



Re: Cycling

To Promote Bicycling as an Enjoyable, Safe, Healthy, Environmentally Friendly Activity for All Ages and Abilities

Otsego Regional Cycling Advocates (ORCA) 547-4020

How To Drive Your Bike

from "Crank from Cooperstown: 50 Bike Rides in Upstate New York" by Dennis Savoie

As a child, you learned to ride your bike as a sidewalk toy. Now, to be safe, you must learn to drive your bike as a vehicle on the road. In all 50 states, you, as the driver of a bike, have the same rights and duties as the driver of a motorized vehicle. Along with the right to drive your bike on the road with a motorist is the responsibility to follow the same rules as a motorist. You ride with traffic on the right side of the road; you stop at stop signs; you hand signal all turns; you follow all the rules in the driver's manual.

But all vehicles are not created equal. Compared to a car, your bike is slow-moving, small, and narrow. Because of this you are required to share the road with motorists by riding as far to the right side of the road as is safe.

But the very edge of the road is the most hazardous. That is where the pavement cracks and crumbles. That is where an uneven shoulder changes to treacherous sand or grass. That is where debris, glass, and roadkill end up. That is where metal drainage grates are placed. That is where the raised and slippery white line at the edge of the road is painted. That is where cars are parked, ready to open their doors in your path. That is where you are least visible to an overtaking motorist trying to squeeze by you without leaving his lane. The very edge of the road is just not a safe place to be.

To ride safely with traffic, you must avoid the edge of the road and you must ride your slow-moving, small and narrow vehicle in a road position where you are visible to a motorist. Only if you are apparent and visible in the traffic lane will you be treated by a motorist as a slow-moving vehicle, like a tractor or horse buggy, that is sharing the road. Your proper visibility is accomplished by proper lane position.

On a narrow road, your safe and proper lane position is 1-2 feet to the left of the white line painted at the edge of the road. When you are cycling in this lane position you avoid the dangerous edge of the road. In addition, you make your vehicle appear wider and as a result more visible so that an overtaking motorist will see you, will define you as a vehicle, and will make a conscious decision about passing you safely – just as he would with any other slow-moving vehicle. This is a safe and defensive position; it is not meant to be offensive, though some uninformed motorists may interpret it as such. This safe lane position overlaps with a motorist's right tire track. This position requires him to slow down and decide when it is safe to veer into the opposite lane to pass you. It is important that you ride a straight and predictable course, without swerving, so the motorist can make proper decisions about you. Make lane adjustments gradually and only after glancing behind to check traffic, just as you would in your car. (Contrary to popular opinion, very few car-bike collisions involve a motorist overtaking from behind, and many of these rare from-behind collisions are caused by the cyclist swerving in front of the car.)

The above comments about lane position refer to roads without shoulders. If a wide and well-paved shoulder is present, you may choose to drive your bike on that shoulder.

On a street with parallel parking, your safe and proper lane position is three feet to the left of the parked cars. This position avoids the danger zone where car doors may open into your path.

Next week: How to Avoid Bicycling Accidents

To join ORCA or to obtain more information about Bike to Work Day, May 13, call Martha Clarvoe, OCCA President, at 607-547-4020