

# TRAVELING COMPANIONS



J. BART RAYNIAK The Spokesman-Review

Joe Sheasby and his Labrador retriever, Tillie, make frequent trips across the state, and Sheasby uses the Internet to look for ways to reduce the cost. He said he'll haul "anything legal" behind his 2004 Dodge Ram diesel.

## Hitching a ride online

Drivers with space connect with those who need it, using Web sites

BY PETER BARNES

Staff writer

Only on the Internet could pregnant dairy goats connect two strangers looking to save gas money between Spokane and the West Side.

Traditional hitchhiking may be all but illegal on Washington highways, but the Web now offers a fruitful meeting place for all sorts of travelers looking to make the most of empty car seats.

"I'm pretty impressed that some people would be willing to pick up anyone they meet on the Internet and drive off with them," said Joe Sheasby, 35, of Spokane Valley.

When he plans trips around the state to pick up the cars that he repairs in his spare time, he also posts ads online in the ride-share section of Craigslist seeking passengers and cargo headed the same direction.

The goats, for example, needed someone to drive them

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Rebecca Lowry

Seattle Web designer

from Sequim to Heather Janke's ranch south of Cheney.

Both Janke and Sheasby are cautious when it comes to online contacts, and they agreed to meet in a public place before Janke would entrust her animals to a stranger.

"I'm kind of leery of people," said Janke, who checks Craigslist a couple times a day since she began finding milking equipment and business opportunities there six months ago.

In the end, the logistics of the trip didn't work out, but Sheasby and Janke agreed to do business if their

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transportation needs aligned in the future.

"Honestly, I would take pregnant goats over a yuppie or someone with their pants hanging around their knees any day," Sheasby said.

Ride sharing is one of several options for net-savvy travelers looking to cut expenses.

An e-mail list at Washington State University helps connect commuters there. Other sites coordinate carpools for large employers and help people find rides to work through Spokane County's Commute Trip Reduction program.

The Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Craigslist site has the most offerings for those traveling

longer distances, with about 60 ride postings in the last month.

"It's always interesting," said Seattle Web designer Rebecca Lowry, who's found fellow travelers online, as both a driver and a passenger, between 20 and 30 times.

She drives to Spokane and back every other weekend in a 1986 Ford Bronco II. Craigslist helped her find not only the \$300 vehicle, but also riders to help pay for gas. She said the company has ranged from charming to creepy.

"Like anything on the Internet it has its share of weirdness," said Lowry, 40. "But to be quite honest, it's just a tool. So like anything else, it's how you use it."

Like Sheasby and Janke, she advises against getting into the

ON THE WEB

## Catching a ride

Sites with carpool and ride-share listings in Spokane:

- [www.spokane.craigslist.org](http://www.spokane.craigslist.org)
- Spokane County Commute Trip Reduction: [www.mycommute.org](http://www.mycommute.org)
- Washington car and van pools online: [www.rideshareonline.com](http://www.rideshareonline.com)
- [www.carpoolworld.com](http://www.carpoolworld.com)
- [www.erideshare.com](http://www.erideshare.com)

List of other ride-share sites: [www.rideshare-directory.com](http://www.rideshare-directory.com)

car with people without talking to them first, at least on the phone.

Some drivers also ask for personal references or a copy of an ID. Several sites require registration, and a few allow people to give feedback on

travel companions.

Founded in 1995 by a San Francisco computer programmer, Craigslist has become part flea market, part bulletin board, part dating service and part drunken shouting match, all organized

into stark rows of categories on home pages for cities around the world.

Most links take the viewer to a list of free classified ads that are posted, edited and monitored for inappropriate material by the site's users.

"Some of it is like watching a train wreck. You can't believe it, but you can't take your eyes off it," Sheasby said.

A Craigslist site for Spokane and Coeur d'Alene opened in November 2004. Among its recent offerings: Free chickens, prostitutes, a tiara from someone's wedding, lost pets, asphalt repair, a guy who will dress up like Captain Jack from "Pirates of the Caribbean" for children's parties, and a forum for amateur haiku writers.

Dominic Cattadoris, 23, found

not only cruise-ship jobs on the site but also passengers for road trips.

Sharing a ride made one particularly long journey – which would have otherwise been "hell" – more interesting, he said.

One of his friends found his job, his house and his girlfriend on the site.

Some people figure out how to split gas costs ahead of time, but Cattadoris prefers to keep things casual. Riders know they need to contribute, he said, and he's happy when they toss what they can on the dash.

Cattadoris said he has a plan should he encounter someone who gives him problems.

"If they try to act up, I'll just drop them off on the side of the road."