

# Sharing the Road

Looking out for one another is the key to both cyclist and driver safety

by Ian MacNeill



**FROM 2008 TO 2012**, British Columbia saw an average of 1,400 collisions per year involving cyclists and motor vehicles that resulted in injuries. Included in this number was a yearly average of nine fatalities. Nobody will be surprised to learn that the victims, in every single case, were the cyclists, despite heavy investment into developing cycling infrastructure in urban areas, including dedicated bike paths.

The stubbornness of the statistics is partly explained by the fact that there are an ever-increasing number of bikes on the road. But reducing the accident rate has more to do with raising consciousness and fostering education among cyclists and motorists alike than it does with erecting concrete barriers, says Vernon's Bruce Mol, a long-time instructor with the Canadian Cycling Association's CAN-BIKE safety program.

"Promoting shared use is the most effective thing we can do," he says. Education is the key, he adds, and to be effective it has to be directed towards both cyclists and drivers – because this is not a matter of one side being right and the other wrong. Bikes are a good thing in that they promote fitness and help reduce the carbon footprint, but they are simply not practical in all cases. "The reality is that there are people who live in Aldergrove and work downtown," says Mol, so riding a bicycle to work isn't an option for everyone.

The types of collisions that most commonly occur between bicycles and motor

vehicles often mirror those that occur between motor vehicles only, with a couple of notable exceptions. The commonalities include vehicles or bicycles attempting a left-hand turn being struck by oncoming traffic, and getting struck laterally by vehicles pulling out from either side. The unique cases include situations where motor vehicles pass bikes and then turn right in front of them. However, the fastest-growing "incident" is when cyclists get "doored"; a driver opens a vehicle door without looking and a cyclist rides into it.

The best way to prevent these situations is to be conscious of the fact they can occur and be on the lookout. This applies to both cyclists and drivers. Intersections can be mine fields; obey the rules and expect the unexpected. This last point cannot be emphasized enough. Surveys indicate that both cyclists and motorists find one another "unpredictable." Both sides can go a long way towards reducing that unpredictability by simply observing basic etiquette: signal when turning, obey traffic signals, yield where appropriate, and most importantly, drive/ride defensively. Cyclists have an added responsibility to be visible; motor vehicles are more apt to strike that which they cannot see.

At the end of the day, everyone, cyclists and drivers alike, wants to arrive alive, and the best way to do that is to accept the fact that we share the road, and a little courtesy goes a long way. ▣

## Mutual Respect

**CHARLES "CHUCK" GLOVER** is a senior B.C. CAN-BIKE instructor and Transit Police officer who teaches riding skills to police and security personnel (and blogs at [canbikebc.blogspot.ca](http://canbikebc.blogspot.ca)). We asked him for a few tips on how cyclists and drivers can learn to live together.

**WW** What advice do you have for cyclists driving in traffic?

**CG:** See, be seen, be heard and be predictable. Keep your head up and back straight so you can see what's going on around you. Something as simple as wearing bright colours, having your lights on and using hand signals will get you a lot more respect from motorists. Remember that you have the same rights as motorists, but also the same responsibilities.

**WW** What about drivers?

**CG:** Understand the fact that cyclists are there, or could be. Respect their right to be there, cut them a break and allow them to get home alive as well. But the same thing goes for cyclists. You often see cyclists riding in traffic lanes where parking is eliminated for the rush hour. Yes, you have the right to ride there, but is it smart? Invariably, there are roads less travelled just a block away; use them instead.

**WW** What can we do moving forward?

**CG:** We need more cycling education. Parents need to teach their children to ride responsibly, and defensively, from an early age. Adults can benefit from rider training as well. Practice low-speed skills like turning around in parking stalls without putting a foot down, and riding over small objects. These are the kinds of skills that can save your life. □ – I.M.

