

Cyclists have same rights as cars

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Parkland students may want to consider biking, as it affords them an opportunity to exercise and is an ecofriendly way of getting around. There are dangers associated with cycling though, and there are laws that must be followed to ensure your safety while cycling.

“Number one, act like a car,” says Officer Kent Jones who works for the University of Illinois police department and teaches at the International Police Mountain Bike Association.

“If you would do it in a car, if you would stop at a stop light, stop at a stop sign [or] yield sign, then do it on a bike,” Jones said. “Same with don’t drive down a one-way street the wrong way.”

In some areas cyclists have the choice between riding on the sidewalk or on the road. Riding on the sidewalk may not be the safest route that a cyclist can take and is not allowed in some areas, however.

“Adults think that they should be riding on the sidewalk, that it’s safer there,” said Lily Wilcock, active transportation coordinator at the University of Illinois. “You’re not very visible on a sidewalk, there’s people coming out of drive ways, there’s people walking dogs and a lot of sidewalks are maybe four feet, so there’s not a lot of room for people to be walking and cycling at the same time.”

Riding on the street is safer, because it gives you greatest visibility to cars. Cars expect cyclists to behave a certain way when they are in the road and the more visible the cyclist is the easier it is for the cars to predict what they are going to do.

Cyclists should also know that they have a right to the road by law, especially when there are obstructions in the bike lane.

“You have the right as a cyclist if there is a danger on the side of the road you can take the [entire] lane,” Jones said. “You have as much right...as that car. Now, the law says as soon as practical you need to get over.”

This may worry some cyclists as they may feel like they then must ride in the gutter, however this is not the case.

“You don’t have to ride in the gutter,” Jones said. “You’re not perfectly stable on a bike, you move back and forth to keep your balance and traffic is supposed to give you a three-foot wobble lane, so they need to stay three feet away from you when you’re riding your bike and that three foot [lane] starts from whatever obstruction, whether that’s a parked car, gravel, glass, gutters, rough roads or anything. It doesn’t start from the edge of the road.”

Motorists who may be worried about cyclists on the road should treat cyclists like another motor vehicle.

“Don’t jump the gun, don’t get worried about seeing the cyclist and trying to speed to up to pass a cyclist while there is oncoming traffic, just wait, like you would for a tractor or a school bus,” Wilcock said. “Don’t pass unless it’s safe to pass.”

Another place that motorists may not be too sure of is around intersections.

“Don’t pass within a hundred feet of an intersection,” Wilcock said. “You probably wouldn’t do that if there was another car there, but because cyclists take up a lot less space than a car, a lot of motorists think, ‘Oh I can just pass and take a right turn there.’”

Doing so is not only unsafe, but could even result in killing a cyclist.

“A lot of people this country die from what’s called a right hook, it’s when you cut someone off and zoom up ahead of them and then you make a right turn at an intersection,” Wilcock said.

While on the road cyclists are required to be visible at night.

“You can get an L.E.D. light for 10 bucks and that’s enough for safety and for the law, because you have to have a front and a back light,” Jones said. “You have to be seen by 500 feet, which even a tiny L.E.D. light can be seen, it doesn’t have to project the road you just have to be able to be seen.”

Bike safety isn’t just limited to proper use of the road; it also requires cyclists to ride well-maintained bicycles. Same as motorists maintain their cars, cyclists want to maintain their bicycle.

“The thing that we usually teach in introductory bike courses is an A.B.C. quick check,” said Mike Nauheimer the store manager at Neutral Cycle, a local bike shop.

A is for air, B is for brakes, and C is for check over. Nauheimer suggests cyclists google this for better explanations, and a quick google search of ‘A.B.C. Quick Check’ reveals a plethora of information for cyclists to learn.

Nauheimer suggests that cyclists pump their tires up once a week with an air pressure gauge, make sure their breaks are in working condition and check that things like the tires and quick releases on their bike are attached.

“Make sure your breaks have good action,” Nauheimer said. “That you’re not pulling the lever all the way back to the handle bar, because remember when you really need to stop you’re squeezing that thing for dear life.”

In an introductory bike course here in town, it was shown these checks can be done in about 15 seconds.

Cyclists may be concerned with getting their bicycles stolen and, while it is impossible to stop someone who truly wants to steal your bike, it is very easy to deter or discourage people from stealing bikes.

“Most bike theft in this community occurs when people snip or cut a cable lock, or people did not lock up their bike properly,” Wilcock said.

Wilcock says campus police have been watching the cameras and noticed people stealing bicycles that weren’t locked very well. In all the video footage that they’ve seen, they’ve never seen a U-Lock cut.

Purchasing a U-Lock and learning how to properly lock your bike are ways to deter thefts. If your bike is stolen there are ways to improve your chances of getting your bike back as well.

“The recovery rate is actually pretty good, which is why you should register your bicycle, Wilcock says. “It’s free.”

Any community member wishing to register their bike can take it to the Campus Bike Center. The center is located on 608 E. Pennsylvania Ave. in Champaign and is a collaboration between Urbana-Champaign’s The Bike Project and the university. This is also a place where community members who may be interested in purchasing their first bike can inquire more.