

Sharing the road

How many close calls with cyclists or pedestrians have you had despite your best efforts at safe, non-distracted driving? Do you ever forget to check your side and rear mirrors to make sure no one is in your blind spot before making a turn? What about accidentally advancing too far into the crosswalk while stopped at a red light? I've personally been guilty of all these things a number of times, and I'm the wife of a cyclist (and the mom of another). And with every mistake, my heart drops into the pit of my stomach as I think about what might have happened.



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But there's another dark side to motor vehicle and cyclist encounters that has nothing to do with being occasionally careless.

Road rage and a deliberate intent to harass and harm people on bicycles is a growing problem. Some motorists actually go out of their way to honk, yell and ride menacingly close to cyclists often within inches of their wheels even though Florida law clearly states, "The driver of a vehicle overtaking a bicycle or other nonmotorized vehicle must pass the bicycle or other nonmotorized vehicle at a safe distance of not less than 3 feet



between the vehicle and the bicycle or other nonmotorized vehicle."

Matt and Julie Goforth of On Your Mark Performance Center have unfortunately seen and personally experienced this type of dangerous behavior at the hands of motorists for years. In fact, South Florida seems to be a particularly risky place for cyclists as well pedestrians.

"The most stressful situation for me is when a car honks, right as they are passing. It's everything I can do to keep the bike upright," said Julie Goforth.

No one likes to talk about it, but almost every cyclist who rides here has a story. What motorists fail to realize is that when an unprotected cyclist or pedestrian is put up against a person sealed in a 4,000-pound steel box, the driver always wins. And the husband, wife, son or daughter lying on the side of the road is headed to the hospital for weeks of painful recovery, or they are dead.

The statistics regarding cyclists at risk are frightening. According to the AAA (American Automobile Association) and the NHTSA (National



Matt Goforth and Julie Goforth, owners of On Your Mark Performance Center.

Highway Traffic and Safety Administration), every day an average of 140 bicyclists are injured or killed in traffic accidents. Male cyclists between the ages 24-64 make up the majority of all cycling fatalities while boys 10-14 years of age have the highest number of cycling injuries and child fatalities.

If you witness a cyclist or pedestrian being harassed by a motorist, please call 911 immediately and report the incident with as much information as possible. It could be a matter of life and death for that individual as well as others if the motorist is not brought to justice.

"We're all sharing the roadways, therefore we need to respect one another," said Matt Goforth.

May is National Bike Month. The League of American Cyclists has done an excellent job raising awareness about this issue through their "Share the Road" campaign in cooperation with AAA and others. For more safety tips and direct links to numerous other websites addressing pedestrian, cyclist and motorist safety in Florida and beyond with information you can download and share, please visit the On Your Mark Performance Center blog at www.OYMBike.com. ■

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