

Citi Biking as a Rookie

Transcript

Jasmin Matthews:

You ever heard the saying, “It’s like riding a bike”?

Well, I’m convinced that whoever created it never stepped foot in New York City.

JM:

MUSIC: “Casa” Blue Dot Sessions

I’m a Jersey girl. That’s where I grew up.

The bike that sat in my garage never had air in its tires. Needless to say I drove everywhere.

I have never ridden a Citi Bike in the streets of New York City. The one time I biked on the walkway in Brooklyn Bridge Park doesn’t count. There were no cars allowed.

For New York, “it’s like riding a bike” needs to be modified because it’s not that simple. It’s more like riding a BMX bike in the X Games.

There are rules of the road, like knowing how to dodge pedestrians who cross regardless of a red light.

I’m not a chicken, the thought of my bike and a car coexisting just intimidates me.

But there’s this part of me that views it as a rite of passage to be deemed a New Yorker.

What better time to ride than a busy 9 am on a Friday?

JM:

AMBI: Sound of cars

The grand plan was to check out a bike at the station right across from Shake Shack on 116th and Broadway, and ride all the way down to Midtown.

I stood at the corner of 116th, and saw the speed of the cars.

AMBI: Sound of card accepted at subway turnstile

Yeah, so much for a plan.

I decided to take the 1 train downtown to 72nd street to shorten my route.

JM:

AMBI: Street noise

I found a bike - the kind you pedal, not electric - at 67th and Broadway.

I unlocked the bike, hopped on and started riding.

I felt bare, without the metal of a car protecting me.

All I had between me and everything else was my black puffer jacket.

I tried to journal in my notes app about how I felt at every red light. Right as the light turned green at 56th and 9th Ave, three bikes left me in the dust. I guess I was taking too long.

AMBI: Sound of cars/heavy honking

Then the real test came: an intersection at 42nd and 9th Ave.

It was clearly rush hour.

There were no bike lanes in sight.

The only thing I had to rely on were the bikers around me. One turned left. Another kept straight.

Turning left meant I had to merge into the busy traffic.

Straight meant going into the unknown.

I had just two choices. Yet I felt paralyzed with a thousand.

I went with the unlisted option - instinct.

I followed the biker going straight.

A bus was approaching from the right. Someone needed to brake.

And the biker knew it wasn't going to be him.

The bus jerked to a stop.

And what did I do? Follow on the heels of that biker.

And on the other side of that bus - a bike lane. What a relief.

MUSIC: "Levander Crest" Blue Dot Sessions

By 25th and 9th Avenue, I felt a little peace.

As I entered Chelsea, the streets became a little wider. The roads a bit less busy. The rays of the sun unobstructed by buildings.

I was cruising. Feeling more like I belonged. I felt like J.Cole, riding freely through the streets of New York as the piano played in his video for his song "Intro."

And then I remembered...

I only get 30 minutes on the bike before I'm charged more than \$4.49.

AMBI: Street noise and bird chirps

I looked on my phone for the nearest bike station to end my ride.

I was midway into my turn onto 21st, when I saw a mom crossing the street with her baby hugged to her chest. She stopped in her tracks. Her back heel lifted as if it could stop the momentum of what was coming at her. Her eyes widened for a second. The corners of her mouth turned upward in a faint, nervous smile. I swerved around her.

I may be a New Yorker after all.

MUSIC: "Casa" Blue Dot Sessions

Onomatopoeia - Sounds like New York - is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. This episode was written and produced by me, Jasmin Matthews. Joanne Faryon is our professor and executive producer. Music by Blue Dot Sessions. Special thanks to Peter Leonard.