

Calendar

Don't Squeeze Right

Bike Commuters Roundtable

A radical proposal? Radical or not, it can be expressed in two simple, imperative sentences: "Cyclists, don't squeeze over" and "Motorists, don't squeeze past."

The National Equal Rights for Cyclists Campaign didn't invent these concepts. They're the law, says Lauren Cooper of Encinitas, the organization's cofounder and director. All they need is to be learned and obeyed.

Cooper isn't a member of the black-lycra cyclist set. "I'm not athletic," she says, adding that statistically there is little overlap between bike racers and bike commuters. "By nature I'm a couch potato. My favorite

activities are television and ice cream. I'm

LOCAL EVENTS

borderline obese. And yet I'm able to bicycle 20 miles a day. I'm healthy and strong. Cycling is the true sport of couch potatoes. When the bicycle was first brought by some British officers to India, when it was a colony, an Indian diplomat laughed and said, "Trust the British to invent a way of walking while sitting down."

Cooper rides her recumbent three-wheeled model to appointments in Del Mar, Oceanside, and Rancho Santa Fe. (A retired NASA professional who moved here from Virginia, she doesn't commute to work anymore.) Several years ago, after she discovered the Uniform Vehicle Code and its "rules of the road," she began to educate herself and others. The Bicycle Commuters Roundtable this weekend is part of her effort to publicize and promote "a historic, fundamental civil right: every person may travel on public roads by their own power, in safety, and under the equal protection of the law."

Among those in whose bike-tire tracks she follows is John Forester of Lemon Grove. "Almost all of this field is based upon Forester's work," she says. "His book is *Effective Cycling*," now in its sixth edition. "But he's a bit of a curmudgeon, so the message hasn't gotten out to the public."

Cooper wants motorists to know she isn't combative. She doesn't blame them for most of the 550,000 bike accidents a year; 500,000 of them are

falls. "No car involved."

Of the remaining 50,000 car-bike situations, blame is split 50-50. "Half are caused by cyclists not using the rules of the road, and half are caused by motorists not using the rules of the road. But motorists have training in using them. Cyclists don't. So [these accidents] are partly society's fault."

Here's what Cooper wants cyclists to do. Don't squeeze right, because doing so invites motorists to squeeze past. "If you squeeze right, your lane position communicates to motorists that you want them to squeeze past. If you're a couple of feet out, that sends

the message that you're moving with the flow of traffic."

There are other reasons not to squeeze right. "Cyclists often pass on the right; that's why many get what we call 'right hooked' when a car turns right, in front of them. Cyclists should pass on the left, just like cars."

Cyclists shouldn't squeeze right when passing parked cars, either. "There is a danger of getting 'doored' if you stay to the right in that instance. Instead, you should ride out beyond where a door could hit you."

What if a cyclist can't go as fast as traffic goes? "The speed limit isn't

something you have to maintain," Cooper says. "It's not a crime to go below the speed limit, although many drivers think it is." There is a minimum speed only on interstates. "That's why you don't see cyclists out there."

As for motorists: "The speed limit is what they are allowed to do under ideal conditions, and if there is a cyclist in the road, that's not an ideal condition, so they are required by law to slow down."

What if a cyclist wants to turn left? Should he or she squeeze left? Not doing so may cause motorists to stop completely. Then what? "All motorists and all cyclists create delays. It's not a crime in either case," Cooper says. "When motorists wait to make a left turn, when they stop to parallel park, everybody behind them comes to a halt, including cyclists. Everybody is slightly inconvenienced by everybody else. Cyclists should take the full lane whenever necessary for safety."

What do San Diego police think of Cooper's proposal? She hasn't approached them yet. "We're still doing groundwork, getting state police organizations on board." Among her campaign's endorsers so far are police in Florida, Colorado, and Virginia.

Getting motorists' support may be a more onerous task. "Or die trying" is a phrase that comes to this reporter's mind. Cooper is undeterred. She considers it a "myth" that if cyclists slow motorists, those motorists will run, accidentally or otherwise, those cyclists down. "Getting hit from behind rarely happens. Bicycling with traffic is safe for those who operate by predictable, vehicular rules. Most motorists would feel traumatized if they injured someone. Many are actually afraid of cyclists."

— Jeanne Schinto

The National Equal Rights for Cyclists Campaign's Bicycle Commuters Roundtable Sunday, May 9, 6:00 p.m. Orpheus Park 480 Orpheus Avenue Leucadia Free 760-753-2531 or www.cyclemedia.org



Laura Cooper signaling on recumbent trike

Local Events
page 79

Classical Music
page 93

Art Museums & Galleries
page 96

Theater
page 97

Pop Music
page 102

Restaurants
page 129

Movies
page 144