



## **SAFETY TOPIC: BIKING SAFETY TIPS**

Road touring has its unique advantages, but it also has its unique hazards. Here are some important safety precautions that will help make your next road cycling trip a safe one.

1. Use a mirror. There is no piece of equipment more important than this. A lot of people prefer a helmet mounted version. But whichever type you choose, install it and glance in it frequently. It is critical to know what's happening behind you as well as in front of you.
2. Don't assume traffic behind you will give you the space you need. A vehicle approaching from behind might be hemmed in by traffic approaching from in front, or by a vehicle passing from the rear ... or, the driver simply might not see you. Watch every vehicle approaching from behind, and be certain it is moving left to give you enough clearance. If not, pull off the road surface until the approaching vehicle has passed.
3. On two-lane roads, be aware of which traffic is permitted to pass. If oncoming traffic has permission to pass, your lane may be occupied by a vehicle approaching from in front of you, at very high (passing) speed. For this reason, stay on or near the shoulder and avoid drifting out to the center of your lane, except in certain specific instances (described later). Single file riding on two lane roads is recommended.
4. Listen as well as look for traffic. Especially in the vicinity of curves or hills, you'll be able to hear approaching traffic before you can see it.
5. Don't cycle fatigued. When you need a rest take one. Your level of mental alertness drops drastically when you're tired.
6. Be visible. You can never assume that a motorist will see you. But you can increase the probability that he will. Wear very bright colors (fluorescent yellow is extremely effective).
7. Be wind smart. Wind is rarely a factor in the wooded trails used by mountain bikers, but on the open road, it is a major concern. Cross winds are especially troublesome, as they can unexpectedly push you out into traffic, or push vehicles over into your path. Avoid cycling on very windy days.

8. Anticipate winds created by passing traffic, especially high profile vehicles like trucks, buses and RV's. These wind bursts can be powerful, even from vehicles one or more lanes to your left. Reduce the effect by keeping maximum distance from passing traffic, and by crouching low to your handlebar to reduce your profile. Vehicle induced wind bursts will be enhanced by any crosswind blowing from your left to your right. These same wind bursts will be reduced, or sometimes eliminated, by crosswinds blowing from your right to your left.
9. Take the lane (sometimes). On rare occasions you may find that a brief stretch of your route (such as a bridge crossing or in certain spots protected by guardrails, or stretches of road alongside steep cliffs) offer you a shoulder that is simply too narrow to permit an acceptable distance between you and passing traffic. Don't invite motorists to pass you by riding the shoulder in these situations. Stop, wait for all traffic to clear, then 'take the lane' riding in the center of the lane so traffic from behind is forced to follow you. Pedal as quickly as you safely can through these sections; then pull off the road completely to let traffic following you pass. Times like this it's important to be HIGHLY visible. A hand signal (left arm extended down and to the side) will alert the first vehicle approaching from behind not to pass. The driver may be impatient or irritated, but this is much preferred to the alternative of being passed where there isn't room to do it safely.
10. Use hand signals to indicate all turns, lane changes and stops.
11. Obey motor vehicle laws, including stop signs, traffic signals, speed limits, turn restrictions, one-way road designations, and so on.
12. Ride defensively. Little mistakes can have very large consequences. Always allow triple the time you think you'll need to cross a lane, make a turn, or pull out into traffic. A slight wobble, or a slip on gravel, or other unexpected mistake can leave you exposed and vulnerable to a very bad result.
13. Be sure to carry repair tools and supplies, as well as a basic first aid kit. Most biking magazines and touring books will provide a list of recommended items.