

Different spokes: Swans' love affair with cars goes in cycles



Lance who? ... Sydney Swans Ryan O'Keefe, left, and Darren Jolly get ready for the ride home after training yesterday. Photo: Steve Christo

By Michael Cowley

THE road is there to be shared ... a message the RTA have been preaching for several years, it's just that around the eastern suburbs lately, the road is there to be shared with swans.

While drivers may encounter the odd duck on a drive through Centennial Park, elsewhere in the east they are now likely to witness the occasional Swan on a bike.

A trend started in late 2005 by forward Ryan O'Keefe has become almost infectious within the football club, with several players now opting to ride a bike to and from training instead of taking the car.

While it's a definite benefit, the inflated petrol prices are not the cause of the sudden switch from four wheels, nor is the regular battle with parking officers outside the SCG on training days.

"We've got a big group who have bought bikes - Ryan O'Keefe, Goodesy [Adam Goodes], Darren Jolly, Benny Mathews, Crouchy [Lared Crouch], Schneids [Adam Schneider], Amon Buchanan ... there's heaps of them," Sydney's elite performance manager, Dave Misson, said.

"But, really, it's not primarily for fitness. What we get them to do is, instead of doing sessions on a stationary bike, we'll encourage them to get out on the road, just because it's not as boring, and gives them a little bit more of a workout ... a bit more specific leg-strength stuff.

"For the guys who ride to and from training, it's more of a warm-up and recovery sort of thing. It's a good recovery, an easy casual ride home after training.

"And some days they might do a fitness session of a ride around Centennial Park, but as I said, that's only in place of doing a session on the stationary bike."

O'Keefe was the first to start pedalling when he began riding the five-kilometre journey from

his eastern suburbs home to the SCG for pre-season training last year. During the season, a couple of his teammates saw the benefits it was having on O'Keefe's fitness and started to ride themselves, before it suddenly became fashionable this year.

"At the start, they all thought I was crazy when I was riding to and from training," O'Keefe explained. "But with a few boys, I think the light bulb went on in their heads and they started doing it and seeing the benefits as well, and now a lot of guys are on the bikes.

"I do find the benefits of it. You get up in the morning and you get your legs going, get the blood flowing, and when you get to training you feel warmed up.

"Then, after training, you get the chance to flush the legs out, and I've noticed that when you get home your legs do feel all the better for it and you can get up for the next session a lot easier.

"I'd say it definitely was a benefit to me last season. It proved a good way to recover and get up for games, and having that conditioning in your legs helped me run out games during the season. "Most sporting teams you'll find do a lot of bike work on stationary bikes or spin classes, but it's better to get out in the sun and the fresh air and ride around, and it makes it a little bit more exciting.

"And, yeah, the boys are saving on parking fines ... but the dressing room is full of bikes every training session."

While they may happily pedal to training and home again, don't expect to see any of the Swans tackling long-distance rides.

Misson said they have spoken with the players and discouraged them from doing too much cycling on their own on weekends.

"I think too much bike riding is counterproductive to properly conditioning ... running muscles, for want of a better description. It shortens hip flexors and overly builds up quads."