

Cyclists entitled to whole lane, bicycle cop says



LUCAS OLENIUK/TORONTO STAR
Const. Hugh Smith trains officers on bicycles.

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The death of bicycle courier Darcy Allan Sheppard, after an incident involving a car driven by former attorney general Michael Bryant, has fuelled that most unending of urban arguments – the rights of motorists versus those of cyclists.

Const. Hugh Smith, who helped found the Toronto police bicycle units back in 1989, has been riding the city's streets since he was 6. The *Star* spoke to the cycling veteran, who helps train officers around the country, as a neutral cycling voice in increasingly tense times for cycling in the city.

This incident has brought out the worst stereotypes of both motorists and cyclists. How would you characterize the relationship between the two?

Most motorists aren't educated enough, even in their driver's handbook. ... A cyclist has the right to an entire lane, even though they only occupy part of it. And it's up to them to dictate when they want to share.

Some cyclists don't understand that. If it's narrow, they have to push to the left and say, 'No. I'm a slow-moving vehicle. Go around me.' But they tend to ride in that small area to the right.

What about giving tickets to those cyclists who break the rules, those rolling through or running lights?

If somebody comes up ... they've almost stopped, they've checked, they've looked, and they go through, that's not the type of cyclist that we're giving failing-to-stop tickets to; we're giving them to the ones who are blatantly going through, who are coming and saying ... "I'm beating the vehicles. I know they've got to stop but I don't."

What should cyclists do if they are hit but the car speeds away?

Get part of the plate and witness information and we'll follow up. We do follow up. If there is a collision, it's the same as with motorists. You've failed to remain at an accident scene and you've got an injured human being down there that we've got to take care of.

You must get respect as a cyclist in police uniform, but what about in your own recreational cycling?

If you're in a uniform, yeah, you get respect. But sometimes you get too much respect. Let's say I want to make a left turn ... I stick that left arm out. Well, here's a police officer in uniform sticking his arm out going southbound on Yonge St., and I've got two lanes of traffic come to a screeching halt because they think I'm directing traffic. Or they don't want to hit a police officer.