

Low Stress, Assertive Cycling

by Fred Oswald, Bicycling Safety Instructor

Many people believe the fallacy that bicycle operators are not entitled to use more than the absolute minimum space on the roads. This fallacy leads to “staying out of the way,” riding in the gutter or on sidewalks. But staying out of the way often means being invisible, which leads to crashes.

It is often better for everyone when cyclists ride near the middle of the lane, particularly on multi-lane roads. This way approaching motorists are more likely to see them – sooner, allowing time to merge smoothly into the next lane.

Figure 1 at top right shows how an *assertive* position near the middle of the lane helps an approaching motorist realize earlier that a lane change is needed. The usual position near the right edge (bottom) fools the motorist into thinking there is room to pass without moving over or slowing down. This can be risky.

The primary benefit of the assertive position is to the cyclist – greater safety and less stress. But it also helps the motorist by allowing more time to merge smoothly into the next lane to pass and it makes motorist mistakes (and crashes) less likely.

Learning the best practices is not hard, except perhaps *unlearning* all the bad information you were taught when you were young. Parents and public officials seem to think that they can scare kids safe. But scared kids do not learn safe practices. They simply repeat mistakes that keep them frightened. Properly trained kids, like the young cyclist in Fig. 2, are much safer and not scared.

Fortunately there is some good cycling education material. Some of the best is on the web at CommuteOrlando.com. A good place to start is the *Smart Moves* articles, <http://commuteorlando.com/wordpress/category/smart-moves/> I especially recommend the article [You Lead the Dance](#) (near bottom of Smart Moves page). There is also an excellent book: *Cyclecraft* by John Franklin. The book is available from <http://www.cyclecraft.org/>. Be sure to get the N. American (not British) edition.

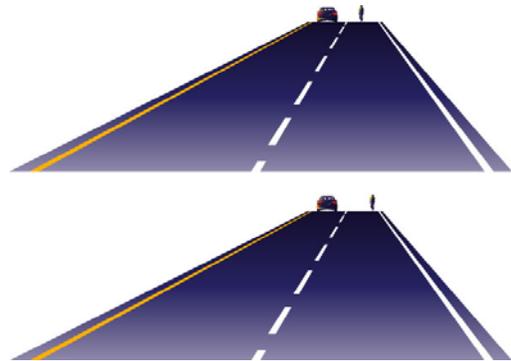


Fig. 1 – Shows how assertive cyclist (top) makes clear that the lane is occupied. Gutter bunny (bottom) may not even be noticed.

Illustration by Keri Caffrey



Fig. 2 – Young cyclist with good lane position approaching curve and downhill run.