

COMMUTERS OF MISSOULA

UNICYCLE

WITH STEVE

My name is Steve Schmidt. I live about 3.5 miles out Mullen Road. I primarily work from home, but when I commute to downtown I ride my electric unicycle. **The only times that I'll commute without it is during extreme weather.**

I discovered electric unicycles online, while waiting for a new motorcycle amidst supply chain issues. I watched countless videos and eventually decided to pull my deposit and buy one. My electric unicycles arrived in December, but with all the ice and snow outside, I couldn't ride it for the first two months except inside my house. **I learned to ride in my kitchen**, clocking my first eight miles there, despite feeling like I might crash at any moment. My wife jokingly threatened to break me if I broke the kitchen!

The learning curve was like learning to ride a bike all over again. Initially, every small bump felt like a disaster waiting to happen. Now, I can handle bumps at 43 miles an hour without a problem. The Electric Unicycle handles forward-backward balance, and I just balance side to side. Once you get moving, the gyroscopic physics of the wheels moving help with the balance.

I've ridden about 3,300 miles on my Electric Unicycle over the past two and a half years. **Charging it has cost me only \$8 to \$15 in electricity. Unbeatable!** When people start to investigate it, electric unicycles are cost-effective compared to other forms of transportation. I don't have to pay for insurance or fuel. My current model cost \$1,500, cheaper than mountain bikes or electric bikes with limited speed and range. The latest electric unicycles, at their most expensive, hover at \$4,400 and outperform motorcycles in many ways.

If I go around 20 MPH, I could have a 50-60 mile range. If my range is limited, **I can roll on board the bus to ride across town and then finish the last couple miles on the Electric Unicycle.** At around 75 pounds, it's portable enough to throw in the trunk of

my car - no bike rack needed. However, I can't take it on airplanes, Greyhound, or Amtrak due to battery regulations. I never have to worry about locking it up outside; I can bring it into stores and keep it with me at all times.

My top speed is 43 miles an hour, so I ride in the flow of traffic just like a motorcycle. On streets where I can't fully keep up with traffic speed, like Reserve Street, I use the bike path or the side of the road. I try to be predictable as possible, staying on either the road or the bike path so I'm not surprising anybody.

I love going up and down Reserve Street during rush hour when it's backed up and everybody's complaining about it. I get to zip down just as if the road was empty, like it's 3 in the morning. And to think just how many gallons of gas is burned at any given moment on Reserve Street from the cars idling at the stoplights.

If I can inspire somebody to think, "I didn't know that was possible." Then I'm doing my job because **it's as much about promoting efficient transportation as it is just having a blast.** And there's a little bit of a showoff aspect for me. If you've never seen an electric unicycle before and I ride by, you stop and look and

point. People roll down their windows all the time at stoplights and ask me questions. “What the heck is that thing called? How fast does it go? What sort of range do you get?”

Give it a try! There are probably five of us in town right now. The technology is changing on a daily basis. Newer ones have top speeds of 70 miles an hour, full suspension, longer battery life, and a range of 125 miles plus!

