

A little more than a year ago, I think I wrote a journal about driving in Japan. I had driven a friend's car home from a party one night, and it felt so liberating to be behind the wheel of a car again. After driving on a few other occasions, and taking the test for a Japanese driver's license last summer, I finally have my own car. It's great!

When I first came to Japan, I was so happy about where I live. It's close to Tsu station, close to this office and not *too* far from Tsu Nishi where I teach. I thought I had the best setup of all the ALTs I knew in Mie—and I still do! But after a while of riding my bike in the rain, in the snow, and in the sweltering heat, I started to wish I had a car. If a typhoon was coming and I had no groceries, I would just get some food at Circle K. Or if I wanted to bring my laptop to school on a rainy day, I had to wedge it into my bike basket wrapped in plastic bags. It became frustrating. So even though one of the things I like best about living here is my active lifestyle, when a friend was giving away her car for free, I couldn't pass it up.

My "new" car is actually quite old, and not the cleanest car in town, either. But it runs quite well, and even made it down to the beach in Shima and back last weekend. As soon as I started driving my car, I had the feeling that my world got so much bigger. Until now, places I could travel to are mostly limited to areas near train stations. It would have been a big hassle to take the train down to Shima, then catch a bus from Ugata station to the beach, and I probably wouldn't have gone. But filling the car with a bunch of friends and driving down certainly was easy! I might even go again this weekend if the weather is nice.

I plan to still ride my bike as often as possible, but now I know that when I have a lot of things to buy at the grocery store, or when it's raining, I can hop in the car and make my travel around town that much more comfortable. I feel like an independent adult now, whereas before I often felt like a child riding my bicycle and depending on other people for rides. I'm happy that I stuck with it and rode my bike for two years, but now I'm looking forward to this year and all the wonderful things that I can see and do with my newfound freedom.