

Why Is Riding With A “Cyclist Mentality” Dangerous?

Part 1

RoadBikeRider.com

<https://shrtm.nu/4KHI>

By Coach Robert Wilhite

Yes, you read the title correctly, but what in the world does it mean? As with all my posts, I share my perspective on various topics, why I believe what I do, pulling from 250,000 miles of road cycling, and then let you decide what you do with it. This post is no different. A bit more controversial, but nonetheless, the same approach.



Reality

First off, we have to start with a few realities. Some may surprise you, some may not. Some you may agree with, some you may not. Doesn't change the fact they are still realities. Just stick with me till the end and then draw your own

conclusion. In my home state of Georgia, we have a 3-Foot Law, that took affect in July 2011 — it's similar to other states that have the same type of law.

A reality here is that most road cyclists have no clue what's in the law, what they can "legally" do and what they can't. You would think that if the state passes a law like this, that cyclists would rally around it. Well, in theory, yes. But in reality, it's just not the case. Cyclists tend to cite the law only when it becomes beneficial for them and entirely depending upon the scenario. Let me explain.

Pick and Choose

We go out for a group ride, or maybe solo. The first time a vehicle passes us *way too close* — what we cyclists call "*getting buzzed*" — we are quick to yell out at the drivers to get away from us and give us that 3-foot space our state says motorists must give us, when they pass us. Sound familiar? But, what about that same group of riders coming up to a stop sign, never slowing down and just blowing through the intersection as though the stop sign wasn't even there at all?

In one breath, we're blowing through a stop sign (clearly illegal) yelling out "*clear*" to each other. But in the next breath, we're yelling at motorists for buzzing us and not (legally) passing us safely. This is just one very typical example of cyclists citing laws, only when it's to their benefit. This example happens in just about every group ride in Georgia, and I bet it's probably the same where you ride. With that said, I do know some states have passed a law allowing cyclists to (legally) roll through a stop sign; Georgia is not one of them.

The point I'm trying to drive home is road cyclists tend to pick and choose whatever laws they think will benefit them (at that time) but go '*brain dead*' on all the other laws that apply to them. You can't have it both ways. And therein lies a fundamental flaw in the mentality of typical road cyclists.

Our Mindset

I wanted to highlight the mentality I just mentioned because it plays a direct role in the title of this article. Because cycling is inherently dangerous out on the road, we cyclists tend to ride with an *“it’s all about me”* mentality. We don’t feel like anyone cares about our safety, so that means we tend to push the envelope when it comes to protecting ourselves when we ride. Hey, it’s kinda human nature. But that doesn’t mean its correct.



Now, if you re-read the stop sign scenario with the mindset I just described, it’s easy to think, or more accurately, feel like its our right to ride the way we do. No one else cares so we’re gonna take matters in our own hands. Here’s the big problem. When we blow through stop signs, and motorists witness that, we send a very strong message that we can do whatever we want, when we want, how we want, in spite of what the law says. It’s no wonder motorists have a bad taste in their mouths when they see us on the road.

Do this long enough and we create a battlefield, of sorts, when we clip in for a ride. Sometimes the truth hurts, and I’m pretty sure this may be one of those times. But hey, we contributed a lot to how motorists see us now, how they think about us, and more importantly, how they act around us. I’ll prove this point even further in Part 2 of this series — in a way most cyclists never think about or do, and how it directly impacts motorists in the exact opposite way.

Understanding A Motorist’s Mentality

In Georgia and maybe for you too, we have this great 3-foot law. But the problem is almost no motorists have any clue about it, much less drive in accordance with it. That's the fundamental problem. Our state did basically zero to properly educate motorists that they are required (by law) to pass cyclists with a minimum of 3 feet. If motorists have no clue about the law, why in the world should we expect motorists to pass us accordingly?

You may not like this, but fundamentally, it's not their fault — to a point. Now I can hear the comments boiling up. What about just basic common sense or basic respect for others? Ha!!! That may have been the case about three generations ago, but to expect that in today's world? Don't hold your breath. Yes, it's a shame and I can't even comprehend how far in the wrong direction our world has come in this respect. But that's where we are, so we can either succumb to it or try and make a positive difference. I don't know about you, but I'm gonna always focus on the latter.

Cyclists Asking To Get Buzzed

I'm going to describe reality every time we go out for a ride. At the same time, I want you to visualize this scenario as I add key pieces of information. Follow along with me because this is the crux of this entire post. You ready?

1. Motorists don't know they are required by law to pass us with a minimum of 3 feet clearance.
2. Motorists DO know it's illegal to cross the center line when it's solid.
3. Motorists DON'T know they can legally cross the center line, in order to pass us safely.
4. Motorists eventually come up behind us while we are riding and let's assume we are riding to the far right of the road.

Now, I want you to stop and visualize these four points so far. I call this the "goal post" scenario. Motorists now see the center line on the inside of the lane and us on the outside; the goal post. Their default tendency is to stay within the goal

posts. Can you see that from the motorist's perspective? Again, you may not agree or like this example, but this is reality.

As long as we ride to the outside, or far right, of the lane as possible, we actually play a huge role in creating this scenario for motorists. This is what I call riding with a cyclist's mentality. Yes, I understand we need to ride to the right side of the lane — but we have to realize that this area may not always be the best place to ride. There are so many other scenarios just like this I could describe for you, and you'd be begrudgingly nodding your head up and down because you've seen them for yourselves.

Riding With A Motorist Mentality

I'm absolutely convinced of what I just described, and let me prove my point. There is a certain group ride I've done for almost 10 years and a particular stretch of two lane road that every time we approach this road, many in the group will yell out "*Single file.*" Now, I understand from a cyclist's perspective (because I AM one) why we think we should ride on the outside of the lane. We want to give motorists the most amount of room for them to get around us. I totally get that.

Every single time I have ridden that stretch single file, we have gotten buzzed countless times. It's almost a guarantee on this road. However, every time I ride on the inside, or in a double pace line to the left of everyone else, the 'buzzing' dramatically reduces. Every single time. Why is that? It's because I am creating a scenario where even smaller cars don't have enough room to stay in the lane without crossing the center line...and pass us without buzzing us; I'm forcing them to cross the center line and enter into the opposite lane.

When motorists see and realize this, they do three things. First, they have to take into account of any oncoming traffic. Second, they tend to pass us with far more than three feet of clearance. And third, if there is any blind spot, they have a tendency of hesitating to pass. Are there motorists who just don't care and will buzz us no matter what? Unfortunately yes. But in my humble opinion, we

cyclists do have some level of control.

I've been on countless group rides across this country where I've done this exact thing and almost without fail, motorists do exactly what I just described. It's human nature and if we ride on the road and fail to factor this into how and where we ride, well, we are literally (to a degree) setting us and the motorists up for failure, or in other words, getting buzzed. Watch the video below and you'll see exactly what I'm talking about.

<https://upride.cc/incident/incident-1-on-7-28-2020/>

This is what I describe as riding with a motorist mentality. As long as we ride where vehicles will be, I am convinced to the core of who I am, that we *have* to adopt to riding with this mentality, if we want to have a better experience interacting with motorists.

This is Part 1 of an article series on this subject, citing many real-life scenarios where we can dramatically change how motorists behave around us. I hope you share the heck out of these with your cycling friends. If you end up totally disagreeing with me, at the very least, I hope it will cause you to think or re-think about what you do (or not do) and how that affects motorist's responses.

We absolutely *can* make a difference.