

Area bicyclists risking lives when disobeying rules of road

Riding a bicycle against traffic is one of the most common mistakes bicyclists in the Farmington area make, say officers from both Farmington and Farmington Hills police departments.

Both departments have been issuing citations for violations, and say they have been lucky so far that no accidents have caused fatalities.

"Most people think it's proper to ride against traffic rather than with it," said Lt. Arlo Newell of the Farmington Hills traffic safety department.

Actually, the rules for bicycles are almost identical to those for cars and motorcycles, he said.

BICYCLISTS MUST obey traffic signs and signals. If there is a stop sign or a red light at an intersection, a bicyclist must stop, said Officer Norman Madison, staff aide to Capt. Daniel Byrnes of the Farmington public safety department.

"They have the same obligation to stop at that light as a motorist would," he said.

Most of the problems in Farmington are caused by adults rather than children.

"You get an older person—the 18-year-old and up—and they start disobeying just about every law there is. They're not yielding to right of way to pedestrians—you name it," Madison said.

Enforcement is nearly impossible, although police will occasionally issue citations or let offenders off with explanations and warnings.

"It's extremely difficult for an officer to stop a bicycle," Madison said. "Police who spot a violation are usually in cars and cannot maneuver through traffic quickly enough."

Lt. Newell said that Farmington Hills officers are routinely stopping offenders.

"We're not issuing a lot of citations, but we are issuing a few. We make a lot of traffic stops and talk to them. We tell them to pass it on to their parents," Parents, Newell said, may be the source of much bicycling misinformation.

NEWELL SAID there have been a lot of car-bicycle accidents in Farmington Hills.

"But we've been lucky so far. I think our traffic stops have played a large part in this."

"We get a number of complaints from motorists who don't feel that they (bicyclists) should be on the road. But they do have the right."

Several court cases against motorists who have forced bicyclists from the road are now pending in 47th District Court, he said.

Both officers emphasized proper usage and equipment to avoid accidents and injuries.

A recent study by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission claims that nearly 419,000 people suffered bicycle-related injuries serious enough to require hospital emergency room treatment in 1973.

The commission discovered five major accident patterns associated with bicycles. They include lack of control, mechanical and structural problems, entanglement, foot slippage from pedal and collision.

Loss of control may occur because of difficulty in braking. The bike may be too large for the rider, who may have trouble reaching the pedals.

RIDING DOUBLE on banana seats, or on rear fenders, handlebars or the horizontal top tube on a man's bike can also result in loss of control. Doing stunts or striking a rut, bump or obstacle will also decrease bike control.

Brake failure was high on the list of accident-causing factors. So is wobbling or disengagement of the wheel or steering mechanism, difficulty in gear shifting mechanism or chain slippage. Also, loose pedals may fall off and spokes may break.

A rider's or passenger's hands, feet, or clothing may get caught in the bicycle, creating other hazards. Feet slipping from pedals could lead, as it did in one case, to a fractured leg when a foot was hit by the pedal as it rotated.

Collision with another bicycle or a car is also increasing in incidence.

To decrease bicycle injuries, the commission is developing a mandatory safety standard for bicycles which will require higher mechanical and structural standards. It will have the power to ban new bicycles that don't meet these standards.

According to the revised standard, bicycles must have reflectors on the front, back, sides and pedals to make them visible at night.

BRAKES MUST BE installed on all sidewalk bicycles with a seat height of 22 inches or more.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission offers the following safety tips when shopping for a new bike or taking care of an old one:

If you're buying a bicycle for a child, choose one to fit his size—not

one which he will "grow into" later. Before purchase, determine the rider's ability and the type of riding he intends to do.

For extra protection and visibility at night, tape reflective trim to the fenders, handlebars, chain guard and wheel sidewalls.

Attach a headlight and a taillight and check hand and foot brakes for fast, easy stops without instability or jamming. Do not buy bikes with slippery plastic pedals. Instead, look for rubber-treaded pedals or metal pedals with serrated rubber edges or with firmly attached toeclips.

Don't buy a bicycle with sharp points and edges, especially along fenders or with protruding bolts which might scrape or tear clothing.

Avoid bicycles with gear controls mounted on the top tube of a man's bicycle.

To insure safety, use a bicycle cor-

rectly. Observe all traffic laws and signals and don't ride double or attempt stunts. Ride near the curb in the same direction as traffic.

FIND ALTERNATIVE routes rather than riding through busy sections and heavy or high-speed traffic. Walk your bike around left turn corners and across busy intersections instead of riding it.

Avoid riding in wet weather. Handbrakes, when wet, may require a long distance to stop. Try reflective tape on clothing such as vests and jackets. Front-back flash lights can also be strapped on the legs and arms.


Loose clothing should not be worn as it can catch in the pedals or wheels. Leg clips or bands will keep pants legs from tangling in the chain.

Do not cross sewer grates because the wheel may slip through, meaning damage to the bike and injuries for the rider.

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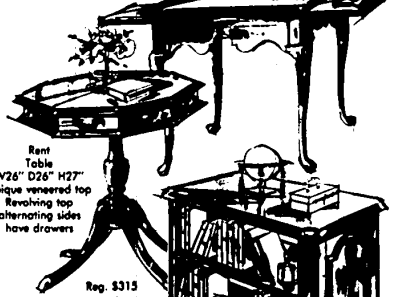
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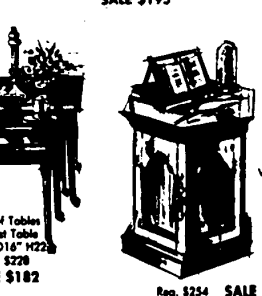
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