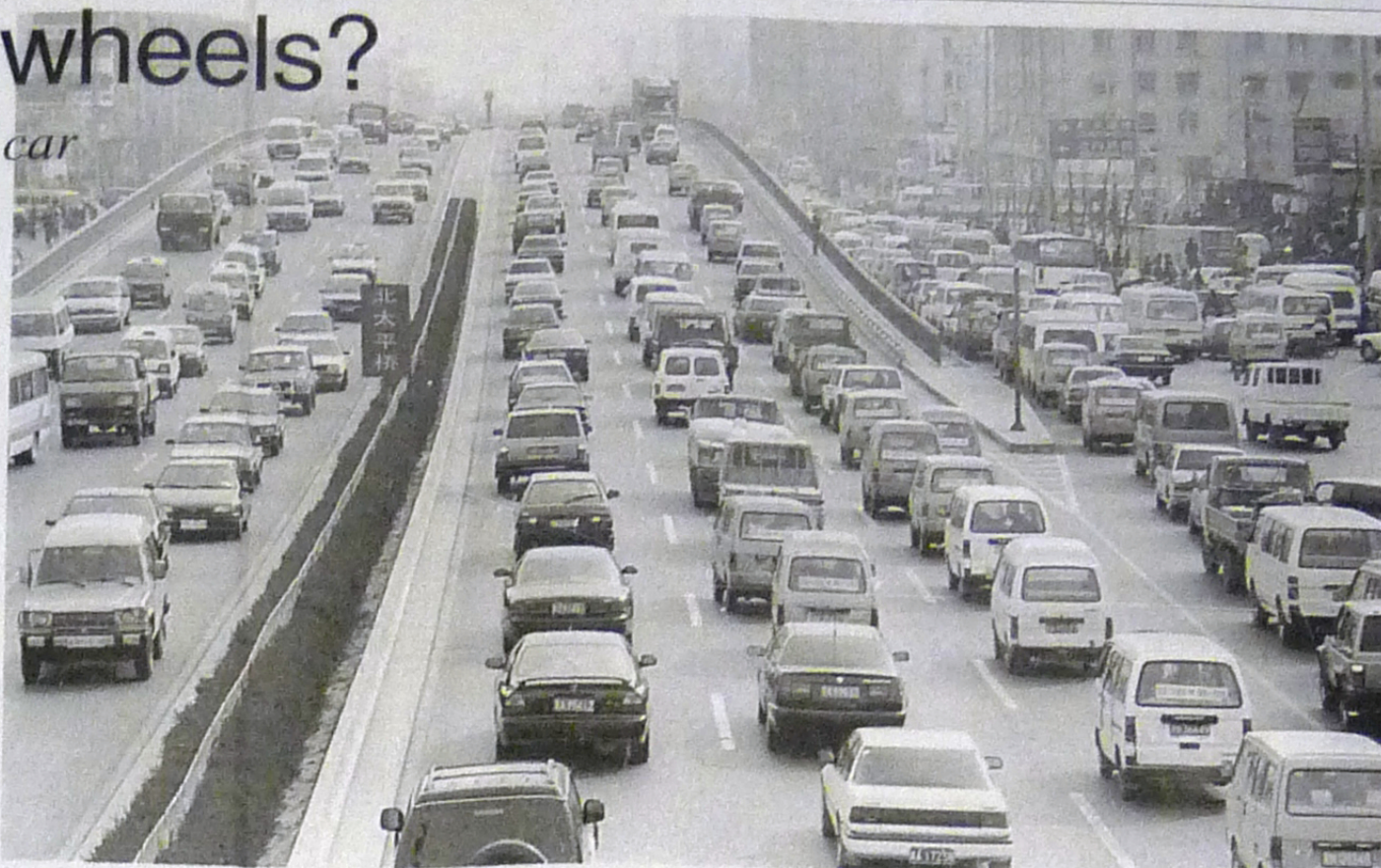
"The supply of most types of cars is unable to meet demand," said Guo Yong, head of the business information centre at the Beijing Asian Games Village Automobile Exchange, the largest one of its kind in the city.

There are now about 1.82 million cars in Beijing. The number is likely to increase as car prices have generally gone down since China joined the World Trade Organization.

"About 20,000 new cars emerge on the roads of Beijing each month," said Guo. "And, so far, there is no sign that the trend has finished. On the contrary, we predict that the buying fever has just begun."

Guo may be right.

Liu Qian, a senior engineer at the Beijing Urban Construction and Design Research Institute, told Beijing Business Today: "Owning



ZHANG WEI/China Daily

a private car is not just a way to set the feet free but also a means to spiritual satisfaction."

Shi Shuyu, a 54-year-old high-school teacher, said she feels very happy when sitting inside her new FAW-Volkswagen Jetta, with which her son drives her to school every morning. Shi used to rush to the bus station at 6:30 am to get school before 7:10 am to supervise the students' morning classes.

"To most people my age, owning a private car sounded like an illusion. Nobody expected it to turn into reality," she said.

The younger generation may think that owning a car can lead to a new lifestyle rather than the fulfilment of a dream.

Wang Yawei, a 24-year-old bank clerk, said she had just signed up for driving lessons. Wang's ultimate goal is to buy a "fancy car," which she said will be within her reach in several years.

"The car will be useful not only for driving to the office and back home but also for parties, weekend trips and shopping," she said.

But Wang said she also worried about the traffic problems in Beijing after seeing car owners at the office leave for home very late to avoid rush-hour traffic jams.

"I just do not understand why the traffic congestion cannot be completely eased even after so many new roads have been built," she said.

Beijing now has a road network totalling 12,852 kilometres in length, including 216 kilometres of expressway. The Fourth Ring Road, which came into use last year, connects with seven expressways, which allow cars to get into the city centre easily.

According to Liu Xiaoming of Beijing Polytechnic University, the total length of expressways in the city will be more than 700 kilometres after the construction of the Beijing-Kaifeng and Beijing-Miyun expressways by 2008.

"Sometimes, the building of new roads only stimulates a greater desire for cars," said Liu.

"The best way to solve the problem is not to limit or control private car ownership but to lead people to use their car more effectively and properly," he said.

Liu said public transport and bicycles should be encouraged most for daily commuting. "Car owners should realize that they are the makers of traffic and also the suffer-



WEITONG

Above: At about 11 am, traffic on the Beitaiping Overpass in northern Beijing seems normal, though the cars wait in long queues on adjacent roads. Left: As an important supplement to the existing subway system in Beijing, the new urban railway began operations in late September across northern Beijing.

ers," he said.

Rail transport on track

As road building cannot meet the demand of the increased number of vehicles, Beijing has readjusted its overall urban-development policy by promoting rail transport, a cleaner and more economical form of public transport, said Liu Xiaoming.

"It is the most effective way of curing our traffic woes in urban areas," he added.

As part of the Olympic transportation layout, the public transport system, especially the urban railway, is the priority in the years leading up to the 2008 Games, according to Liu.

In an effort to accelerate the development of public transport, new subway lines totalling 126 kilometres will be constructed to add to the current 63 kilometres of lines.

Among the planned urban railway lines, a high-speed 23-kilometre line will be con-

structed to connect the Capital International Airport with the city centre.

Meanwhile, seven new transport hubs will be set up to make transfers from the subway, urban railway, buses and other vehicles more convenient and efficient.

The length of the urban railway in Beijing will exceed 100 kilometres later this month with the opening to traffic of the western section of the No 13 Urban Railway Line.

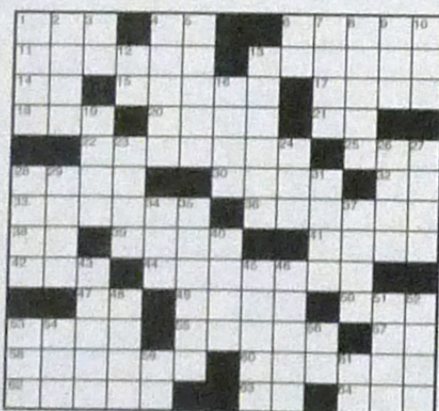
"By then, Beijing will have 300 kilometres overall of rail-based public transport — great progress but not the ultimate goal," said Liu.

"For super-large and densely populated city such as Paris and Tokyo, rail-based transit is always the backbone of the whole transport system, which normally carries 40 per cent of daily commuters, but it only carries 5 per cent in Beijing now," Liu said. "There is a long way to catch up."

CROSSWORD (No 6746)

ACROSS

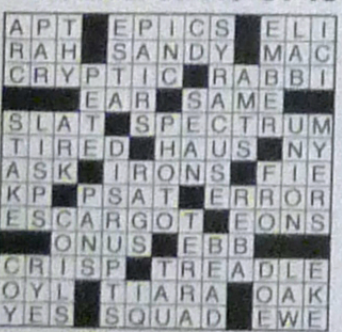
- 1 Garment edge
- 4 Ledger entry
- 6 Sparkle
- 11 Dream
- 13 Aviator — Earhart
- 14 New England st.
- 15 Woodland deities
- 17 Many years
- 18 Jayhawker st.
- 20 Sauna sites
- 21 MD asst.
- 22 False move
- 25 Yak
- 28 Manner
- 30 By mouth
- 32 Puget Sound st.
- 33 Freight mover
- 36 Warbles
- 38 Lend — ear
- 39 Clock hand
- 41 Lake dwellers
- 42 Worker's ID
- 44 Doorbell ancestor
- 47 Sundial numeral
- 49 Capri, e.g.
- 50 Cash dispenser
- 53 Busy as —
- 55 Armstrong and Sedaka
- 57 "Hear —!"
- 58 Desert bloomer
- 60 Embraces
- 62 Lock or curl
- 63 Frankfort's st.
- 64 Jungle snake



DOWN

- 1 Saddle horse
- 2 Are, in Taxco
- 3 AWOL
- 4 chaser
- 5 Uncouth
- 6 Enlists again (hyph.)
- 7 Type of radio
- 8 Unpleasant look
- 8 Get — (manage)
- 9 Misdeed
- 12 Whether
- 13 Claim
- 16 Defense grp.
- 19 Santa Fe's st.
- 23 Creep slowly
- 24 Links goal
- 26 Leather punches
- 27 Big party
- 28 Execs' degrees
- 29 Charged atoms
- 31 Vitality
- 34 Hunky-dory (hyph.)
- 35 Arguments (hyph.)
- 37 Turkish currency
- 40 Ascended
- 43 Brother's child
- 45 Make sense
- 46 Shade of green
- 48 Old soldiers
- 51 Hunt-and-peck error
- 52 Butte's cousin
- 53 Go on stage
- 54 Lounge
- 56 Arg.'s continent
- 59 We
- 61 Antimony symbol

Solution to No 6745



TODAY'S TELEVISION

CCTV-1 Channel 2

- 16:23 Review of the Century
- 19:00 News; weather
- 19:38 Focus Interview
- 20:05 Serial: The Turn of the Century (3)
- 21:25 Global
- 22:00 World Report

CCTV-2 Channel 8

- 17:05 China Market Update
- 19:30 China Business Report
- 20:00 Life
- 20:40 Net Age
- 21:35 Economy 30 Minutes
- 22:15 Stock Market Today

CCTV-3 Channel 15

- 14:42 Hand in Hand
- 18:03 Studio Express
- 19:30 Symphony World

Art Scope

- 21:35 Art Scope
- 22:40 Late News
- 23:13 Classic Sound

CCTV-4 Channel 32

- 16:10 Oriental Horizon
- 18:30 Across the Straits
- 20:05 China Showbiz
- 21:30 China Report
- 22:10 Sports online

CCTV-6 Channel 18

- 18:09 Animation Theatre
- 18:20 People
- 19:45 Chinese movie: Qiao Feng
- 21:24 FilmMarket
- 23:42 Australian movie: The Fourth Wish

CCTV-8 Channel 29

- 19:00 Around the World
- 20:00 Prime Time Theatre: Around

- Los Angeles (17, 18)
- Jiayi Drama
- Late-night Theatre
- Mexican serial: Wild Heart (19)

BTV-1 Channel 6

- 17:25 Stock Update
- 18:30 News; weather
- 19:42 Documentary
- 19:53 Serial: Civil Servant (1)
- 22:36 Hello the World

BTV-2 Channel 21

- 12:05 20-part serial: Story of 2001 (8)
- 13:08 Current Popularity
- 15:46 MTV
- 16:44 Live Now
- 18:20 Chinese Top Music Showbiz
- 22:46

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

Today's deal features the winners of this year's Cavendish Calcutta Pairs, Bobby Levin and Steve Weinstein, who also won in 1999.

After South opened one no-trump (15-17 points), North's two-spade response was a transfer bid showing clubs. (Two no-trump would have been the response with long diamonds. Also, if you use major-suit but not minor-suit transfers, I think you should play that responder's immediate jumps to three of a minor are sign-offs. With a good hand and a long minor, start with Stayman, then rebid in your suit on round two, which is game-forcing.)

Against three clubs, Weinstein (West) led a diamond, Levin winning with the ace and returning a diamond to declarer's king. If South had ruffed his remaining diamond in the dummy and called for the club jack,

running it if East plays low, he could have got home. However, South continued with the ace and another trump, hoping that either they would break 3-2 or that West would have a singleton honour. Here, though, Levin won with the club queen and shifted to the heart king.

Now declarer couldn't succeed. If he won the trick, West would get in with the heart queen and give East a heart ruff. And if South ducked this trick, he would lose two hearts, along with one diamond and two clubs.

Only five pairs out of 29 did better than Levin and Weinstein on this deal.

Finally, note that to defeat the contract even when declarer plays double-dummy (knowing where all 52 cards lie), East must not win the first trick! The curious may work out the various possibilities — I'm out of space.

North			
♠ 9			
♥ J 9 6 4			
♦ 8 4			
♣ J 10 9 8 7 5			
West			
♠ K 7 5 3			
♥ Q 5 3			
♦ Q 10 9 7 3			
♣ 6			
East			
♠ Q 10 6 4			
♥ K 7			
♦ A J 5			
♣ K Q 3 2			
South			
♠ A J 8 2			
♥ A 10 8 2			
♦ K 6 2			
♣ A 4			
Dealer: South			
Vulnerable: Both			
South	West	North	East
1 NT	Pass	2 ♣	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	Pass	Pass
Opening lead: ♦ 10			

WHAT'S ON

Acrobatic Show

Chaoyang Theatre is a theatre which specializes in acrobatics all the year round. Many top acrobatic artists from all over the country are invited to perform for the Chinese and foreign tourists.

Venue: Chaoyang Theatre, 36 Dongsanhuan Beilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing

Time: 7:15 pm, nightly Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

China National Acrobatic Circus

China National Acrobatic Circus was the first State-level acrobatic troupe of New China and has won lots of gold medals in various well-known international acrobatic contests in places such as Monaco, France, Hungary, Russia and Italy. Now the star-studded cast are exhibiting the charm and elegance of the most professional comprehensive acrobatic art every night. Integrating superlative juggling, unicycling, balancing and jumping through hoops with the finest ancient Chinese dancing, the award-winning variety show will amaze you at every turn.

Time/Dates: 19:15 - 20:30, every evening

Location: Universe Theatre, 10 Dongzhimen Nandajie, Dongcheng District (100 metres north of Poly Plaza)

Tel: 6502-3984, 6502-2640, 6416-9893 Fax: 6500-2743

STAGE

Tibetan antelope: A modern dance depicting the life of the antelope of Tibet is set for the stage. The dance is also a plea to humans to protect the vulnerable creature.

Time: 7:30 pm, November 22, 23

Place: Poly Theatre, 14 Dongzhimen Nandajie

Tel: 6500-1188 ext 5176

EXHIBITION

Art show: Chinese artists including Li Xiongcai, Xu Xi, Feng Linzhang, He Jiaying, Hu Yongkai and Liu Jibiao are presenting their representative works of Chinese ink paintings at the western hall of Wanfung Art Gallery until November 29. The works on display cover subjects like landscapes, portraits and flowers-and-birds. At the eastern hall, a show "Thunder" is being held until November 20 with 23 paintings by Korean artists.

Time: 9 am-5 pm

Place: 136 Nanchizi Dajie, Dongcheng District

Tel: 6523-3320

CONCERT

Asian orchestra: The Asian Symphony Orchestra made up of musicians from Japan, South Korea and China will play a diverse selection at a concert in Beijing "Pray For Peace Airrang," the theme music on the 2002 FIFA World Cup Opening Ceremony, a Japanese piece "Rainbow" and Chinese pieces including composer Liu Wenjin's "Operatic colours."

Time: 7:30 pm, November 22, 23

Place: Forbidden City Concert Hall, Zhongshan Park near Tian'anmen Square

Tel: 6559-8285