

Red Light Runners

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By Rick Bernardi, J.D.

The reason most often-cited by motorists for the animosity between motorists and cyclists is the disregard that cyclists have for the traffic laws. And one complaint in particular always comes up in any discussion about cyclists—the well-known disregard that cyclists have for stop signs and red lights.

Well, it's true that many cyclists do not follow the traffic laws when it comes to required stops. But it's also true that many cyclists do follow the law. And yet it's virtually guaranteed that whenever the subject of cyclists comes up, motorists will volunteer their observations that cyclists have no regard for stop signs and red lights. And these observations are offered regardless of circumstances. A motorist right-hooked a law-abiding cyclist? A driver has no explanation for why he didn't see a brightly-clad law-abiding cyclist in broad daylight? A road-rager uses his vehicle to assault a cyclist and bully him off the road? No matter. Somebody will mention that cyclists break the law.

So with all of that sanctimony, one might reasonably believe that drivers are themselves paragons of lawfulness, especially when it comes to observing stop signs and red lights.

[Except they don't particularly like red light cameras.](#) You see, the fines are expensive, and there's no question that red light cameras catch red light runners. In fact, just one camera in Oakland, California generates more than \$3 million in fines every year. Statewide, red light cameras generate \$80 million in revenue for the state, and another \$50 million for California cities and counties.

Which is kind of strange, considering how drivers always make cyclists out to be the ones who are breaking the law. Is it possible that maybe, just maybe, motorists run stop signs and red lights too?

Well, somebody is tripping all those red light cameras, and it's not cyclists.

But still, cyclists are always trying to [get the laws changed](#) to make it legal for them to treat red lights as stop signs, and to treat stop signs as yield signs. Just who do they think they are, trying to change the law? You wouldn't see motorists doing that.

Well, actually, you would. Angry, allegedly law-abiding motorists have convinced the Legislature to passed a law that would cut by half the fine for a rolling turn at a red light (vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger), and have twice in the past two years prevailed upon the Legislature to pass laws cutting red light camera fines (vetoed by Governor Brown) and limiting the

use of red light cameras (also vetoed by Governor Brown). Well, even a stopped clock is right twice a day.

But no stopped clock is right three times a day. On September 29, [the same day he vetoed two bicycle safety laws](#), Governor Brown [finally signed a law](#) making it harder for cities to nab red light runners...and a whole lot easier to shift the conversation back to all of those stop sign-running cyclists.

Especially after some careless motorist breaks the law and kills another law-abiding cyclist.