

I've been asked to write a column about bicycle safety. My response was that cyclists would rather hear about my recent tooth extraction than hear about how to stay safe on a bicycle. That might be a bit of an exaggeration.

The truth of the matter is that after 13+ years of leading the A ride out of Potter Park, I've seen most all situations that can turn a pleasant ride into a devastating disaster, some avoidable and some not. It would be a sure bet that most of you know about the cycling behaviors that will keep you safe but because you have been biking for so long and hopefully without a safety issue, you may not think about them on a daily basis.

Much of the safety of the group ride is in the hands of the ride leader. They set expectations and guidelines for the ride and then have the responsibility for enforcing the rules during the ride-not always an easy task. Riders can help the ride leader by being "ride leader assistants." Pretty soon, every rider knows and does what is expected of them through peer pressure.

Why do we worry so much about stopping at stop signs and red lights, or staying in the bike lane? It is probably no surprises to you that we are ambassadors for SMBC as well as for all cyclists. When drivers see us treat stop signs as a yield signs, they loose respect for us as road sharers. If the lead riders does not stop at a stop sign and sees a car while half way into the street, the riders behind who have followed without looking could be put in danger or end up plowing into the rider in front of them when everyone slams on their brakes. Lead riders should make sure they can get their entire group through a stop sign before starting through themselves.

As many years as my group has been riding the same two courses, we all signal our turns - especially important when guests or snowbirds join the ride.

We recently had a major accident that sent a couple of riders to the hospital with concussions and broken ribs. The culprit was a rock the size of a baseball that was the same color as the bike lane pavement. The lead riders did not see it and a rider in the middle of the pace line hit it and went down, taking two other riders with him. It is easy for the lead rider to become momentarily distracted or even loose focus, missing a road hazard and allowing for an accident. When anybody in the pace line points out a road hazard, all should point, whether you see it or not. It can be difficult to see a "point" if you are at the back of the line and only the first two riders point to the hazards.

Here are a few other tips that could help make your group rides safe:

- Check your tires the evening before each ride. When the wear holes disappear, change the tire.
- Check your cleats for excessive wear. Change them before they unclip unexpectedly.
- Ride in the middle of the bike lane to avoid cars who like to ride the close to the bike lane.
- Don't lap the wheel in front of you. You can't be certain when the rider in front of you will pull to the left or right.
- Avoid abusive, foul language when a motor vehicle puts the group in danger. It wins us nothing.

- If you are “on the pull,”make your accelerations slow and steady to avoid large gaps in the pace line. Catch-up and subsequent sudden braking causes confusion and problems.

We are not just group riders, we are SMBC family. Let’s help our rider leaders conduct safe, enjoyable rides with the greatest chance of a safe return.

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