

Road warrior

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Bike law expert and former Olympian **Bob Mionske** calls for more justice for cyclists



Bike law expert and former Olympian Bob Mionske rides with Lance Armstrong.

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On June 8, a 3-year-old girl was riding her bike on Lewis Street in Reno when she was hit by a Ford pickup. Though she was dragged for about 10 feet, she survived. Earlier, on May 12, a helmeted, former Tour de Nez racer was riding in the bike lane along South McCarran Boulevard and Caughlin Parkway when he was hit from behind by a vehicle and injured.

Inevitably, these sorts of stories spur comments from both motorists and cyclists about the lack of courtesy and often unsafe behavior each group demonstrates to the other. Comments on a Reno Gazette-Journal article about the May 12 accident ranged from complaints about distracted drivers

to cyclists hogging lanes.

"Things have changed in the world in the last four years in terms of the number of people using bikes," says bike law expert and former Olympic cyclist Bob Mionske. "It's gotten better in that more people are riding, but it's also put more pressure on conflict."

For the past 12 years, Mionske, who wrote the 2007 book *Bicycling & the Law: Your Rights as a Cyclist*, has represented injured cyclists in his legal practice in Portland, Ore. On the first day of the Tour de Nez, June 17, Mionske will discuss the rules of the road and legal rights of cyclists at a safety forum at the Sparks Nugget.

"There's a lack of justice for cyclists," says Mionske. "We have a right to use the road. I think most people who bike realize that. The problem is the rest of society doesn't understand that. If there's a collision between a car and a cyclist, and let's say the car violated the cyclist, the media might say, 'Cyclist Collides with Car,' or it would launch a spate of articles saying cyclists need to learn the laws."

Take that May 12 accident, for example. The headline in the RG-J read, "Bicyclist injured after colliding with car in Reno."

The Reno police just received a \$36,000 grant to target cyclists and pedestrians who disobey traffic laws, as well as motorists who don't share the road.

Mionske is particularly frustrated that no serious charges can be brought for accidentally hitting and killing a cyclist. He says gross negligence, like drunk driving, has to be shown in such cases.

"I get links two, three, four times a week about cyclists hit and killed while riding legally—they're wearing reflective jackets, riding in their lane—the driver says, 'I didn't see him,' and he's not even given a ticket."

A few ways to make the roads safer for everyone, says Mionske, is to cut out cell phone use and text messaging while driving. Stronger drivers education that includes how to interact with cyclists could also help. Then there are some simple things, like slowing down. Use turn signals. Don't open a car door without looking. Don't pass too closely. Consider retesting seniors when they reach a certain age.

"I really think enforcement is an integral part of it," says Mionske. "People realize that if you're driving distracted and the only consequence is a \$200 ticket, that's not much of a deterrent."

Cyclists need to show courtesy toward motorists, as well, he says. "A little bit of comity between the different modes of transportation will go a long way."

- Bob Mionske, local law enforcement and citizens' groups will present at a safety forum on Thursday, June 17 at John Ascuaga's Nugget, 1100 Nugget Ave., Sparks. For more information, call 287-3599, or visit ww.tourdenez.com.

- Find Nevada's bicycle laws at www.bicyclenevada.com/law.html.

OTHER GREEN GOINGS-ON:

- The Reno Green Summit is Thursday, June 17, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. at Joe Crowley Student Union on the University of Nevada, Reno campus. For more information, visit www.reno.gov/index.aspx?page=1589.