

TTIPS Vol 8/22 – Safety Bicycle Safety Facts*

“What do you call a bicyclist who won’t wear a helmet? An organ donor.”

INTRODUCTION

Hello fellow KABC members. After reading last week’s TTIPS on chain maintenance, I know all of you rushed out to the garage and cleaned and lubed your chains. Good job. Now that you are ready to ride, wash the grease off your hands and let’s talk about bike safety.

Wait, wait, don’t skip ahead to the next section yet. I know that this may not be the most interesting topic, but there’s lots of stuff in here that may just keep you alive or perhaps prevent injury. Please keep reading. KABC rides occur in all kinds of traffic conditions ranging from the congested roads of Hilton Head Island and Bluffton to the relatively more remote rural areas surrounding us. Do you know which is safer, and why? You might be interested to know about the safety implications of riding in those locations. Here is some “food for thought.”

MOST BIKE ACCIDENTS HAPPEN IN URBAN AREAS

As can be expected, urban areas are the epicenter of road accidents for cyclists. For example, roughly 71% of cyclist deaths occur in urban areas, with the rest occurring in rural areas

Urban arterial roads (high-capacity roads that deliver traffic from collector roads to freeways) have the highest percentage of cyclist fatalities. These roads are responsible for around 44% of cyclist deaths.

MORE CYCLISTS ARE DYING NOW THAN IN EARLIER DECADES

With innovations in in-vehicle technology and ongoing research into road safety, you would expect fewer cyclists to be dying from road accidents now than 30 years ago, but that is not the case. Cyclist accidents and fatalities are on the rise.

CYCLISTS ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE KILLED AT NIGHT

Not surprisingly, most cyclist fatalities occur at night. For instance, National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) reports that, during weekdays and weekends, the highest proportion of bicycle fatalities occur between 6 p.m. and 8:59 p.m. On weekends, 20% of fatalities occur within that timeframe.

MOST CYCLISTS KILLED IN ACCIDENTS ARE ABOVE AGE 40

You might think that children would comprise the highest statistic of cycling-related deaths. Nope. An analysis of accidents that leave the cyclist dead shows that most of the cyclists killed are above 40, and that age figure is rising.

ALCOHOL PLAYS A PART IN CYCLIST ACCIDENTS

The NHTSA'S National Center for Statistics and Analysis reports that "alcohol involvement (BAC of .01+ g/dL) – either for a motor vehicle driver involved in a fatal pedal cyclist crash and/or the fatally injured pedal cyclist – was reported in 37% of the traffic crashes that resulted in pedal cyclist fatalities."

The numbers above are testimony that cyclists riding under the influence of alcohol are putting their lives in danger. They also show that some innocent cyclists are killed on roads by motorists driving under the influence of alcohol.

MOST ACCIDENTS INCLUDE SINGLE-VEHICLE CRASHES

According to the NHTSA, most cyclists killed on U.S. roads come into contact with a single vehicle. The same organization reports that the highest number of deaths can be attributed to light trucks (representing 87.9%). However, passenger vehicles are responsible for most injuries (20,000 or 75.2%). The front of the vehicle struck most injured cyclists.

REAR-END COLLISIONS ARE THE MOST COMMON TYPE OF ACCIDENT

Rear-end collisions (i.e., in front of the vehicle to the back of the bicycle) are the most common types of collision. The League of American Bicyclists' "Every Cyclist Counts" report says that "40% of fatal crashes with a reported collision type — were *hit from behind* incidents." This fact alone is sufficient justification for using a taillight on your bike.

To ensure that motor vehicle drivers can see the cyclists on the road, it's always crucial that riders make themselves more visible. Increasing visibility may be achieved by wearing bright-colored clothes. Neon-colored clothes are a good option, especially if you are riding during the night.

To improve your visibility, consider having lights installed on your cycle. A white light in front, a flashing red light behind, and multiple reflectors all over your bicycle are some of the recommended measures to help cyclists remain visible.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT BIKE MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Choosing the right bicycle for the type of riding you will do can help prevent accidents. This involves making sure that your bicycle is the right size for you. When buying a bike, consider the bike's size and weight, the design of the tires, and your body size. These factors determine how comfortable you will be when riding your bicycle and your ability to concentrate on the road and your ride entirely.

Your decision should be influenced by what you want to use the bike for. For example, generally it's not a good idea to ride a Triathlon bike or Time Trials bike in a group setting or paceline ride. These bikes are not as maneuverable as a road bike and usually the brake levers are only on the top bar, not the aero bar.

Check to make sure that your bicycle has all the right safety gear. These include things like tires whose treads are not worn down, tightly screwed wheels, working brakes, a well-oiled chain, a strong handlebar, a comfortable well-fit saddle, and lights and reflectors on both ends and at either side of your bicycle.

ACCIDENTS CAN BE AVOIDED BY BEING PREPARED

Being prepared does not only mean riding a bicycle that suits your body size and ensuring that your bike works perfectly before hitting the road; it means investing time in learning the road rules. It may also involve taking time to learn about road safety for cyclists and the main reasons why cyclists get injured or killed.

KNOW THE HAZARDS

Being armed with facts and figures about accident rates for cyclists can motivate you to be more careful when riding. For example, one of the common hazards for cyclists involves motorists opening doors in front of cyclists. Knowing this will ensure that you will always be alert when you approach a car with someone inside.

Hazards include:

- Motorists driving out of concealed driveways
- Drivers overtaking from the wrong side
- Cyclists cycling against traffic
- Motorists indicating to the right, and turning left, and vice versa
- Motorists failing to stop at intersections controlled by traffic lights or stop signs

- Cyclists passing a car on the right side; motorists don't expect cyclists there
- Motorists turning right-on-red when a cyclist is properly crossing from the right on a path or sidewalk

HELMETS ARE EFFECTIVE

Bicycle helmets can save lives. The non-profit website HELMETS.ORG cites data from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), which reveals that nearly 3 out of 4 crashes (74%) involve head injuries. The same data from the IIHS shows that almost all (97%) bicycle fatalities involved cyclists not wearing a helmet.

The World Health Organization (WHO) advises cyclists to wear helmets because such head coverings "create an additional layer for the head and, thus, protect the wearer from some of the more severe forms of traumatic brain injury."

Even though you may not need a license to ride a bicycle, it's still essential to follow the traffic laws. For instance, it is dangerous to ride against traffic flow; a driver may shift to the side of the road, preparing to stop, not expecting that someone is coming.

Use appropriate hand signals when switching lanes or making a turn. Make no assumptions. Just because you are in a driver's lane does not mean they can see you or are paying attention to the road. Stay alert and avoid making any sudden turns.

Don't forget to always ride in a straight line. This helps others on the road predict your action

DON'T USE HEADPHONES OR EARBUDS

Headphones can drown out external sounds or the voices of fellow group riders. When riding, you need to hear traffic noises for your safety. This may not always be possible when listening to music through headphones because it can lead to distracted riding.

Apart from the fact that listening to loud music on headphones can cause hearing loss, it may be against the law to ride a bicycle with headphones on.

That's a wrap for this week. I hope that you noted the part above concerning helmets. Next week I'll provide a bit more about your helmets that will help you to know if your helmet fits, how to test to make sure it is still viable, how to maintain it, and when and why you might need to think about replacing it. Until then,

Make Every Ride Epic,

Darryl

*Some content from this article is attributed to CyclingHow.com