

Jerks; A Matter of Perspective

RAGBRAI is coming to town in less than two weeks, so it's time for many of you to finally come to terms with your conflicted feelings about bicyclists. Me, too.

Unless you're one of the estimated 35 million Americans (age seven and older) who rode a bicycle at least a half-dozen times last year, there's an excellent chance that many cyclists think you're clueless when driving a car. And they may be right.

I don't even own a bicycle, but I count myself among the motorists who "get it" when it comes to giving bicyclists equal rights on our streets and highways. Any regular cyclist can relate stories of close calls with drivers who for one reason or another feel like they don't need to yield.

I'm a motorcyclist, which is much the same as bicycling with regard to vulnerability to cars and trucks. Every time I climb on my motorcycle, I say three things to myself; "I am invisible to drivers", "Drivers will do the most ridiculously stupid things at the worst possible moment", and "I am about to die." These mantras have served me well so far.

But something happened to me recently that I'm still brooding about. Many city streets allow parking on one side, which often does not leave enough space for two cars to pass each other safely (if at all). The motorist traveling the same direction as the parked cars has to pull off to the side to allow the other to go by.

College Street near City High School is wider than most, and there's just enough room for two cars to pass each other alongside a parked vehicle if necessary. Last week I was in my car driving along it (in the same direction as the numerous parked cars) on a quiet afternoon. I was traveling down the middle of the street since there was no oncoming traffic, but a block or so ahead I could see a lone bicyclist coming toward me. He looked to be about 30 and was wearing the common "I'm serious about cycling" spandex outfit and helmet.

He was riding down the middle of his lane, but I was unconcerned because there was plenty of room for us to pass each other safely even given the presence of the parked cars. That's *assuming* the cyclist was willing to move to the right half of his lane; instead, he moved to the left half.

At first I thought he was just being a little lazy with his navigation, but then I realized he was staring me down at the same time. I slowed down, and as we met at a parked car, he forced me to a stop and shouted, "Stay in your lane!" as he pointedly veered to avoid me and went by.

My first thought (as I sat stopped in the middle of the street) was, "*Really?*" My second thought was, "OK, he was within his rights to use any or all of his lane if he wants to, but *really?*" My third thought was, "This is so unfair! I'm a driver who *gets* it!"

I always try to look at things from the other guy's point of view, so let's magically convert Dave the Driver into Dave the Cyclist. I'm riding my bicycle down College Street when up ahead I see what appears to be an older guy in a late-model German luxury car driving right down the middle of the road towards me, taking up part of my lane.

"Who does he think he is, the King of Iowa City?" I say to myself. Normally I would move over to give him enough room to get by, but I'm tired of always being the one to give way to clueless idiot drivers. No, not today! I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!

I steer to the left side of my lane to signal my intention for him to avoid a potentially risky pass alongside parked cars, but this guy seems oblivious – he's not pulling over to let me by. He finally stops just short of hitting me, and I yell, "Stay in your lane!" as I swerve to avoid him. His mouth is agape in confusion – he has no idea what he's doing wrong. Jerk.

Having completely overthought this event, I guess the takeaway is that Dave the Driver probably could be cutting some additional slack to fellow travelers who are at a serious disadvantage with regard to the mass of their conveyances. With the possible exception of the occasional self-righteous cyclist who feels it's his mission

to go out of his way to administer irritating and unnecessary lessons on cycling etiquette to every motorist he encounters. Jerk.

Writers Group member Dave Parsons has numerous cycling enthusiast friends who are presumably not jerks.