

Safety Tips # 40

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A Major Rager?

We're not talkin' about a party here. This time it's about road rage.

Rage: my Webster's dictionary's first two definitions for this are, "1 insanity 2 a furious uncontrolled anger; esp. a brief spell of raving fury." When applied to riding, it doesn't sound too safe to me! "Insanity"! Yikes! We all know there are people out there on the roads that are sometimes in a complete rage. By definition, they're *insane*. And sometimes they drive others to the same depths by their insane actions. Do you participate in road rage? Are you immune to it?

I'm not immune to it. (But I am working on it...)

Last week on my way to work I was being tailgated (very closely) by a car. I have several ways to notify a driver that he/she is dangerously close to my bike. One way is to flash the brake lights. Another way is to (briefly) turn on my 4-way flashers. And another way is to glance around over my shoulder and try to make eye contact with him/her. This particular time the tailgating was so aggressive that I just had to have a look. So I turned my head around briefly to see if the driver was paying attention to the road situation at all, as opposed to reading a book or checking the GPS or texting. But his eyes were up, looking forward at me. When I subsequently turned my eyes ahead to the road in front of me I checked my rear-view mirror and I could see the driver of the car

making grand gestures at me. I had to do something to get out of this dangerous situation. Slowing down a bit to leave more following distance between me and the vehicle ahead of me was not an option, because slowing down at all would have put the tailgater in contact with my bike! So I accelerated rapidly and changed lanes, which put me in the left lane of the interstate. But I guess the tailgating driver was completely out of his mind with aggression. Because he then accelerated fast, too, and passed me on my right (barely missing my bike) at a highly illegal speed, passed two more vehicles that were ahead of me, and then sharply cut into the left lane. Wow – he sure showed me, huh? Yes, I got mad. Plenty mad. I wanted to *do something*.

(Thinking back, maybe making eye contact with this person was not a good idea. It may have ramped up his aggression. Who knows?)

I bet most of us have had that feeling of anger. So let's examine what could have been done. I've heard of riders throwing things at the offending car, like spark plugs, or whatever. Flipping the driver off. Trying to scare him/her. Following the vehicle until it stops and forcing a confrontation. But now that we're in a (relatively) calm state of mind (you're reading an article, not riding your bike), let's think about it. When we're on our bikes we are at a severe disadvantage in a challenge to a driver of a car. The driver of the car is just about completely impervious to an assault by us. Moreover, if the driver feels threatened or aggressive enough he/she could use the vehicle as a weapon, and guess who would lose that conflict! Getting involved in a battle that cannot be won, and would almost certainly have BAD results, is just plain stupid.

This is from David Hough's book, *Street Strategies*: "If you haven't encountered a desperate driver yet, you will. And whatever his or her problem is, you don't want to be any part of it. Erratic driving, and even the condition of the vehicle itself, are clues that a driver has a problem, whether physical or psychological." I like

that Mr. Hough brings out the idea that the condition of the vehicle itself can be a clue that the driver is unstable. But the key point is, “you don’t want to be any part of [his/her problem].”

Put distance between you and the offending driver. Let them motor angrily away, right out of your life. That sounds like the best option, doesn’t it? “Bye bye, see ya’! Wouldn’t want to be ya’!” And then they’re gone.