

# Room for Two

Size matters when it comes to sharing the road, says cyclist and motorist **Peter King**

**IMAGINE DRIVING HOME.** Now imagine you are driving home along an airport runway with jet planes landing and taking off in the lane next to you all the time. That's what it feels like to be a cyclist on many of our busy roads.

I know this because, like many other motorists, I am also a cyclist.

There are no shortage of cyclists in New Zealand. According to Bike New Zealand, a quarter of all New Zealanders cycle regularly and 75,000 compete in sports cycling events each year. That would explain why we import 300,000 bicycles each year – considerably more than the number of cars. Nor are bikes cheap. New children's bicycles range from \$100 to \$500, while you'd be hard pressed to find a new adult's bicycle for less than \$500.

What New Zealanders generally are not doing so much with their bicycles is riding to work. Census recorded 50,000 commuter cyclists in 1996, but only 38,000 in 2006. Still, that's as many as commuted by motorcycle and train put together, so while there has been a reduction in cycle commuting, it is still a significant mode. AA Surveys examining why recreational cyclist Members don't ride to work have found there are generally simple reasons, such as the need to carry passengers or tools during the day, very long distances or a lack of changing facilities at work.

But the big question on most people's minds is, is it safe?

## "MAKING CYCLING SAFER ISN'T SOMETHING THAT LAWS CAN REALLY ACHIEVE."

You might think so. Ministry of Transport crash statistics show that the number of people seriously injured while riding a bicycle is only 5% of the total number of crashes. But, adjusted for serious injuries per kilometre travelled and bicycles are about where you think they are: riskier than any



other mode except motorcycling.

One proposed solution has been to create a legal requirement for motorists to give cyclists a 1.5 metre berth when passing. But the proposal is beset with practical difficulties. How can Police measure 1.5 metres accurately? What happens when cyclists thread through waiting traffic and are then in turn overtaken? What happens when cyclists ignore the general requirement to keep left and start riding two or three abreast? The requirement to drive carefully, with Police free to enforce this law as they see fit, is the only workable legal solution.

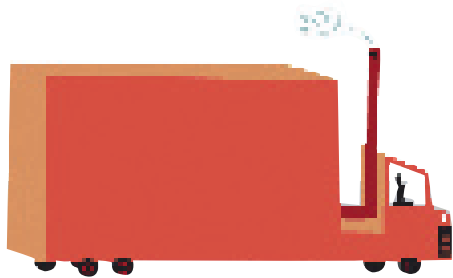
The fact is, making cycling safer isn't something that laws can really achieve. In a

toss-up between obeying the law or surviving to see my family, I have to confess that for me the law comes a distant second. And, so long as I am not creating a hazard, I have found Police ignore me grinding slowly uphill on an empty right-hand footpath, rather than in the left lane creating a scary, but completely legal surprise for drivers coming around the bend. I would rather avoid injury risk and be in the wrong, than be injured and be in the right.

In theory, of course, cyclists have the same rights as any other vehicle on the road. For many New Zealand drivers, for whom the road code has been replaced by a code of bullying based on vehicle size, such a notion seems to be ridiculous. Cyclists are puny, they

ILLUSTRATION: SCOTT KENNEDY

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## “THE ANSWER IS IN EVERYONE TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ROAD SAFETY.”

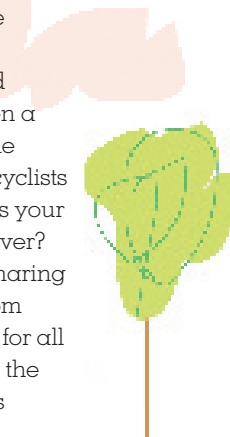
reason, so they should clear the way. Cyclists may be puny, but they resent being bullied and, as a result, they start to assert themselves. The result is road rage on all sides and somebody, normally a cyclist, gets hurt.

The answer is not in rights. The answer is in everyone taking responsibility for road safety.

For cyclists, the first way to take responsibility is to avoid risk. Wearing a helmet and being highly visible is just a start. Jumping red lights isn't about safety, it's about beating traffic and it's dangerous, so don't do it. If you can, avoid busy streets and take quiet ones. Keep on the left side of the highway shoulder. Quite often there are connecting routes that are off-street altogether – why not use them? When riding in a bunch, keep left and choose routes that can accommodate you without holding up traffic. Remember, no matter how fast you think you are going, you are much slower than motorised vehicles. Be considerate.

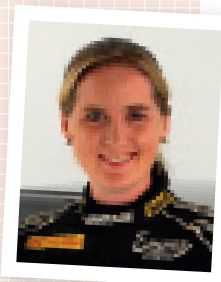
For drivers, it's a case of putting yourself in the cyclist's shoes. How would you feel if that was you riding? Give cyclists reasonable time and space to pull over. Remember: cyclists aren't an annoying road hazard, they are someone's mum or dad, son or daughter. When crossing busy traffic, take a second look for cyclists. Many crashes occur when a motorist is so intent on finding a gap in the traffic, they miss seeing the cyclist. Give cyclists at least 1.5 metres and ask yourself this: is your timetable actually worth killing anyone over?

New Zealand drivers are not good at sharing the road with one another, quite apart from other types of vehicles. There are lessons for all parties when motorists and cyclists share the road, so long as we get over this pointless obsession with being in the right. 🚗



## Tips from the Top

### Motorist and New Zealand rally driver **Emma Gilmour** on sharing the roads with cyclists



**ANTICIPATION:** When preparing to pass a cyclist, look at the piece of road that they are immediately dealing with. If they have a pothole or a parked car to deal with, they may change their path into your space of road.

Motorists should try to anticipate these changes in direction of travel.

**SPACE:** Give cyclists as much space as possible. If the road allows and it is safe to do so, move across the centre line as you would do to overtake any slower vehicle. If it isn't possible to go past whilst giving the cyclist plenty of room, then exercise patience.

**PATIENCE:** If the road is narrow or twisty and there isn't enough visibility to pass safely, wait until there is.

### Cyclist and CEO of Bike New Zealand **Kieran Turner** on sharing the road with motorists



**CONSISTENCE:** Ride in a predictable way, avoiding sudden movements such as swerving around obstacles, moving in and out of traffic flow, or changing direction that may take motorists by surprise.

**AWARENESS:** Scan for hazards, be aware of your surroundings and what other road users are doing around you – including pedestrians and people getting out of parked cars. Also, look out for hazards on the road surface that may cause you to lose control – loose gravel, glass, painted markings (especially when wet), storm water grates and road edgings.

**VISIBILITY:** Wear bright coloured clothing. At night, in poor light or inclement weather, use reflective gear and lights in the front, side and rear so that you are visible from all directions. Flashing lights are essential. Ensure the batteries are strong and your lights are bright!

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