

### Starting up

- How would you describe the atmosphere in towns and cities round the world when they were all in national lockdown some months ago?
- During this time, there were fewer cars on the roads. Do you think the use of cars will go down in the future as a result?

### Reading

Will the reduction in car use we experienced during lockdown continue in the future?

To find out more, read the article and then answer the questions that follow.

### Reading comprehension 1

Read the article again and say whether the following statements are true (T), false (F) or there is not enough information given (N). Quote extracts from the article to justify your answer.

- 1 During lockdown, birdsong could sometimes be heard in big cities such as London.
- 2 As a result, many people took up bird watching.
- 3 One benefit of Covid-19 is that people now use their cars much less.
- 4 Before the pandemic, there was a growing trend for young, city-based professionals not to have a car.
- 5 Most new car purchases are for electric vehicles.
- 6 Cycling is now more popular than driving for commuting to work.

## Why the pandemic is pushing city dwellers towards cars

<sup>1</sup>Early in lockdown, I would often go outside and gaze at the sky, freed from its haze of pollution to reveal an azure blue rarely seen above London. Without car horns and aeroplanes, birdsong could occasionally be heard.

<sup>2</sup>Environmentalists insist that we can find a way to hold on to at least some of those benefits post-Covid-19. But outside my front door sits my first car. Parked with it are any plans to cut my own contribution to pollution.

<sup>3</sup>I'm far from alone. Car dealerships in the UK capital are reporting a new breed of buyer, the 30- or 40-something city dweller opting for vehicle ownership amid fears that public transport has become a no-go zone.

<sup>4</sup>This shift, replicated in cities like New York and increasingly in China, could dent plans for a "green" recovery.

<sup>5</sup>As lockdown has eased in the UK, petrol and diesel sales have returned to 82 per cent of pre-crisis levels. Early data from China, the first major economy to largely emerge from the pandemic, suggests resurgent growth in new car sales.

<sup>6</sup>This is good news for car manufacturers, who have seen young professionals in big cities over the last couple of decades show little interest in cars. Tubes, trains and buses are normally quicker; congestion charges, parking fees and insurance soon add up. Paying for two tonnes of depreciating metal seemed a waste.

<sup>7</sup>Not everyone in lockdown is going the car route — bike sales have soared. But while pedalling around is great now, it may be less popular in winter.

<sup>8</sup>My own reason for buying a car was less to do with navigating inner London than with getting out of the city. The thought of not being able to safely visit my parents in Scotland pushed me to think seriously about buying a car.

<sup>9</sup>I've argued before that electric cars will be a game changer, not just for the auto industry but for the oil sector too. The UK has over 30,000 charging points, with more than 10,000 added last year, so "range anxiety" should not be an issue. Yet in Covid-19, I hesitated — having to spend 45 minutes at a motorway service station would normally be a mild inconvenience, but how do you kill time when almost everything is shut?

<sup>10</sup>In the end I bought a second-hand plug-in hybrid, that allows electric journeys in town, with a petrol engine for the motorway. This is better than nothing, but the polluting engine does most of the miles.

<sup>11</sup>But for all its problems, the car is a lifeline, at least until the world and its travel options can return to something approaching normal. Like so much in 2020, I just wish it had never turned out this way.



© The Financial Times Limited. All Rights Reserved.

## Reading comprehension 2

Based on the information in the article, find answers to these questions.

- 1 What was the sky like above London during lockdown?
- 2 What do environmentalists want to happen after lockdown?
- 3 Why are 30 to 40 year-old city dwellers starting to buy cars?
- 4 What is the level of car use in the UK since the easing of lockdown?
- 5 Why were young professionals in cities against car ownership before the pandemic?
- 6 Why did the writer decide to buy a car?
- 7 Why didn't he buy an electric car?
- 8 What kind of car did he buy instead?
- 9 Is he happy with his purchase?

## Vocabulary

Find words or phrases in the article to match the definitions below.

- |  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 1 smoke or dust in the air that makes it difficult to see                    | (Para 1)  |
| 2 a bright shade of blue   | (Para 1)  |
| 3 keep   | (Para 2)  |
| 4 not the only one   | (Para 3)  |
| 5 kind, type   | (Para 3)  |
| 6 choosing   | (Para 3)  |
| 7 done again in the same way   | (Para 4)  |
| 8 affect in a negative way   | (Para 4)  |
| 9 rising again   | (Para 5)  |
| 10 increased rapidly to a high level   | (Para 7)  |
| 11 something that will revolutionise the way things are done                 | (Para 9)  |
| 12 occupy yourself while waiting for something to finish                     | (Para 9)  |
| 13 something you depend on to help you when you are in a difficult situation | (Para 11) |

**Grammar – compound nouns and adjectives**

- 1 Find all the compound nouns in the article where the first word is *car*.
- 2 What other compound nouns can you think of in which *car* is the first word?
- 3 Complete these compound nouns from the article.

- |                    |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| a lock _____       | k suburban _____         |
| b _____ song       | l bike _____             |
| c _____ door       | m game _____             |
| d city _____       | n _____ industry         |
| e _____ ownership  | o oil _____              |
| f _____ transport  | p charging _____         |
| g diesel _____     | q _____ anxiety          |
| h pre-crisis _____ | r motorway service _____ |
| i congestion _____ | s _____ engine           |
| j _____ fees       | t travel _____           |

**Discussion**

- 1 How would you describe your town or city during lockdown?
- 2 Have you noticed more people walking and cycling rather than taking a car since lockdown? What about your own habits? Have they changed?
- 3 Do you think we will learn some lessons about the environment and modes of transport as a result of our experience of lockdown, or do you think everything will return to normal when/if Covid-19 has been eliminated or we find a successful vaccine?

**ANSWER KEY****Reading comprehension 1**

- 1 True. *Without car horns and aeroplanes, birdsong could occasionally be heard.*
- 2 N. Nothing is mentioned about this.
- 3 False. *As lockdown has eased in the UK, petrol and diesel sales have returned to 82 per cent of pre-crisis levels.*
- 4 True. *...who have seen young professionals in big cities over the last couple of decades show little interest in cars.*
- 5 N. There is no information about this.
- 6 N. We are only told that *bike sales have soared*, but not that they are used more than cars for commuting.

**Reading comprehension 2**

- 1 A clear blue sky with no pollution.
- 2 To try to maintain some of the reduction in pollution.
- 3 To avoid using public transport.
- 4 Based on sales of diesel and petrol, it has gone back up to 82 per cent of pre-lockdown levels.
- 5 Because metros, trains and buses are normally quicker than cars; also congestion charges, parking fees and insurance all have a cost.
- 6 To be able to visit his parents in Scotland without taking public transport.
- 7 Because of the time it would take to recharge it when on a long trip, such as London to Scotland.
- 8 A plug-in hybrid.
- 9 Yes in that it serves its purpose, but no because its petrol engine still does most of the miles.

**Vocabulary**

- |                  |              |             |                   |
|------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------------|
| 1 haze           | 5 breed      | 8 dent      | 11 a game changer |
| 2 azure          | 6 opting for | 9 resurgent | 12 kill time      |
| 3 hold on to     | 7 replicated | 10 soared   | 13 lifeline       |
| 4 far from alone |              |             |                   |

**Grammar – compound nouns and adjectives**

- 1 car horns, car dealerships, car sales, car manufacturers, car route
- 2 car industry, car plant, car factory, car maker, car driver, car passenger, car owner, car seat, car door, car boot, car bonnet, car jack, car rack, car wheel, car tyre, car roof, car hood, car window, car chassis, car body, car key, car radio, car lane, car mechanic, car maintenance, car repair, car insurance, car loan, car rental, car hire, car park, car registration, car pool, car fleet
- 3
 

a lockdown	h pre-crisis levels	o oil sector
b birdsong	i congestion charges	p charging points
c front door	j parking fees	q range anxiety
d city dweller	k suburban dreams	r motorway service station
e vehicle ownership	l bike sales	s petrol engine
f public transport	m game changer	t travel options
g diesel sales	n auto industry	

Articles sourced from the Financial Times have been referenced with the FT logo. These articles remain the Copyright of the Financial Times Limited and were originally published in 2020. All Rights Reserved. FT and 'Financial Times' are trademarks of The Financial Times Ltd. Pearson ELT is responsible for providing any translation or adaptation of the original articles.

With a worldwide network of highly respected journalists, the Financial Times provides global business news, insightful opinion and expert analysis of business, finance and politics. With over 500 journalists reporting from 50 countries worldwide, our in-depth coverage of international news is objectively reported and analysed from an independent, global perspective.

For more information: <http://membership.ft.com/pearsonoffer/>