



# **How to Live Well Without Owning a Car: Save Money, Breathe Easier, and Get More Mileage Out of Life**

*Chris Balish*

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## How to Live Well Without Owning a Car: Save Money, Breathe Easier, and Get More Mileage Out of Life Chris Balish

You don't need to own a car to live well in America. In fact, you'd probably be better off without one. In this groundbreaking guide, award-winning journalist Chris Balish exposes the true costs of car ownership and shows how car-free living can put anyone on the path to financial freedom. Using the book's car cost worksheet, first figure out how much owning a car really costs-you'll be surprised. Then, see how easy it is to transition to a car-free or car-lite lifestyle using Chris's strategies for commuting, running errands, taking trips, dating, socializing, and more. You'll also find hundreds of tips and success stories from car-free people in cities and suburbs across America. Without car payments, rising gas prices, and traffic jams to worry about, you'll have more money and leisure time to spend as you choose. Discover why getting rid of your car may be the soundest and sanest lifestyle change you can make.

**Reviews**

View a video clip from NBC's Today Show: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/25609661/> "Chris Balish offers a mix of the practical-a worksheet to figure out a car's total cost and impact-as well as the horrifying: The average American walks just 300 yards a day."-Sierra Magazine "If ever there was a practical inducement to get out of the car trap, this is it. For the multitude of Americans stuck in traffic and spending thousands of dollars a year on their cars, Chris's lively and pragmatic step-by-step solutions provide a way out."-Jane Holtz Kay, author of Asphalt Nation "Chris Balish's book can help environmentally conscious Americans live their values. If you're concerned about pollution and global warming, follow the program in these pages. There can be life without a car. And a good life at that!"-Ed Begley, Jr., actor and environmental activist "[Chris Balish's] prescriptions are feasible and most important, reasonable."-San Antonio Express News "Even if living car-free or car-lite isn't for you, you'll still learn a lot from this book. I did."-Michelle Singletary, Washington Post

Listen to Chris Balish talk about living car-free in Los Angeles on NPR's Morning Edition.

## How to Live Well Without Owning a Car: Save Money, Breathe Easier, and Get More Mileage Out of Life Details

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# **From Reader Review How to Live Well Without Owning a Car: Save Money, Breathe Easier, and Get More Mileage Out of Life for online ebook**

## **Travis says**

Two weeks ago our car was totalled and we got a check from the insurance that would allow us to buy a new car and continue as we were, struggling with debt, or to pay off all our debts and go car-free as we'd been thinking of for several years. It turned out to be a pretty easy decision.[return][return]This book was an interesting (and quick) read, but to be honest, it's kind of a waste if you're already car-free or pretty well convinced that's the way you want to go. It's definitely focused on selling people on the idea, so a lot of the book is spent just repeating the same info on benefits over and over. In addition, the largest section is on commuting to work, which is not an issue for me at all. I'm self-employed and work from home, and my husband is unemployed and going back to school - at the community college that's half a block down the street from us.[return][return]I'm also well-familiar with alternative modes of transportation, having spent all but the last nine years of my life walking, riding my bike, and taking the bus.[return][return]The book is well enough written and engaging, just not really for me.

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## **Kathryn says**

My 13-year-old car is about to bite the dust (the poor thing has broken down for the third time in a little over a month). And, since I live only a short distance from work, and since I can't yet afford the new SmartCar, I've recently wondered what would happen if I just never replaced the Hyundai? Would life be so impossible? Add to that carbon footprint guilt and a distaste for driving, and going car-less doesn't seem like such a bad idea. So... I read this book.

This is mainly a how-to guide to help people think of living without a car. I found myself flipping through the same sections of the book again and again, hoping for some earth-shattering piece of top secret information that would unlock the key to getting around in LA without a car (how do I get the bus to come more often after 7pm? How do I ride a bike in heels? Will I have more bad hair days without a car?). I didn't find much that was earth-shattering, but in retrospect, I think the author included all that he could without being city-specific. The best tip? Getting stuff from the pharmacy and grocery store delivered. I haven't done it yet, but the idea makes me feel very crafty indeed.

In the meantime, I've started getting around relatively gracefully without a car. While I'm not a good driver, I'm a super bus rider, and I now have a handy bicycle to get around between bus trips.

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## **Ian says**

I read this book back in 2008 and it stuck with me pretty hard. It lays out a very practical case for living car free in today's society. I am so glad I read this book when I did before graduating college because it set me on a trajectory to be car free. Soon after reading the book my wife and I dropped down to one car, and then finally went car free in 2011 and haven't looked back since. In a couple years we will have not had a car for

longer than we ever had a car and our lives are so much better because of it.

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## **Adrienne says**

I read a local edition of this book. It is a tad bit dated, but the information is still rather good. I would add that those who are planning to go "car free" and will be mostly walking or taking public transportation should consider purchasing a rolling cart for hauling items, including dry cleaning, groceries (if not getting them delivered, which can be expensive in some areas), and so on. Whole Foods currently sells a model that is very slim (as opposed to the bulky and non-flexible metal grocery carts, which seem to work well on metros but are too bulky and difficult to lift on buses), fairly tough, and costs only about \$20. We have had one for more than a year, and it is still going strong. Similar ones are available on Amazon.

In addition, an update to this book is that many rental car agencies are now competing with ZipCar. Many of them, such as Hertz, have plans that are very flexible, and there are several new companies that have cars which can be taken one-way at an hourly rate. (ZipCars have to be returned to their original locations but come with gas and currently \$300,000 in insurance.) Anyone who plans to rent cars on a fairly regular basis might consider checking with his/her insurance company and inquiring about a non-drivers' policy. We have one that acts like a normal car insurance plan for the two of us for under \$20 a month. It covers us no matter what we drive (except motorcycles) and also covers us should we be hit or injured as a pedestrian. The only caveat is to make sure that the plan covers ALL aspects of the car, including the actual car itself. Our original plan covered everything except that actual rental car, and if one ends up with a free upgrade, he or she can often be driving a brand-new vehicle worth anywhere from \$25-\$70,000! In some cases, one's credit card company may have something to cover this gap, but you have to be very careful and make sure to have all your bases covered. Additionally, when renting cars, consider signing up for a rewards program. We have a friend who rents a Hertz vehicle most weekends (as a personal luxury), and she usually receives every fourth weekend rental free. (It may sound more expensive to rent a car almost every weekend, but with rewards points, etc..., she still comes out far ahead.)

When buying things, here are some things we found really helpful (which may or may not be useful to you):

--In most areas, Wal-Mart (and several other companies) will ship virtually anything to your door if you spend \$45, including toilet paper, detergent, cat litter, etc..

--In areas where you can access Wal-Mart-To-Go (different than Walmart.com), delivery to your door is \$10 (waived for large orders), and you can select a time for the items to come the NEXT DAY. (In some areas, they even have groceries.)

--Amazon Prime (\$79 for most; \$39 for students) has been great. In our area, items come in two-days, and we often use this for ink and things that we run out of unexpectedly. This works well when you only need an item or two or something that Wal-Mart or Target (or other business) does not carry.

--Amazon has added lockers to many areas, so if you do not want something shipped to your house or mailbox, you can usually pick things up at a local convenience store or other location.

--CSAs--Community Supported Agriculture. Many areas have CSAs that you can buy into for a season or the year, and then you just pick up your box of fresh food at a set time and day.

--In areas where there is an IKEA within a roughly 50-100 mile radius (depends upon the location), you can often go to the Ikea, pick out what you want, and have anything you order delivered to your door at very flexible times, including the weekends, for only \$89. (In most cases, this is much, much cheaper than having items delivered by online order or renting a U-Haul.)

(Note: None of this is legal advice or counsel. This is just a post about what has been useful to us and might be useful to others.)

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## **jen says**

I didn't think this book was that great overall, but its strong point is in providing convincing financial reasons for not owning a car. The title is pretty misleading; it has more useful info about WHY you might not want to own a car than HOW to live without one. If you are investigating ways of saving money, have been concerned with gas prices, or are interested in the financial implications of car ownership, this book is worth reading for that aspect.

In terms of the "hows", the info is fairly basic and much of it seems pretty intuitive - I think many people will think of renting a car occasionally or looking at public transit options in their area. Some of the more difficult aspects of not owning a car are not addressed thoroughly in the book. For instance, I think parents must face some of the more difficult challenges of not owning a car, so it would be useful to have an in-depth section on issues with babies, teenage children, etc. Safety issues at night without a car are also not addressed adequately (the author recommends taking a cab after a night on the town, which isn't possible in many places and a financial challenge for others).

Finally, I found it interesting that there was so much focus on the "stigma" of not owning a car (there's a whole section, for instance, on concerns about dating when you don't have a car), but not much about the opposite situation of dealing with negative reactions of from car-owning friends. As with any lifestyle choice, there are people who will react with defensiveness or guilt. Some discussion about how express enthusiasm for your choice without being judgmental (but still be prepared to deal with the defensive reaction anyway) would be a good addition to this book.

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## **Chezz says**

Such an important book. Whether you go car-free or not, it is certainly in your interest (and the interest of everyone else, except the car and oil companies) that other people go car-free. But alas, as this fine little book explains, most of us are addicted to driving. It's not a "love affair" America has with the automobile, it's an addiction. "Driving is the new smoking," as one of the wise commenters in this book notes.

The book is an utterly practical manual to not only getting by but prospering, as the title explains, without your car. You save lots of money and lots of time (yes!), and become healthier and happier when you learn to get around by other means. And Balish is no radical. (Not that I have anything against radicals -- I also loved John Francis' Planet Walker, which is a different and very valid approach to getting rid of your car.)

Balish is a regular guy with a regular job in St. Louis, who had merrily driven around for years, until he happened to find himself carless for what he thought would be a brief period. He adapted quickly, and enjoyed the financial savings so much that he decided to prolong that carless period for awhile and then indefinitely. In plain English, he explains his own story, why you should follow his lead and how to do it. How to not only get to work, but also shop, date, get to the hospital, go on vacations, etc., without owning a car, in grand style and while having fun. Oh, and the illustrations by Andy Singer are thought-provoking, profound and very funny.

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## Carl Wade says

Back Cover: Suggests doing with out a car in city and suburbs. What about the country?

Author Chris doesn't own a car and commutes year round by bike. I did that at one time. The only time I missed was one time after a show Betty came to pick me up in the van. She said I was disappoint when I saw that I would be able to ride the bike in the snow.

Index: Here is a new word; slugging, it is picking up strangers for the HOV lanes.

Pg v: The biggest contribution of the book may be; "The true financial costs of owning your car."

Pg 22: Just the list of cost on the worksheet is an eye opener.

Pg 162: Seattle Flexcar in mentioned. I signed up for that service once but never found a use for it.

Pg vii: Here is a good point; This book challenges in the Auto Industry.

Pg 1: It says yoy can get out of debt by not owning a car. But it doesn't work that way. You end up spending the money in another way.

Pg 8: I like some of the investment options however.

Pg 79: Google research for groups with the same interests. This could be good for Monopoly as well.

Pg 176: He mentions Monopoly game as part of Family gatherings and Holidays.

Pg 177: Oh dear, he takes a unisex approach.

Pg 185: Use the bike for heavy items; [www.bikeatwork.com](http://www.bikeatwork.com)

Books and other resources: [WWW.livecarfree.com](http://WWW.livecarfree.com); for continued information. [erideshare.com](http://erideshare.com); carpools for out of town travel. [www.edmunds.com](http://www.edmunds.com); for the true budget cost ofr owning a car "TCO". This would be good for young men getting married to present to the father-in-law. [www.googel.com/transit](http://www.googel.com/transit); maybe the best tip, a trip planner for public transit. This may be the best tip of the book.

Pg 194: good chapter on selling cars.

Pg 36: I just thought of a reason why I gave up driving. Speed limits makes law breakers out of all of us. I didn't like being run off the road because I choose to do the speed limit.

Pg 42: The writer says he gets out more because he doesn't have to worry about parking problems.

Pg 71: Carol Berry of Bellingham found fun places within a mile from home.

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## Patrick says

A good resource to get people thinking about going car-free or car-lite. Chris Balish lays out various scenarios chapter-by-chapter: getting to work; being social with friends and dates; doing your errands; to get you thinking about the possible ways you can get along just fine without a vehicle. While the research and explanation of living car-free and car-lite was well researched, I did feel that the book was missing a bit of realism.

Balish provides various charts showing you how the money you save by being car free could be grown with with an 8 percent a year return. You'd have to do some research to find yourself an investment with that high a yield. Most familiar, safe and steady investments have a return rate much lower. The problem of insurance when you rent a car was not given much attention either. The author mentions that some credit cards have protection with them, but again, in this scenario you do have to do some research. Most insurance coverage offered by car rental companies is the same or higher than the actual rental of the car. This is something to take into consideration for anyone who may be thinking of going car-free or car-lite and supplementing with rental weekends.

The chapter on car sharing was great addition and should have been discussed more as an alternative to

rentals, since you pay for gas and insurance with your membership to rental services.

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### **Brian says**

Since I started riding my bike to work more often recently, I have started pondering an everyday bike commute, ditching our second car completely. This book has some valuable tips for people like me, and even more for people who want to go completely car-free, instead of car-lite like me. Some of the choices he presents are hard: move closer to work, closer to services like the grocery store, choose doctors, dentists, churches that are closer to your house, and so on. The author focuses on the financial benefits of going car-free: no car payments, insurance, maintenance, and so on, and does present a compelling case to someone looking to buy a car, or who is still paying for one. My Civic hybrid is paid off, so I don't have the car payments on that to worry about, but it is still costly enough to make it worth looking at.

For me, he convinced me to look closer at public transportation as an alternative/backup to biking, and it actually does look feasible. We only live a mile or so from a Metro station, and my work provides a shuttle bus from another Metro station. I could also take a bus, though I would have to plan in advance to catch it on schedule. Still, both are valid options if I couldn't ride my bike. My work even provides pre-tax paycheck deductions for transit, which I didn't know about before.

I'm going to keep riding for a few more weeks to see if it's really something I want to do all the time, but after reading this book, I can definitely picture our family cutting down to one car in the not-so-distant future.

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### **Sarah says**

I love riding my bike--it's fun. I'd like to use it for transportation more often, especially to work. My car's getting quite old and I am already cutting down unnecessary trips in it. The financial savings of not having a car are very compelling if you live near public transport and do not have small children to transport. And what do I like to do when I visit big cities? Use their public transportation.

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### **Cyndi says**

I read this book years ago, probably when it first came out. I recently saw it at the library, so I skimmed it again. Some of it struck me as a bit dated, but most of it is still really relevant. And so, so important!

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### **Melinda says**

Overall, this is a useful book in explaining how to live a car-free or "car-lite" life in the United States. It is well organized into sections, such as alternative modes of transport (bicycling, walking, motorcycling) and how-to guides (get to work, have a social life, use car-sharing). It is easy to read and peppered with anecdotes from people across the country.

Unfortunately, the author tends to downplay the difficulties of living car-free in the U.S. He does not address the fact that in some cities it is much, much easier to live without a car, and in others it is almost — if not



entirely — impossible. I wish he noted that some of his alternatives are not options for everyone. For example, bicycling can be very dangerous (after being hit by a car while riding my bike, I can't imagine going into traffic again) or downright impossible for someone with a physical disability. Not only does he seem to be coming from a middle/upper-class perspective, he also fails address what people outside an urban/suburban environment might do.

I also disliked his assumption that everyone already drives and is only now considering switching to a car-free life. It would be nice if his book assumed that at least a few of his readers do not (or cannot) drive and do not have a car to begin with.

Despite these problems, the book is a handy guide for anyone who lives a middle-class existence in an urban environment in the U.S. Straightforward, well organized, and easy to read, the book might give you some useful tips you hadn't considered before, or it just might be the motivation to get rid of your car, which is what the author intends.

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### **Christine Kenney says**

Pretty decent pep talk for folks thinking about selling a car. Alarmed that several years into a "car-lite" lifestyle (household sharing a single vehicle), this book tempted me to splurge my hypothetical savings on a scooter.

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### **Jared Millet says**

One can certainly dream.

I've lived car-free before, back in my college days, but not by choice. I've also been a Slave To The Machine, especially back when I was commuting 3 hours each day from Mobile to Pensacola. Even before reading this, I've been dreaming of being able to live somewhere I could ride the train to work and walk from home to all the basic amenities. When my wife and I move next, we plan to pare down to a single car for the both of us. The techniques, advice, and strategies listed in this volume do make it clear that living car-lite or car-free is very, very possible.

Depending on where you live. And where you work.

Living car-free is much, much easier if you live in some sort of West Coast utopian fairyland like Portland or San Francisco. It's telling that of all the testimonials from car-free people included in the book, not one - *not one* - is from the Deep South. It would be tricky but doable if you moved to the right areas of Atlanta or New Orleans, but practically nowhere else in my neck of the woods. Cities in the South either have no public transport to speak of, or (like Birmingham) no groceries, pharmacies, or any other basic human necessities in their downtown areas.

Oh well. One more reason to move somewhere else.

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## **Keith Akers says**

O. K., true confessions, I'm "car lite." But we ride bicycles everywhere we go locally when it's not icy on the roads.

This is a good book, and the basic thrust of it is, "you'll save money by ditching your car!" To which your response is, "But . . . but . . . but . . ." to which the author's response is, "well, this is what you do in that situation." So his style is more practical and less theoretical than "Divorce Your Car" (which is also good). The emphasis is on how you can go car-free, now, rather than why we need better mass transit or more bicycle lanes. Methods of getting around include buses, bicycles, carpooling, walking, renting a car, getting rides from other people; the author even counts motorcycles and scooters as good enough to qualify as "car free." I like it that he tackles the really tough situations where you think you just have to have a car (like dating, which gets quite a bit of space). Going car-free really is more of a social challenge than a physical challenge.

It's a long story why we're not car-free completely. (I used to have a pretty good excuse: impossible to get my stand-up bass to gigs without our Honda Hatchback.) I actually lived without a car for over a decade. But this is a good book to give you an overview of the issues.

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