

## **Cycling, Motorists, The Highway Code and Rules of Etiquette on the Road – Some facts**

Cycling is now a major national pastime and with increasing popularity of our local Outlaw Triathlon more and more individual cyclists and cycling clubs are using this route throughout the year. Therefore, motorists and cyclists have a shared responsibility for their on road behaviour.

Unfortunately, there are quite a few misconceptions and also misinformation surrounding the responsibilities of both cyclists and motorists which often leads to mutual antipathy. This is quite ironic as 50% of motorists also own a bike.

This summary document highlights the key causes of friction between motorists and cyclists and has been compiled from various reliable sources to clarify the facts, and hopefully to provide a wider understanding of our responsibilities as both cyclists and vehicle users.

### **1. Overtaking cyclists**

Highway Code (HC) Rule 162 states that cars should\* only try and overtake if there is sufficient room in front of the cyclist. This means that if there is stationary or slow moving traffic ahead there would be little value in overtaking the cyclist only to have to put the brakes on right in front of them.

### **2. Give vulnerable road users a wide berth**

HC Rules 211-215 states motorists should\* give cyclists, motorcyclists, and horse riders at least as much room as they would when overtaking a car. This means at least 1.5 metres. Cars overtaking cyclists should\* be on the other side of the road, just as if they were overtaking a car. Motorists should\* also be alert to cyclists having to pull out suddenly to avoid uneven road surfaces and obstacles such as potholes, drain covers or oily, wet or icy patches in the same way as being alert to a door of a parked car suddenly being flung open.

If this simple rule was understood by all motorists there would be far less cars passing extremely close to cyclists and less road rage between the two groups.

### **3. Cyclists riding 2 abreast**

Certain motorists get annoyed as they think it's illegal, dangerous and harder to overtake.

Rule 66 of the Highway Code states you should\* never cycle **more than two abreast**, and **ride in single file** on narrow or busy roads or when riding round bends. This means cyclists are perfectly legal to cycle side by side on most roads in the UK. It's quicker and safer to overtake a group riding two abreast than it is to pass a long line of single file riders.

Cycling is a social activity and cyclists riding 2 abreast will often chat as would a driver and passenger in a motor vehicle.

### **4. Correct road positioning for cyclists**

Cyclists are advised to ride well clear of the kerb - 1 metre away or in the centre of the left lane - so that drivers have to manoeuvre to overtake. This is known as the 'secondary position'.

Cyclists position themselves in the centre of the lane – the 'primary position' - to enhance their visibility, especially to drivers ahead approaching a junction from the side road who, quite naturally, will be looking to their right in the middle of the lane for other motor vehicles. It also deters an impatient following driver from overtaking inappropriately and rushing up to the junction and turning sharply in front of the cyclist; sometimes referred to as being 'left hooked'. Cyclists should move back into the 'secondary position' when it is safe to do so.

So when a cyclist moves out, as they are trained to do, this to protect themselves and not to deliberately hold up following motorists.

Assuming the correct road position is key to staying safe on a bike.

## **5. The law applying to cyclists**

Cyclists **must not\*\***:

- Ride under the influence of drink or drugs
- Ride in a dangerous, careless or inconsiderate manner
- Carry a passenger unless the bike has been adapted to carry one, for example a bike with a child's seat
- Hold on to a moving vehicle or trailer
- Cycle on a pavement, unless it's a shared pavement or one with a cycle path on it
- Ride through red traffic lights

Cyclists **must\*\***:

- Have front and rear lights lit at night - flashing lights are now permitted (though in built up areas steady lights are recommended). In addition, bikes must\*\* have reflectors (number and position depends on age of bike).
- When using a cycle track which segregates between cyclists and pedestrians, cyclists must\*\* keep to the side intended for cyclists – HC Rule 62. (However, the use of cycle routes and marked cycle lanes along the side of carriageways may make a cyclist's journey safer but their use is not compulsory - HC Rule 61 and 63)

The most common offences are jumping red lights, riding on the pavements and not having lights lit after dark.

## **Overview**

Whatever the rules are, there's a lot to be said for using common sense and both cyclists and motorists need to act in ways that are respectful of the Highway Code and other road users.

If these simple rules are taken on board and respected by all road users there will be far more empathy rather than antipathy between cyclist and motorists and more importantly, less serious injuries and fatalities.

*(\*\*The words MUST or MUST NOT in the Highway Code are references to specific requirements of the law whereby the cyclist or motorist can be prosecuted or fined in breach of section 72 of the Highways Act 1835*

*\*The HC Rules using the words SHOULD or SHOULD NOT are not statements of law per se. However, these rules can still be used in the criminal courts as guidance on whether a more general traffic offence has been committed (e.g. 'dangerous driving', 'careless or inconsiderate driving' or 'obstructing the highway'). They can also be used to determine 'negligence' (and hence liability to pay compensation) in the civil courts.)*

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