

HEROES to the rescue!

If these people don't get to work, other lives could be in danger. Luckily, our knights of the road are all a whizz when it comes to two wheels...

MARTIN STOCKS is 42 and a paramedic with the London Ambulance Service. He lives in west London with his wife and stepdaughter.

Obviously to do this job, you need to be fairly fit. I've always been a keen cyclist and still am. I've worked with the London Ambulance Service for eight years now and when the chance came up to work as a member of the Cycle Response Unit, I applied straight away. I've been doing it for a year now and I have to say my fitness levels have improved even more, which is great.

"I cover an area of west London that runs from Chiswick to Hyde Park and I can be sent to anything and everything. We have a target response time of less than 8 minutes and I can often get somewhere in just a few minutes.

"Obviously, working as a paramedic on a bike is perfect in a big city with lots of heavy traffic and pedestrianised areas, where it's more difficult for ambulance vans or cars to get through. As a lone responder, my job is to get there quickly and assess the situation. Using a bike saves time and resources because if I don't need ambulance back up it means they're able to divert to calls where an ambulance may be urgently needed.

"Being able to get to an emergency fast can make a big difference. I got called out to the middle of Hyde Park recently after a woman had been thrown from her horse. She was lying on the ground, cold and in shock so needed treatment urgently. Fortunately, because I was able to cycle across the park, I could get to her quickly and make her comfortable while we waited for an ambulance to get her to hospital.

"We have everything we need on the bike apart from stretchers. I even have flashing lights and a siren!

"You can never tell how busy you'll be on a shift. There'll be days when you'll do 12 to 15 jobs and others when you'll just get two or three. In between calls I might sit in the park and read or go for a coffee. If I haven't had enough exercise I'll often go for a cycle while I wait for my next call.

"We work on the bikes all year round. The only time we're not really able to go out is if there are strong winds. The bike and the equipment weigh more than 100 kilos so it could go over easily in that kind of weather.

"Being a lone responder to call outs does carry risks of course – sadly,

it is now mandatory for all ambulance workers to wear stab vests. We've never had a bike stolen on our team though and I think the public like the fact that because we're on bikes we're more accessible. Most people really appreciate what we do and they'll come up to me all the time and say 'I think you do a great job.'

"That's very rewarding and makes the job worthwhile. I love what I do and couldn't imagine doing anything else."

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DEBBIE HERBERT is a 37-year-old medical courier for Medical Services. She is single and lives in Islington, north London.

This job is a 100 per cent about communication. And whether you're transporting blood, organs for transplant or nuclear medicines, time is always of the essence. Hospitals are urgently waiting for you to deliver – people's lives and health may be at stake, so you've got to make sure you do your job with no messing about.

"It's vital to stay in touch with your

controllers every step of your journey so that if your vehicle breaks down or you suddenly hit a traffic jam your package can still be delivered on time and before its contents deteriorate or maybe even become unusable.

"The transport we use depends on what we're delivering. Blood can be carried on motorbikes in special shatter-proof boxes but transplant organs have to be transported in vans to ensure the organ stays safe and in good condition.

"Nuclear medicines are also only delivered in vans and obviously you have to be really careful when delivering them. They're sealed in lead containers to prevent leakage and are strapped in the

back of the van as far as possible away from the courier.

"When I'm on nuclear jobs I do sometimes worry whether it's leaking but I think those thoughts go through every courier's head. The reality is that very stringent procedures are followed transporting nuclear medicines in order

to keep everyone safe.

"This definitely isn't a 9 to 5 job – we're

here 24 hours a day. It sounds horrible to say it but the truth is we are busier in the winter when the weather's bad and there are more road accidents. As a result, more people need blood urgently or there may be more organs that are available for transplant.

"This can be a stressful job but it is satisfying knowing you've delivered a kidney, liver or some blood to someone in desperate need of any of those things.

"When I'm on an organ transplant delivery, I do always think of the donor – these things don't come off a shop shelf. It can be upsetting and the only consolation is that you know it's going to help someone else."

"Whether you're transporting blood, organs or nuclear medicines, time is crucial"



“Home births are increasing and so is the traffic!”

INDEPENDENT MIDWIFE and mum of two, Marion Costin-Ford, 50, is from Rutland. Married to Paul, they own 11 bikes between them!

The very first thing I do when I take on a new client is tell them that I will probably be turning up for appointments at their home on a motorbike. I do that in case it puts them off but, having said that, it hasn't so far—most of my clients are quite impressed!

I love motorbikes and I've been riding them since I was 14. I have three bikes altogether. There's a Kawasaki 750 Zephyr, which I use for early pregnancy and post-natal appointments. I also have a Yamaha XT 225, a trail bike, which is really for having fun and getting muddy on at weekends. However, it's very light and quick and so I often use it when I'm making local visits.

“Then I have my BMW R1100 GS which is similar to the bikes actors Ewan McGregor and Charley Boorman rode on their travels. It's huge and weighs 235 kilos with panniers, a top box and tank bag. I also have a flashing light if I need it.

“Home birth rates are increasing and so is the traffic, so motorbikes are a great

way to get somewhere fast.

“I use this bike a lot as my practice covers a fifty-mile radius over five counties, with many of my clients living in rural areas that can be difficult to get to. I call my BMW my storm, flood and tempest bike as it goes through anything and can tackle any terrain. The only time I don't use it is with snow or ice.

“I remember having one woman who called me at 5pm on a Friday, when traffic is at its most congested, saying she felt like she wanted to push. I rode my bike very creatively down the congested A1 and managed to get from my house to hers in just a fraction of the time it would take me in a car. So I was able to arrive in time for the birth.

“I'd definitely recommend using a motorbike in this job but only if you're going to learn to ride it safely. The great thing for me is that not only do I really enjoy riding motorbikes but it's very reassuring for both me and for my clients to know that I will be able to get to them quickly.”