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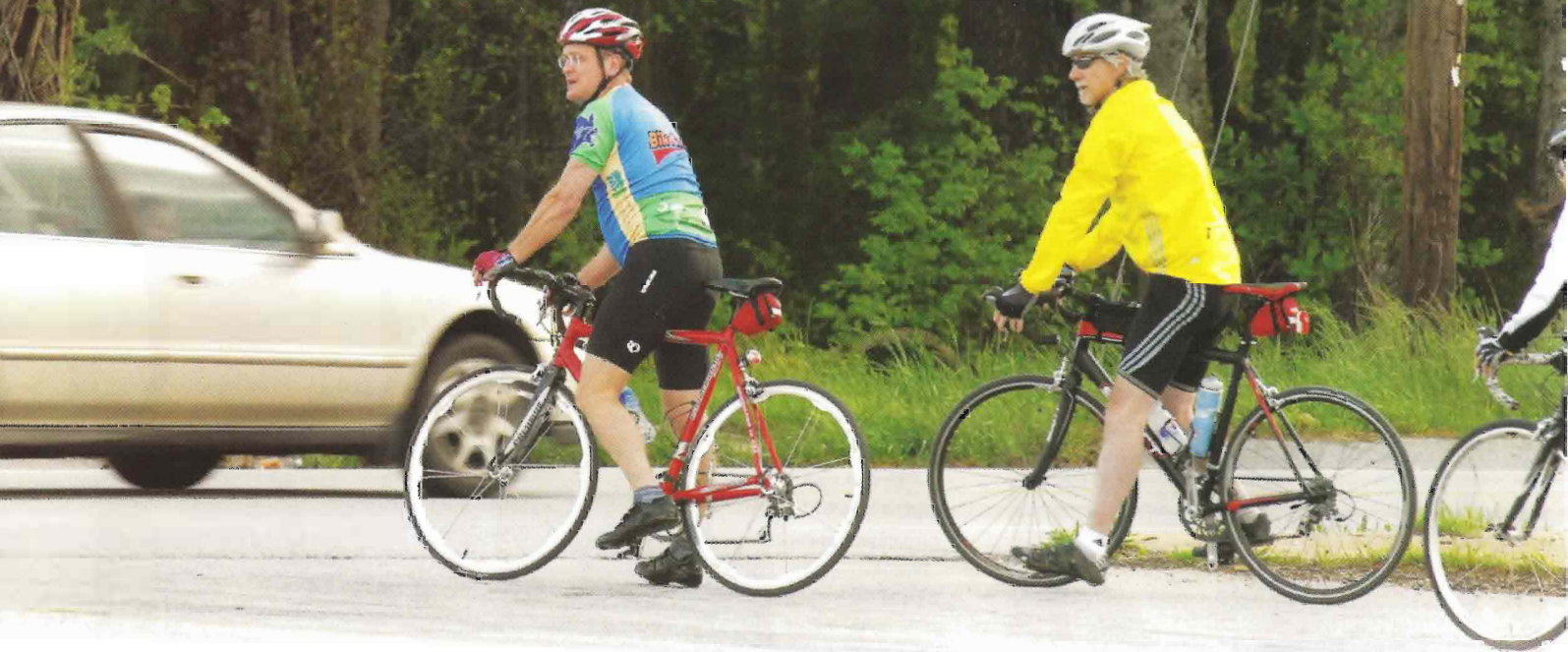
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Sharing THE ROAD

Local initiative,
new law promote
better relations
and safer roads



WRITTEN BY GARY HYNDMAN | PHOTOS BY JULIE TURNER

Cyclists' Code of Conduct

1. Obey ALL state vehicular traffic laws: stop at all stop signs and red lights. Signal all turns. Make lane changes correctly. Use front and rear lights at night. Don't ride on sidewalks.
2. Proactively ride single-file if needed to accommodate motor traffic.
3. Ride as far to the right of the road as is practicable.
4. Do not advance your position in a line of stopped cars at an intersection.
5. When riding in groups, limit group sizes and create sub-groups when needed to give motorists the ability to pass in safety. Dynamically create gaps to accommodate motorists as appropriate.
6. Pay particular attention both to the legal requirement for turn signaling and to courteous intentional communication with motorists; e.g., "slowing" motion, "wave-around". Conversely, NEVER curse motorists or make obscene gestures.
7. Be attentive to traffic around you (not self-absorbed, listening to music, etc.) and be proactively courteous to motorists and pedestrians.
8. Wear a helmet at all times, as a recognition of the example it sets in promoting safety.

— Source: www.roadrelations.com

Last fall, after an altercation with a motorist left two cyclists in a Simpsonville ditch, a shaken Allen Hamada was ready to hang up his bicycle for good.

Instead, Hamada resolved to do something about the festering tension on Upstate roads between bicycles and motor vehicles. "I love the sport so much I still want to ride," he says. "But I want to make it safe for everyone."

He and other members of the Greenville Spinners cycling club formed the Cyclists/Motorists Road Relations Coalition. (The coalition now includes representatives from local government and other area organizations.) Its goal is to improve relations with motorists and, as a consequence, to make roads safer both for sports cyclists and those who use a bicycle as their primary means of transportation.

A cyclist's code of conduct has been approved by the Spinners board for con-

sideration by its membership. And a list of basic bicycle safety rules is being printed for distribution throughout the area.

Coalition members say there is room for improvement both behind the wheel and from atop the saddle. "Share the road is a two-way proposition," says Tim St. Clair, coalition member and past president of the Spinners.

Complaints have circulated about some motorists harassing cyclists, everything from throwing things out the window to "buzzing," a form of intimidation by which drivers pass bicycles too closely.

Cyclists have contributed to the conflict as well by riding in long pelotons and two-abreast formations that, while legal, make it hard for cars to pass safely.

The conflict has escalated in recent years due to the Upstate's increasingly congested roads, coupled with the growing popularity of cycling.

It's been exacerbated, some say, by the state's lax drunk driving laws and the absence of bike lanes and wide shoulders on area roads. Both of these factors increase cyclists' risk and contribute to the state's perpetually high national ranking for bicycle-related fatalities.

Peter Wilborn, a Charleston cycling advocate and attorney, says the state suffers from what he calls an "immature cycling culture." That immaturity takes the form of hostility between cyclists and motorists, both of whom tend to lack awareness of laws and etiquette.

For example, a cyclist was killed recently after failing to yield to traffic on Mills Avenue in Greenville. Another fatality occurred when a rider darted diagonally across busy White Horse Road. Both victims violated traffic laws.

Wilborn, a self-described "Breaking Away kid," has been an avid cyclist for many years. But he first became involved in cycling advocacy in 1998 after his brother,

Jim, was killed on his bicycle by an underaged driver. His personal loss drew him to specialization in cycling-related personal injury cases, a practice he now does almost exclusively because of high demand.

Wilborn says the cause took a giant leap forward last June when the state legislature approved the landmark Bicycle Safety Act. Among other things, the new law addresses buzzing, requiring motorists maintain a "safe operating distance" from cyclists, makes it unlawful "to harass, taunt, or maliciously throw an object at or in the direction of any person riding a bicycle" and increases fines against violators up to \$1,000.

Passage of the progressive legislation drew national attention as the cover story (written by Wilborn) in American Bicyclist magazine last summer.

Spartanburg resident, Paul LeFrancois, president of the Palmetto Cycling Coalition, says his organization began working with the state legislature on the proposed bill in 2005. He attributes its eventual passage to persistence, legislative support, some high-profile cycling fatalities and considerable

"grassroots" lobbying by cyclists from across the state. "It pretty much had everything we wanted in it," he says.

Corporal Mark Nelson, a Greenville city police officer who serves on the cyclists/motorists coalition, reports he recently received authorization to enforce the new law. The delay, he says, was due to coordination issues between law enforcement and the judiciary which sets the fines.

Yet with public education likely to be a lengthy process, the coalition is encouraging area cyclists to be proactive about their safety. Scott McCrary, a coalition member, says his business, Touring, Tandem and Recumbent Bikes, is paying for 10,000 copies of a laminated card listing basic bicycle safety rules in both English and Spanish for distribution in downtown Greenville, Hispanic neighborhoods and at area bike shops. Its recommendations include riding with traffic, obeying all traffic lights and stop signs and equipping bikes with proper lights.

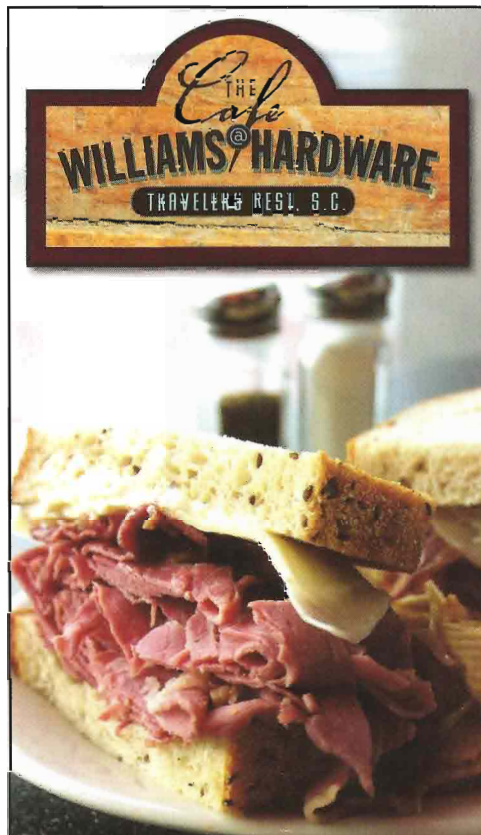
In addition, Spinners members are being asked to observe the newly adopted cyclist's code of conduct to promote consideration and courtesy toward motorists. McCrary says he researched similar codes around the world for inspiration. "We're trying to produce something that will stick," he says.

Advocates are encouraged by the progress. But Wilborn contends the ultimate test is public investment in constructing bicycle lanes. He says facilities like lanes – which allow people of all ages to ride bicycles safely, especially for bike commuters – are what separate mature cycling cultures like Amsterdam and Vancouver from those that are just emerging.

The cities of Greenville and Spartanburg are already incorporating bicycle lanes into their respective infrastructures. And in 2003, the state DOT Commission adopted a resolution making bicycle and pedestrian accommodations a routine part of highway design and construction. The bike/pedestrian lane over Charleston's new Ravenel Bridge and four-foot wide shoulders added during repaving of portions of Highway 11 are both a result of this initiative.

Still, Wilborn allows much work remains to be done. "At the state level," he says, "we're still in the dark ages."

A new law increases fines – up to \$1,000 – for anyone who harasses, taunts or maliciously throws an object in the direction of a cyclist.



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