

Don't 'ride' your bike

Follow traffic laws to ensure safety

By David Brown
Of the Emerald

Between 5 and 10 percent of all inner city commuters in Eugene ride bikes, says Charles Norgaard, one of two Eugene bicycle coordinators.

In such a heavily cycled city, bicycle safety becomes crucial.

It becomes especially important on the road, where cyclists are subject to the same traffic laws and regulations as motorists.

There were 49 collisions between bicycles and autos in the first six months of this year, according to police reports. In 1981, there were 109 reported accidents; in 1980, 147 accidents.

Many accidents occur when motorists made a right or left turn into the path of cyclists riding alongside their car, or when motorists pulled in front of cyclists after stopping at an intersection.

Sometimes drivers are not aware of cyclists traveling on "contra-flow" bike lanes that run against one-way motor traffic such as on Alder Street, Norgaard says.

To reduce the accident problem on Alder Street in the west University neighborhood, the city placed signs at side streets and alleys warning drivers of two-way bicycle traffic.

Accidents typically decrease while ridership increases in areas where the city installs bicycle traffic facilities, Norgaard says.

Deaths from auto/bicycle accidents have hovered between two

and three during the last three years, he says.

In some cases, crash victims have died of injuries which might have been minimized if the cyclist had been wearing a bicycle helmet, according to police reports.

Norgaard says the cost of a helmet can look disproportionate to that of a cheap used bike for some students, but "You have to say, 'How much is your life worth.'"

"It's definitely dangerous," says Jean Snyder, owner of a bicycle messenger service. "You have to be aware of everything around you. You have to make motorists aware that you are there."

City police issued 578 citations in 1982 to cyclists

A study conducted in 1979 suggests that traffic accident reports equal only three of every ten bicycle injuries. Most cycling injuries involve collisions with other bikes, stationary objects, or pedestrians, according to the study.

Bicyclists don't have the same learned behavior that motorists have, says Norgaard. A bicyclist who rides down the left side of the road probably learned to walk against

traffic as a pedestrian, he explains.

"Last year about 150 citations were issued to bicyclists, and that upset us because we feel that citations are our only real form of education."

The Eugene police department has been more stringent in enforcing bicycle regulations this year, according to statistics. Bicyclists received 578 citations through August, of which 170 were for disobeying traffic lights and 148 for running stop signs.

Cyclists who treat a stop sign as a yield sign may feel they have enough time to assess traffic, but Norgaard says giving bicyclists such an allowance would make police judgement very difficult.

But more importantly, he stresses, it would set a inappropriate example for children.

Children learn by adult example, but do not have an adult's ability to judge the flow of traffic, Norgaard says. He refers to an accident this August in which a 2-year-old was seriously injured while apparently riding on the handle bars of his 12-year-old nephew's bike. A van struck them as they crossed Belt Line Highway against a red light.

The idea that a bicycle is just a recreational vehicle has got to go, Norgaard says.

Snyder agrees. "Signal your intentions. Establish eye contact with motorists, and wave thank you. When bicyclists disobey the law, it really ticks the motorists off."

New bike map, journal offered

Need bicycling directions? Eugene acquired two new guides this summer for two-wheeler fans.

The new bike map details the city's growing 75 mile bike path system, and for those interested in social cycling, Cycling Alternatives Network has begun publishing a newsletter by the same name, according to CAN founder Jean Snyder.

The latest Eugene bicycle map, 18 inches by 24 inches, is printed on paper resistant to rain and rough handling.

It denotes on-road, off-road and suggested bike routes using a color code overlaid on a vividly detailed graph of city streets and parks. It shows inclines exceeding 6 degrees, bike repair shops and pedaling times from downtown.

Its reverse side diagrams two different methods of turning left at an intersection and other answers to safety questions, such as when not to pass a car.

CAN's monthly newsletter provides a "one stop" briefing on concerns such as safety, city facilities, and theft.

Theft prevention, Snyder says, is one of CAN's goals. "When you get your bike stolen, it strikes really close."

The letter also includes articles on various cycling club activities, an events calendar, and CAN meeting dates. September's issue contains an article on a bus service equipped to transport bikes to the coast.

The newsletter is free on the racks of the Survival Center and the Outdoor Program in the EMU.

The map sells for \$150 at most local community centers, bike shops, and bookstores, including the University Bookstore.

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