

## Fun story on the challenges of bicycling around Concord

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Casey Lyons, a staff writer at the Concord Journal, wrote a fun and wry essay in this week's edition on the many hazards and adventures of biking through the genteel neighborhoods of Concord.

### A Friday afternoon bike ride around Concord

**July 28:** *The article has been removed from the Concord Journal online edition, so I am copying the story from Google cache to here:*

#### A Friday afternoon bike ride around Concord

Thursday, July 7, 2005

It is only fun until the tires lock up, and then, its exhilarating. Over paved roads, grassy areas and eventually trails, Concord offers much in the way of bike riding opportunities. And though bicyclists are no oddity around town, there is some sense of frustration or exasperation and maybe awe when bicyclists fly past.

Make no mistake, there is a certain level of self-righteousness in passing cars, but the rift between the leg-powered and the lead-footed remains more than a matter of scale.

Bicycle riders can be misunderstood, and even for the casual bicyclist, some things remain mysteries.

Take spandex for instance, and particularly neon colored spandex. The skin tight feeling of some type of poly-fiber must give the very near simulation of riding in the buff. Or perhaps spandex is the key to reducing drag, or maybe its some kind of underground style choice. I can have no idea about this, except that recent images from the Tour de France leave carelessly little anatomical detail to even the dullest imagination.

Things occur differently, at times faster, slower and more intense than other modes of transport. It is somehow difficult to be completely there when pedaling uphill especially, but one cannot drift away into mouthed lyrics of some Barry Manilow tune or NPR report.

The voices on the radio, or even the iPod, are replaced by a keen ear tuned to the subtle air movements that signal oncoming cars.

Yes, things occur with a quick rush at eye level, and that rush was either my out-of-shape heart pounding furiously to keep up with an otherwise inactive lifestyle, or maybe just the wind.

Biking around Concord and West Concord was enjoyable: at once, once can cover more ground than a walker, but things move slow compared to a automobile.

In my hour and a half cycling odyssey, I noticed a choice Ford Galaxie 500 for sale on Walden Street that I must have passed hundreds of times, and missed, while driving. I can also speak with limited certainty that the cat mailbox flag somewhere near there was cute to the point of cute-saturation.

In the constant jar of bicycle versus car versus pedestrian, cyclists lack identity to some regards. Though it is nice that those neon-yellow spandex colored signs urge everyone to share the road. No, people on bicycles, be that for exercise or transportation, want some of the privileges of cars and pedestrians, but none of the hassles. Particularly for those who use toe clips on bike pedals, a three second stop-sign stop is impractical. It's not that I don't want to follow the rules of the road, it's just, well, they seem somewhat overkill when applied to bicycles.

It should be noted that pedestrians have the least protection against moving pieces of metal, but the greatest road presence. In Monument Square, walkers expect those in 2-ton Hummers and those on 30-pound Treks to stop dead, and they are not afraid to let you hear about it.

There is of course, the bicycle death zone, which maybe the hardest concept to explain to habitual drivers. This experienced cyclist - and believe my tours of duty as a Boston bicycle messenger - has learned that riding the yellow line is a relatively safe place to pedal out the miles. And this, beyond anything else, infuriates drivers.

But take to the right of cars on a street with parallel parking, and you have found yourself, probably not for long, in the bicycle death zone.

In this two- to four-foot space, just about anything can go wrong, and just about instantly. This is the place where car doors are flung open by the recently parked, which can be easy to spot, or people hanging out listening to the final bars of that Barry Manilow song can open the Beamer door faster than the selectmen assign subcommittees, usually with no warning.

Considering the physics - 15 mph to 0 in about six inches - and the presence of metal and/or glass, the only pre-ride training a cyclist can do here is strap on the old helmet, crouch down in four-point 100-yard dash stance and sprint directly into the library's wall. In the absence of brick, trees of the proper size and shape will suffice.

Helmets are a necessary piece of equipment. Unlike spandex, helmets carry the explicit function to protect the noggin in case the ground comes up really, really fast. While cyclists will concur that it is nearly impossible to look hip, happening, or even somewhat un-absurd wearing a plastic head shell, it is easier to curse out careless drivers while in state of consciousness.

As a child, I would hide my helmet in the bushes as soon as I rounded the

first corner, but my years of life-experience, and near misses, have leant to thoughts otherwise.

Many also do not realize that bicycling is an excellent source of protein. In the mouth-open panting of high humidity riding, bugs use the Star Wars force to land directly into one's mouth, providing muscle building fuel for the remainder of the excursion.

Concord is acceptable and even conducive to bicycling. Roads are wide and have space on the sides, Friday afternoon traffic is relatively light, and cars are pleasingly cautious around cyclists. This could be a result of proper conditioning, and gesturing if necessary, but I did not find that to be the case.

At what is likely the hairiest part of Concord for the cyclist - that is, that small underpass on state Route 62 - drivers were courteous to make eye contact before going past a biker stopped at a stop sign. And my thanks go out to the lovely elderly couple in the green Subaru who slowed down to let me pass.

What Concord lacked last Friday afternoon was other cyclists. All around there was evidence of other bikers - beach cruisers or 10-speeds attached to poles at the train station or signs outside Sorrento's - I only managed to see a pair of youths blowing circles around the train station's parking lots.

Somewhere off Harrington Road, I took an abrupt turn into the woods, figuring I had not done any trail riding since my city days began and feeling that I might want to re-capture the feeling. To be sure, I stopped and checked for bike restrictions on this trail.

Blazing through trails is basically the same as weaving in and out of Boston traffic: decisions have to be made quickly, the path is often narrow, and the margin of error is slim. One false pedal and it's down into the ravine for you. But unlike Boston's streets (for the most part), this particular trail had no kind of markings on it. Before I knew it, my vigor had carried me across several trails, and I was, of course, lost.

Using the old trick of following dumb luck, I managed to spill out onto a dirt road. Employing my luck tactics again and proceeded down a very pock marked dirt road until I reached a sign: the Musketaquid Sportsmen's Club. The part about trespassers being shot on sight I probably read into myself.

Turning around I found myself on Range Road and later some place called Ministerial. And though my knowledge of Concord had not yet extended into this quadrant - and I had to check a map to make sure I was even still in Concord - I made it out. Though only after a nice woman walking her golden retriever gave me directions.

So winded and needing water like a polar bear in the desert, I returned to Concord's one area of industrial zoning. I was no worse for wear, received no comparisons to Lance Armstrong, and no beeps or gestures from miffed

drivers.

And this time, Barry Manilow at least didn't cause me any physical harm.

Casey Lyons is a Staff Writer for The Concord Journal.