

Be assertive, safe while cycling on roadways

“Aren’t you afraid of getting hit,” a clerk asked me near the Washington coast. “Yes I am,” I replied. “I’m afraid of getting hit with clogged arteries.”



Yes, I am also aware that approximately 750 cyclists die in accidents each year. That is tragic. But, more than 40,000 Americans motorists die annually and few give a second thought of getting into their automobiles. Plus, another 500,000 die of heart attacks, many because of their sedentary ways. Playing the odds, I’m staying on my bike.

I also like to improve my odds by being a smart, confident cyclist. Periodically someone will notice me on a busy road. Sometimes they will ask me what my “secret” is. I suggest they join me for a ride and observe.

First, I’m assertive. Don’t confuse that with confrontational. I know the bicycle traffic laws and what my rights are. I ride like I deserve space on the road. I expect it instead of beg for it. I don’t weave, wobble and wander to cause motorists to wonder what I’m going to do next. I look a distance down the road to make riding “in a straight line” easy. When I’m planning to turn, change lanes etc., I put a stiff arm out to the left or

right like someone in the military or law enforcement. I want to make it clear that I’m not just shaking numbness out of my arm! If I want a motorist to go first at an intersection, I “authoritatively” roll my wrist to make my desire obvious. If a motorist yields to me, I give them a sharp “parade wave” to make my appreciation obvious. Yes, my repeated use of the word “obvious” is intentional. In my experience, I’ve rarely met a motorist who wants to hurt me. My best safety lies in the motorist knowing where I am/will be.

A majority of accidents happen at intersections. I make sure I’m not in the blind spot for a motorist who might be turning right. If I’m slightly ahead of the motorist, I “look them off” to make sure I can safely proceed. The biggest hazard to a cyclist is to be in the far right of the roadway, planning to go straight when even motorists in the middle of several lanes can go straight ahead or turn right. In that case, if I’m going straight, I ease into the middle lane long before I get to the intersection.

I wear bright orange cycling gear. Even our tandem is bright orange/yellow. If I'm out cycling when visibility is waning, I look like a flashing Christmas tree! And yes, I ride single file unless I'm in on a bike path or there is no traffic.