

Life sure rolls by when a person's having fun

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Photos: DICK KELLEY

You might say Steve Lemke of Birmingham is a freewheeling fellow.

Lemke, 31, wheels around the city on roller skates. He banks on his skates. Shops on his skates. Commutes to work on his skates. Relaxes on his skates. And he raises eyebrows.

"I'm a fanatic about roller skating. They haven't made English words for how I feel about skating," said Lemke.

"Outside of falling in love with someone, this is the most exciting thing to happen to me."

Lemke can be spotted around town as he glides on sidewalks, hands behind his back, on his way to work, to run errands or to visit friends. Sometimes, empty parking lots lure him to try a few fancy spins or turns.

"Everyone looks or stares," said the Benvall Street resident. "It's a real happy sport. Everyone smiles and wants to talk to you about it."

"The little kids in my neighborhood can't believe I'm skating."

"I skate to the bank. I skate wherever I can. I live in Birmingham but I've skated to Royal Oak to visit friends."

WHY DOES HE SKATE?

"It's a riot. I have more fun roller skating than anything else right now. And it's a great way to stay in shape."

Lemke, who says he owns four pairs of roller skates, credits his eight-wheel sport with reducing his gasoline consumption.

"I've only gotten gas once so far this month," he said. "I used to buy it once a week."

Lemke, who owns the Muskies Bay Trapping Company, 1423 S. Woodward, Birmingham, began skating at roller rinks last summer.

A trip to California prompted him to take his sport outdoors.

"One guy I met in California puts on his skates in the morning and takes them off at dark," Lemke said. "I saw a guy on skates taking a dog on a run and the dog was pulling him."

Lemke isn't dissuaded by Michigan weather.

"I've skated in 30-degree weather," he said. "The cold doesn't bother me. Once you get going, you work up the body heat."

"I like being outside and doing something healthy."

"When the store isn't busy I go out and skate. I have a lot of friends with stores in downtown Birmingham, so I skate there."

"I've skated in the middle of the night as long as I know the streets."

"I never go to the party store unless I skate. I skate to the YMCA to play racquetball."

"It's more fun than jogging and it's not bad on your legs. This is fun."

LEMKE SAID he has little trouble maneuvering around the city.

"When I go into downtown Birmingham, I can skate and see all the stores before anyone could walk a block," he said.

"There are a lot of neighborhoods you can skate through."

"The worst time I had was when I went to Royal Oak. I hit 13 Mile and Woodward and there were no sidewalks. So I had to go around it. But usually when I skate outdoors, I scout the area first."



Lemke shops, banks, relaxes and just plain has fun on his skates, but admits the winter's snow may slow him down a little.

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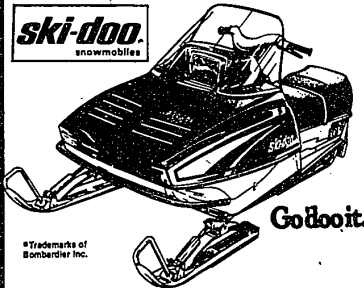
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