

NOW my son is getting a bit older, I've been enjoying teaching him to ride a bike. The Netherlands may seem a lot safer for cyclists than here in the North East, but it's still been a nerve-wracking parental experience.

He mostly follows direct orders of what he's told, but being nearly seven, he's easily distracted by the sheer excitement of the cavalcade of impressions crashing through his brain on a cycling trip. Ultimately, he simply doesn't have a healthy sense of fear of what can go wrong on a bike to pay the necessary attention.

Our one near miss by a busy road later sent me into shock, but luckily he remained completely unaware of how close he came on that day to a serious injury.

His wider obliviousness to road traffic means that, as a cycling father, I'm going to need both a lot of patience as well as a very firm grip of his collar near crowded junctions.

I'm hoping he'll have picked up some bike sense when we next visit the North East for the summer holidays, because his wild enthusiasm also makes him perfect company for a bike tour. My plan is a cycling mini-break to one of the farther reaches of our picturesque region, perhaps Bellingham, Berwick or Barnard Castle.

I certainly have my own pleasant childhood memories of visiting Barnard Castle and bracing walks to the High Force waterfalls. More recently, my interest in the North East's innovative technology firms as part of my Ph.D. saw me set out (with no little trepidation) to speak with the boss of Barnard Castle's Glaxo factory. The Glaxo plant manufactured life-saving antibiotics, and had been located at Barnard Castle during WWII to reduce its vulnerability to bombing raids. When I visited, they'd just donated hundreds of thousands of pounds to a local leisure centre, and a similar sum to the Prince's Trust, and were visibly proud of their positive civic role in the town.

These donations, along with countless smaller gifts to local good causes, bought them positive headlines. But I got a sense that what mattered more to the company was, in their charitable work, a sincere belief in being a good neighbour in a tight-knit market town.

Glaxo is now GSK and its Barnard Castle facility generated rather more gloomy headlines this week. With Brexit threatening their unfettered access to European pharmaceutical markets, the company is understandably unwilling to further commit to investing in Barnard Castle, and there is a fear of job losses to come.

This is just the latest business announcement underlining that there's no special deal coming our way when our EU membership expires next year. We in the North East are going to be hit hardest by this, as our manufacturing is suddenly throttled by a tangle of trade barriers that we've forgotten how to address.

With Trump ramping up his trade war with the entire outside world and as Australia sends its trade negotiators to Brussels, Brexit sees us racing blithely towards an almighty crunch into these hard trade barriers.

The cavalcade of impressions of a brave global trading Britain recklessly touted by the Leave camp have distracted us from these dangers ahead.

High on Leaver delusions of "taking back control", "socking it to Brussels" and "£350m for the NHS", we've lost any self-awareness to slam on the brakes and save ourselves.

Remainer arguments were portrayed as Project Fear, but people forgot that a bit of healthy fear of imminent danger is a good for a prosperous life.

So fingers crossed that a grownup politician stands up sometime soon to grasp us firmly by the collar, and avert our headlong rush into a devastating crash!