

By Alex Rawlins

Why I loathe other cyclists

MY DAILY 32-mile commute is the source of many emotions: exhilaration, exhaustion, worry and terror.

However I've found that the main feeling I experience as a cyclist is hatred.

I hate pedestrians who don't look before stepping out, I hate car drivers who don't signal, I hate buses that pull into my cycle lane with no notice and I hate the sound of an HGV revving to overtake me.

Most of all, though, I hate other cyclists.

Cyclists are by far the most unpredictable road users out there and every day I see fellow riders doing things that are crazy, not to mention illegal. It's time we took ownership of our safety.

During the height of the summer I yearn for the long nights of winter. The least experienced and most reckless cyclists go into hibernation, leaving the more grizzled riders to brave the dark trip home.

This year the drop in numbers seems less pronounced. More cyclists have stayed on the road and many have failed to kit themselves or their bikes out properly.

Drivers can't see them, we often can't see each other and a lack of decent lights, or in many cases any lights at all, poses a real threat to other cyclists. If I look over my shoulder and see nothing I'll move out. It doesn't take a great brain to see the consequences of an invisible cyclist on my rear wheel.

It's not just lights it's the Lycra too. Almost all riders wear it because of its breathability and comfort but it should be neon, or at least reflective. Every day I

spot people head to toe in matt black. It is dangerous enough out there, you don't need to give motorists an excuse not to see you. You're trying to get home safely, not surreptitiously delivering a box of chocolates.

Which brings me to red lights. I hear lots of cyclists say it's safer to run reds, which is absolute rubbish. The reason they do it is because it is quicker. If they were really worried about safety they'd get off their bikes and push.

My commute entails 53 sets of lights and while recent research said 10 per cent of cyclists jump reds, in my experience it's closer to a quarter. At worst it causes fatal collisions at best it winds drivers up, making them edgy and mistrustful of law-abiding bikers. When I stop at the lights I look around at the other cyclists and see that most like me are simply trying to get home but as soon as the lights change someone will try a manoeuvre more suited to the BMX circuit and my blood begins to boil again. Pedestrians get

the worst of it, with many cyclists thinking a green man entitles them to move off too, then abusing anyone on foot who deigns to get in their way. I know because it frequently happens to me.

One of the most worrying trends is the almost total absence of indicating. Cyclists have a duty to let other road users know their intentions but many only use their hands for obscene gestures.

If I see a shiny new bike I don't think, "Oh good, another convert", I back away. I know the rider is unlikely to signal, will probably fall over at the lights because they can't unclip their shoes and will go too fast where they should take their time. London is a mean place to learn and I'd rather you didn't do it in front of me.

That said, I don't trust *any* cyclist while they're in front of me. I'll slack off to add braking distance, or overtake. Too many riders group up one after the other like they're in the Tour de France. If one goes down they all do. Usually into the path of traffic.

My biggest gripe though is with undertaking.

Pulling away from lights I'll often get people driving up the inside, forcing me into the traffic. If you're unwise enough to do this I'd advise putting your fingers in your ears for the four-letter blast I'll reciprocate with.

THE RECENT spate of cyclist deaths has made me seriously re-evaluate my commute. I love the feeling I get at the end of the day and it's great for my health but I am worried about the danger the poor quality of cycling around me poses.

When I took my driving test the theory portion devoted more time to dealing with horses than cyclists.

Drivers aren't adequately educated while riders aren't required to have any training at all before tackling the busiest cities on the planet. Perhaps it's time to make the National Standard for Cycle Training mandatory.

In the meantime I'm going to continue despising other cyclists, at least when I'm pedalling.

The hatred keeps me wary and as a cyclist that's the most important asset there is.

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