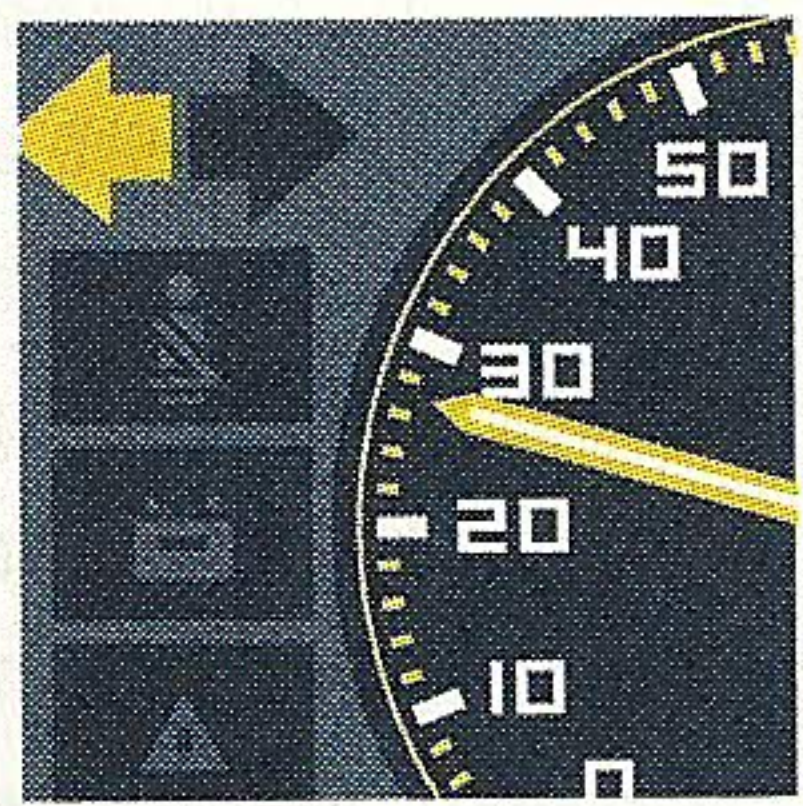


How to Drive around Cyclists

Some subtle lessons that all drivers—even cyclists—need to know to share the road better

DRIVERS AND CYCLISTS: IF THERE'S EVER BEEN AN OIL-AND-WATER COMBINATION, THIS IS IT. WE both use roads; we'd both prefer to do so without the other in the way. But the juxtaposition puts cyclists in far greater peril than drivers. For that reason, nearly every rider would like nonpedaling motorists to know how vulnerable they are. And, yes, riders also need to take responsibility for their own safety (see Cyclists' Commandment boxes), but a few simple tips for drivers will make the roads safer for everyone. ■ You may think that you, as a seasoned cyclist, already know how to coexist with bikes when you drive, but trust us—a refresher can't hurt. ②

by Lawrence Ulrich ■ illustrated by L-Dopa



SLOW PASSING SAVES LIVES // A study in the UK showed that a pedestrian is eight times more likely to be killed by a car when struck at 30 mph than at 20 mph. The obvious implication is that a cyclist hit by a car has a much greater chance of survival if that vehicle is passing at a cautious speed. Pass efficiently, at perhaps 25 to 30 mph, if the rider is going 15 mph. Want to floor it because a car is coming? That only proves it's not the right time to pass safely.

SHOW THE WAY // Lead by example. After you give a cyclist a wide berth, watch the cars directly behind you. You'll usually see the next few follow your line and leave plenty of space.



3 FEET

CYCLISTS' COMMANDMENT Don't drink and ride, even if it's a trip down the block. Twenty-four percent of riders over age 16 who were fatally injured in 2006 had a blood-alcohol level above 0.08 percent (the legal limit for DUI), according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

CYCLISTS' COMMANDMENT Ride single file when possible. Amanda Eichstaedt, a cycling instructor who chairs the League of American Bicyclists's National Legal Defense Committee, says too many riders ignore the safety hazards of riding two-up when cars are following or on busy roads.



THE LONGEST YARD // Fifteen states have settled on 3 feet as the motorist's minimum legal distance for safely passing cyclists. Gary Brustin, a California cycling attorney, is a huge proponent of the rule, saying it gives drivers the clear, workable guideline they need. "The unsafe, too-close pass easily turns into a rear-end accident, the number one cause of cycling fatalities we see here," he says. He adds that if your car is brushing past cyclists with only a foot to spare, the slightest leftward move by the cyclist can mean a collision. While Brustin lobbied unsuccessfully for a 3-foot rule in his state, a bipartisan effort helped lead governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to sign California's Complete Streets Act in 2008, requiring local governments and planners to safely accommodate all users, including cyclists. A push for a nationwide standard is now taking place in both houses of Congress. You can learn more at completestreets.org and 3feetplease.com.

CYCLISTS' COMMANDMENT Nine out of 10 cyclists killed in 2008 weren't wearing a helmet. Put one on to increase your chances of surviving a crash.



Lawrence Ulrich is a cyclist and writes for the New York Times, Automobile and Popular Science.

CYCLISTS' COMMANDMENT
Use hand signals to indicate your intentions or let drivers know they should pass. It shows you're aware of their presence and gives them more information.



CYCLISTS' COMMANDMENT Eye contact with drivers announces your presence. Garmin-Transitions pro Dave Zabriskie says it also reminds drivers that you are a living, breathing person, not a rolling obstacle.

CYCLISTS' COMMANDMENT
Abide by the law. If you want drivers to treat you with respect, that's a two-way street. "You've got to become part of the system," Eichstaedt says. "When you really put yourself out there, visible, signaling, stopping at all signs, you'll find you have virtually no conflicts."



SHUT UP ALREADY // Car crashes linked to cell-phone use have led 20 states to ban driver texting, and six currently require hands-free devices for calls. But even with a hands-free device, driving and talking on the phone makes you dangerous to everyone on the road. In one study, psychologists at the Center for Cognitive Brain Imaging at Carnegie Mellon University, in Pittsburgh, had subjects "drive" simulators while responding to spoken questions. Subjects strayed from their lanes, an obvious hazard to cyclists, and their brains (scanned by a magnetic-resonance imaging machine) showed a 37 percent drop in activity in the parietal lobe, the region tied to driving.

NO-PASSING ZONES // Most legal experts argue that drivers are allowed to cross a double-yellow line to pass cyclists. Ray Thomas, an Oregon bicycle attorney, says that every state has some version of an obstruction law that allows a driver to cross a double yellow (as long as he yields to oncoming traffic) to get around slow-moving obstacles. But these laws vary from state to state. Ohio's obstruction law, for example, specifically cites bicycles as a potential obstruction, but this isn't always the case. Still, Thomas and other experts advise drivers to err on the side of safely giving a wide berth to the pedestrian, cyclist or mail truck on the shoulder. "If someone were walking along the road, you'd automatically give that person some space," Thomas says.



SEC = 60' @ 20mph

DANGER ZONES // Thirty-eight percent of cycling fatalities in 2008 took place at intersections. Before initiating a turn, drivers need to focus attention on their rear- and side-view mirrors. Turning right? Look for cyclists along the curb who may be going straight.

COUNT TO TWO // A few decades ago it was standard practice to count "one, one thousand; two, one thousand," to figure out how closely to follow the car ahead of you. If you reach a landmark two seconds after the vehicle in front of you, you can safely brake in time to avoid a fender bender. Today, car brakes are more effective, and the two-second rule might seem like overkill. It's not. Safety researchers say it takes roughly 0.75 seconds to recognize a stopping situation and another 0.75 seconds to hit the brakes, and that leaves only 0.5 seconds of actual braking. That makes it imperative that you give cyclists at least as much time as you'd give another vehicle—and remember that even tapping a cyclist with your 4,000-pound car could kill him.