

## **Sharing the roads with bicycles in Bibb County**

*By Rick Maier*

Remember riding your bike as a kid – racing your pals, the cool wind in your face on a hot summer day, the freedom to visit distant friends and explore remote frontiers?

Well, some of us over-grown kids still enjoy riding our bikes. It's great exercise that's easy on the joints, and every trip can be an adventure. Clubs and cycling events in Middle Georgia help you meet great people, and you can spend a little or a lot on really cool equipment and outfits.

It takes an hour or more to get a good workout, and going back and forth on neighborhood streets just doesn't cut it. That means going out on Bibb County roads.

Narrow, curvy, hilly Bibb County roads? No wonder you see so few people riding bikes!

### **Cycling risky in Bibb**

Equipment failures and operator errors make cycling dangerous on its own. But sharing the same road with huge vehicles and poor drivers can make cycling particularly treacherous.

Since it isn't likely that we'll have bike paths around Macon anytime soon, I'd like to offer some suggestions to drivers for sharing the road with bicycles. I can tell by your looks of anger, panic and bewilderment as we pass each other on the streets that you really want this information.

Let's say you spot someone on a bicycle on the road up ahead. You have a better chance of hitting a cyclist than a walker or runner because bikes travel *with* the flow of traffic at a much slower speed (10-30 mph, depending on the terrain). The thin tires on road bikes require cyclists to stay on a paved surface.

The first thing to do when you approach a cyclist is to take your foot off the gas. Don't slam on your brakes, just get ready to slow down if necessary. Yes, the time it will now take you for your trip just increased by a few seconds - please try to deal with it calmly.

### **Decisions must be made**

Okay, brace yourself for the tough part. You have 3 seconds to answer the following questions: Is your speed OK, or are you about to crawl up the tailpipe of the car in front of you? Is the cyclist in your lane or to the right of the white line? Will the lane to your left be open when you pass the bike? Does the cyclist look like he or she knows what they're doing?

The objective is to use whatever space you still have to maneuver safely and smoothly. Even though passing on a solid centerline is technically illegal, the last thing you want to do is follow behind a bike for any period of time - it will only serve to aggravate you, annoy other drivers and pester the biker.

Once you've committed to pass the cycle, get on with it! But watch out for two bikes traveling close together. Cyclists often 'draft' off each other to increase speed and reduce the effort, but it requires that they stay close together in single file. (By the way, Georgia law allows two cycles to ride abreast.)

Now that you've passed the bike, it's time for four challenges.

#### **Four things not to do**

First, please don't make a quick right in front of the cyclist.

Second, try not to look in your rear-view mirror. I dare you. I'm not sure if it's to see if the cyclist is okay, or to be the first to see the carnage, but I haven't seen a motorist yet that could resist staring back.

The third challenge is to try not to shake your head and bless out the whole nation of bicyclists as having no business being out on the road. Cyclists pay taxes too (probably more than average).

The last challenge is to try to get the image of those spandex pants out of your mind. Those bulges in the seat of the pants are foam rubber pads built into the pants to help reduce the pain of sitting in those hard little saddles for long periods of time.

And if you're tired of bikes interfering with your cell phone conversations or interrupting your cruise control, tell your elected representatives that you want bike paths - not just to save lives or encourage more bicycling, but so that car drivers aren't inconvenienced.

In the meantime, give bike riding a try – the more of us out there, the safer it will be. Plus you get to wear those really cool outfits.

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