



LETTERS

BY POPULAR DEMAND AND PERMISSION.....

A Reprint of the letter to the editor Roger Durham Wrote to VeloNews in 1982—thirteen and a half years ago—responding to another letter in a previous issue, on the topic of riding in traffic. This letter was mentioned in RR-2's Roger Durham interview, and many of you have requested a copy. It is here for your information only, and does not necessarily reflect anything. The topic of riding ethics and personal preservation are way too hot for the mild-mannered Rivendell Reader; however, we'll be happy to print thought-out responses in the next letters column. With sincere apologies to John Forester and certified Effective Cyclists everywhere, here she goes...

To Dennis Koelmel:

I read your letter to the editor (VeloNews, Jan. 14) about how bicycle riders are often heedless of the proper rules for bicycling.

I used to ride the way you recommend, but find myself departing from it more with each passing year, based on a line of thinking much different from yours.

I began changing my way of thinking one night when I pulled in back of a bikie who was properly waiting to make a left turn in an absolutely mad intersection...with cars going in all directions, signals getting ready to change, and everybody mad to get home from work. Somehow, he got through: nobody charged out from the sides when the light changed.

I realized how foolish the man was and how foolish he looked. A kid would have taken one glance at the intersection and cut to the left, through a gas station across the line of

stopped cars, or else he'd have gone down the sidewalk on the left side. The path of least exposure. I suppose "exposure time" is the key phrase for the way I ride mostly, now.

Talking about respect from motorists is an illusion. Motorists all break laws. They speed. They roll signals. The drive half drunk or all drunk. They argue with their spouses and drive in rages. They drive full of drugs. They drive with reckless abandon. It's a jungle out there, and sooner or later one of the beasts is going to mow a person down, right or wrong, so the best thing cyclists do is minimize their exposure...just like the cyclist did you objected to. Let's look at that:

He took advantage of the stopped cars (a stopped car is no threat unless you run into it), passed them, went through them, and was gone. Safe but illegal.

You waited while they waited and had to share the road with them while they were moving and therefore dangerous. Your exposure time was much greater while traversing that particular bit of roadway. While much more legal, getting through the intersection was more dangerous for you than it was for him.

If you want to see the safest and most efficient way to ride a bicycle or motorcycle in heavy traffic, you ought to spend some time in Washington, D.C. watching the messengers. Professionals...earning a living each day because they get the job done and don't get hurt.

They ride like children. They cross traffic, ride on the wrong side of the street, join pedestrians, go against red lights, cut through corners of parks, go

between parked cars. They are unhampered by police, because the police probably realize the regulations really can't apply to bicycles or motorcycles.

If you ride through a red light, usually by the time the cars catch up with you, they'll be strung out with some space between them, and they'll pass you in a more orderly manner than they will if you all leave the light together.. You'll have ridden a quarter of a block or so with almost no traffic.

If you ride through a barricaded area, dodging the workers, if it's done at a slow speed, it's safer than riding with automobiles around the obstruction.

Tail-gate a truck down a crowded street, if you can, because nobody in his right mind is going to make a left turn in front of such a big thing; because if you're close enough, nobody can make a left turn in front of you without hitting the side of the truck; because the truck driver almost never will make a panic stop.

You'll find you can do almost anything on a bicycle, even in front of a policeman, without fear of receiving a citation. Live by the rules of the jungle.

Putting it briefly, if it's safe, do anything on a bicycle which will reduce the time it takes to get to where you're going, because that reduces your exposure.

You see, there're other ways to do it...

ROGER DURHAM
Durham Bicycles

AS FOR OUR WRITE-INS...

Editor,

My first bicycle (still my favorite) was a 1987 Bridgestone MB-3. It was three inches too high but I didn't care.