

Braking Story- The Idaho "Stop-As-Yield" Law

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I have a confession to make.

A few months back, Bob and I had a morning meeting scheduled at a local café. I had just bought a "new" road bike—[a 1984 Fuji del Rey](#)—and after getting it [serviced](#), and fitting it with some vintage toe clips (yep, much to Bob's bewilderment, I'm old skool), I was eager to take it out on the road, so I decided to take it to the café for its inaugural run.

Now, leading to and away from my apartment is an arterial with four narrow lanes, two in each direction. I rarely ride this arterial, because it's not the safest route; the lanes are too narrow, there are too many vehicles, the traffic is moving too fast, and most drivers are paying more attention to their cell phones than they are to the road. I avoid the arterial when I can.

And that means I prefer to ride the calmer, quieter side streets. There's just one problem with that choice of route—the intersections are bristling with stop signs. Combined with Portland's short city blocks, it means that on some routes, there will be a stop sign every 200 feet.

Now, I said this was a confession, but it's not exactly the type of confession you may be thinking—I'm scrupulously attentive to observing stop signs and red lights. For me, it's part of being what [Dr. Leon James](#) calls a "supportive driver," and is my way of countering the negative stereotype of the "scofflaw cyclist" that contributes to the [poisoning of the cycling environment](#).

Still, a stop sign every 200 feet is not exactly cycling-friendly infrastructure.

So, on this particular day, I was riding to meet Bob, and as I approached yet another intersection, and yet another stop sign, I slowed to a stop. Now, sometimes, depending on my mood, I will stop and put a foot down. Other times, I will slow to a near stop, remaining upright, but rolling forward again as soon as I come to a complete stop, but before I lose my balance. I could track stand, but—and this is not the confession I referred to—I've never actually done a track stand, and this wasn't the time to start learning. So I just rolled to a stop, and as all forward momentum ceased, and I sensed that I would be losing my balance momentarily, I began to roll forward again.

The only thing was, by that time, a car had approached the intersection from my left, and not being controlled by a stop sign, the driver had the right of way. It was obvious that I had to stop—again—so I applied the brakes, and came to a complete stop. And sure enough, my bike began to tilt to the left. No problem, thought I, I'll just slide out of the toe clip and put a foot down.

Except my toe clip didn't get the memo—it caught my shoe upper, and wouldn't let go. I yanked, and yanked, but the toe clip held fast to my shoe, as I continued my plummet to the left, until I hit the asphalt...

More than anything, it was my pride that was wounded. Of course, there were witnesses, so as is typical of both people and dogs in these situations, I picked myself up with an air of denial that I had done anything even remotely embarrassing. What? That spill? Oh, I meant to do that. And it didn't hurt. Nope. Feeling that a hasty getaway was the most prudent course for preserving what might remain of my dignity at this point, I quickly regained my mount and rode off toward my meeting with Bob.

So there you have my confession—I fell off my bike at a stop sign.

Now what if things were different? What if cyclists weren't required to come to a complete stop at stop signs when not necessary for safety? That's the idea behind a [proposed law](#) that will be introduced in the Oregon legislature in the 2009 session. Based on an [existing statute in Idaho](#), the proposed law would allow cyclists to treat stop signs as yield signs. For this reason, it is sometimes called "stop as yield." We wrote about this proposed law in our most recent [Legally Speaking](#) column, "[Stop as yield](#)"; reader responses to that column are posted on "[Breaking Story—Analyzing the Idaho Stop Sign Law](#)." As promised in [Stop on yield](#), this is the first of an in-depth, multi-part series on the Idaho stop sign law, and proposed legislation in Oregon and other states modeled on the Idaho law. Whether you're in favor of the idea, opposed to it, or not quite sure what to make of it, we think this will be the most thorough discussion of the issue available anywhere. We hope you'll enjoy it.