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"A Different Light"

A Different Light – 25th May 2024 – “The hunt was on for a new scooter”

We had envisaged frequent trips to the Waipu village when we were planning our move there from Ruakaka. There is a walkway near the street where we were moving to. It goes through to a side street that is adjacent to the Waipu main drag. I planned on driving through the walkway on my scooter but there was a dog leg chicane type structure in place to stop motorbikes from entering the walkway. The Whangarei District Council removed it when I raised the issue of access to them. This was very responsive and much appreciated. I have never seen a motorbike ever go by the walkway, in fact the only motorbikes in Waipu are, middle aged bikers who mount their Harleys on Sundays for an excursion to the Pizza Barn for a late lunch.

However, my plans for frequent village outings were somewhat fraught by my extremely compact scooter that is designed to be super light, easy to dismantle and reassemble and fit in your boot. While it does this very easily there are downsides. Each time I get on it, I feel like an over-sized chimpanzee on a tiny tricycle in a circus. I hear a circus tune- perhaps the Benny Hill theme tune or the “Thunder And Blazes” instrumentation (google it to get the idea) in my head every time I hop on it. It’s also somewhat unstable. I realised why there was a warning sticker on the scooter saying how important it was to have these small back wheels at the back extended. I learnt this lesson going up a small ramp at the Duke of Marlborough. The whole scooter tipped backwards and I almost did a backward roll. Luckily I am so used to falling backwards that over time, I’ve learnt to automatically tuck my head forward avoiding many collisions between my skull and the ground. My wife Sally, rather heroically dove to the ground in an attempt to save me and unluckily gave herself a small fracture to a leg bone.

The walkway to Waipu Village has a sideways slope with an electric fence on the upward side. When I go on the walkway on the Chimpanzee tricycle I try to counter the slope by leaning in towards the electric fence. As you can imagine this is somewhat perturbing and I have never run the walkway gauntlet solo.

Last week I after much investigation, I purchased another scooter. I wanted to be able to go to the local shops on my own without the fear of being stuck in an aisle doing an Austin Powers 13-point turn. I also wanted to ride down the walkway without throwing myself into the

electric fence. I was after a scooter that was stable enough to handle the walkway gauntlet and manoeuvrable enough to navigate the aisles of the local 4 Square and the butcher.

After countless enquiries, Richard from the Independent Living, said he knew of two scooters that would fit the bill. He offered to drive them up from Auckland and give me a test drive and that if I did not want them there would be no obligation. He went an extra mile. At that point in time, I was fixated on a Pride Zero Turn model that promised outstanding manoeuvrability where you could turn on a dime. Richard however counselled against the zero turn, pointing out that it had extremely small wheels and a very low ground clearance. True to his word Richard came to Waipu with two scooters and we did an extensive test run. Richard was very detailed and explicit in his instructions on how to drive a scooter. I said to him in a jocular manner that this wasn't my first rodeo, however he was very conscientious in his instructions. We went down the walkway. We went to the butchers. We threaded effortlessly through the aisles of the Waipu 4 Square where I had not ventured before. I bought my first purchase, a bottle of tonic. I even went to the public toilet when the urge took a grip. Richard was giving me instructions on how to use the pedestrian crossing but as nature was seriously calling, I ploughed straight ahead. The scooter ticked all the boxes and was purchased there and then.

Last Saturday, Sally and I had brunch and perused various shops. At the end of our jaunt, Sally said " I really enjoyed that, it's what I envisaged when me moved here. You and me meandering around the village like couples do". I'm also looking forward to being able to go on shopping forays buying eccentric food and drink at will, Sally however is not that enthusiastic about that prospect!

Access to things that enhance interdependence and enable independence can make a huge impact to ones quality of life. Thanks Richard, for going that extra mile.

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation