

## YOU, YOUR LIFE, AND YOUR BIKE

In several recent years Cambridge students have died as a result of collisions with motor vehicles. Every year, many undergraduate cyclists are injured in accidents with motor vehicles, cyclists, pedestrians, and one another. A frequent sort of accident, often serious, involves a head injury; and the victim owns a helmet. But it was not on his or her head at the moment of impact; it was in his or her rucksack. This frequent type of accident saddens the doctors who have to treat the casualties.

Why does this happen? Cambridge is a flat place. It is small and deceptively domestic. Much of it can be reached by bike within minutes. Many of the 18,000 people in the University are just a few minutes' ride from the next lecture, or the lab, or tea, or the pub, or a friend. Many of the other inhabitants of Cambridge travel on the same assumptions. Make no mistake: using a bike here is quite unlike using one in your own village, town, or even city.

Cambridge has cramped medieval streets which carry a heavy burden of private cars, tourist coaches, supply vehicles and construction vehicles. The combination of close quarters, heavy traffic and many bikes is always dangerous, and sometimes lethal.

Some cyclists ride recklessly. You are always likely to be late for a supervision, a lecture, or a match. You may be tempted to read a text that has just arrived for you, or even to have a conversation while cycling. You have already proved you are clever. Are you clever enough not to rush or distract yourself, and so to arrive slightly late and alive?

You must take precautions of your own:-

- a) if you already own a bike, make sure that it is serviced before you bring it to Cambridge. The obvious things - brakes, lights, chains - may be important at home. They are vital here. Remember: most lights need batteries. Bring spares. The police may impose a significant spot fine on bikes without working lights.
- b) if you intend to buy a bike while you are here, have it checked for these features.
- c) do not expect consideration from other road users. Ride defensively. Part of the lack of consideration you may encounter from drivers is the product of what they have seen other cyclists do. Do not add to the fund of resentment. Ride with your own skin in mind. Give way to larger masses of metal, even if, especially if, they are driven with less than due consideration.
- d) Get a helmet. And wear it.

Show your parents this letter. They may be able to help you afford what you need to stay safe - the helmet, the lights, after-dark indicators on clothing, maybe a sensible bike.

This is not a trivial matter. We lose more bones, months and lives to it than we care for. We can only advise. It is you on the bike.

