

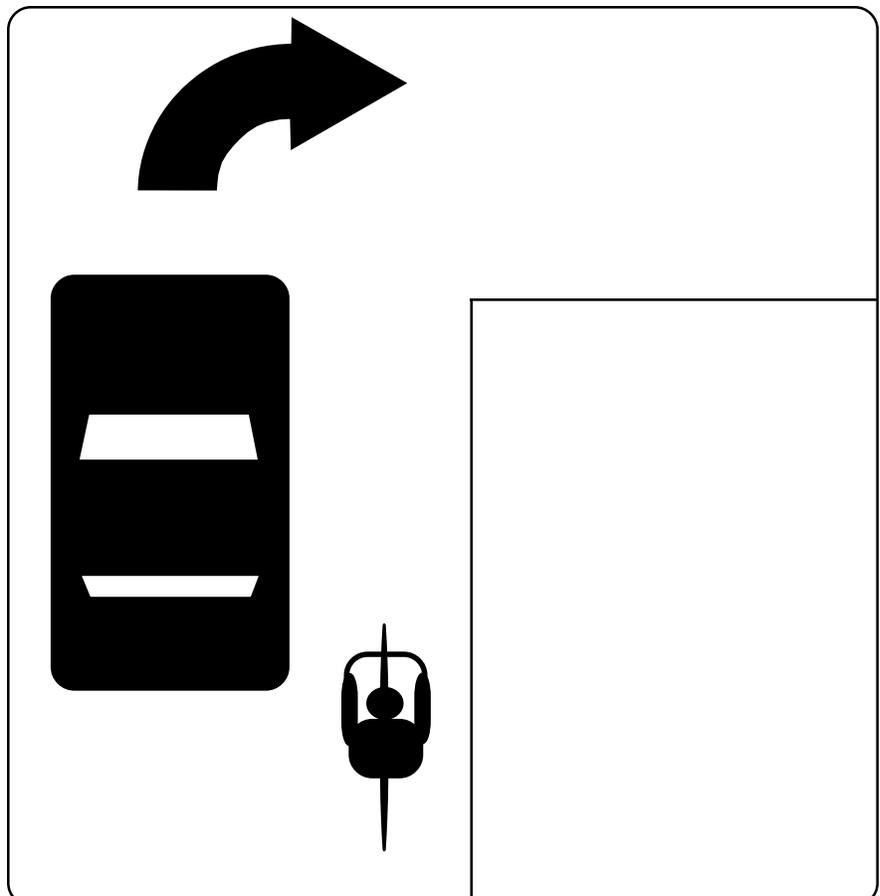
Ten Terrifying and Dangerous Things Cars do to Threaten Cyclists' Safety

By Sebastian Wren

1. The “Rude Right” -- Turning right at an intersection in front of a cyclist traveling the same direction.

Cars often do not realize how fast a cyclist is moving. When a car is approaching a right turn, the driver often thinks that the cyclist is moving slowly, and will not be affected by the car's right turn. However, cyclists can easily move 25 miles an hour or more -- much faster than a car can safely navigate a right turn. The car slows down to make the right turn, the cyclist doesn't, and the car ends up turning right in front of the cyclist.

The safe and correct way to make a right turn when a cyclist is approaching the intersection at the same time as the car is to wait well behind the cyclist until she clears the intersection. When the intersection is clear, it is safe to proceed.



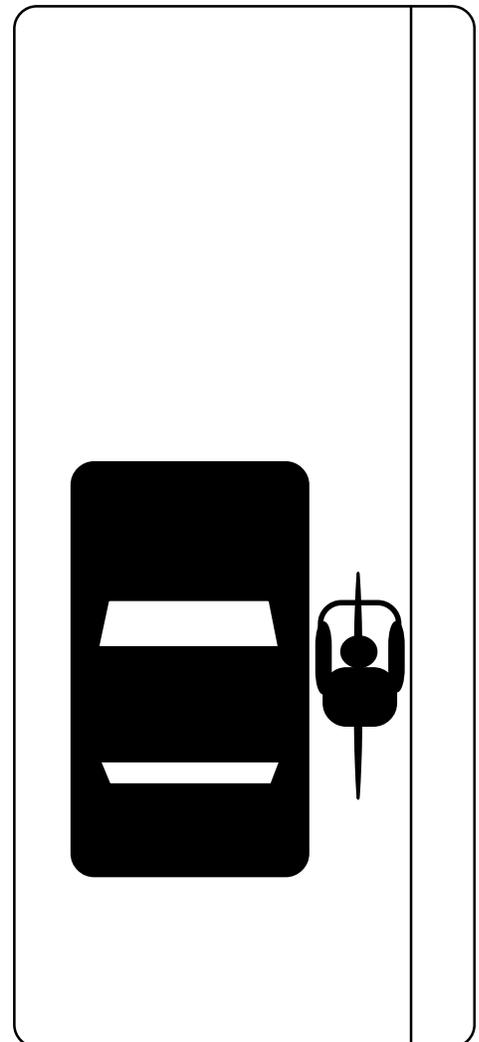
2. The “Close Shave” -- Cutting dangerously close to a cyclist. Some drivers think they know exactly where the boundaries of their car are. They think they can safely cut within inches of obstacles without hitting them. They are usually right, but when they are wrong, the results can be tragic. Even when they are right, the results are frightening.

Sometimes cars try to squeeze into places where they only barely fit. Sometimes they simply are not paying attention. Sometimes they don't realize just how close they are to the cyclist. Sometimes, cars in a hurry just rudely squeeze by cyclists rather than wait for an opportunity to pass the cyclist at a safe distance.

And some cars deliberately try to intimidate cyclists with the “close shave.” Some car drivers do not believe that cyclists have a right to be on the road. To express their views, they try to intimidate the cyclist by cutting past them with inches to spare. It is a deadly game of chicken.

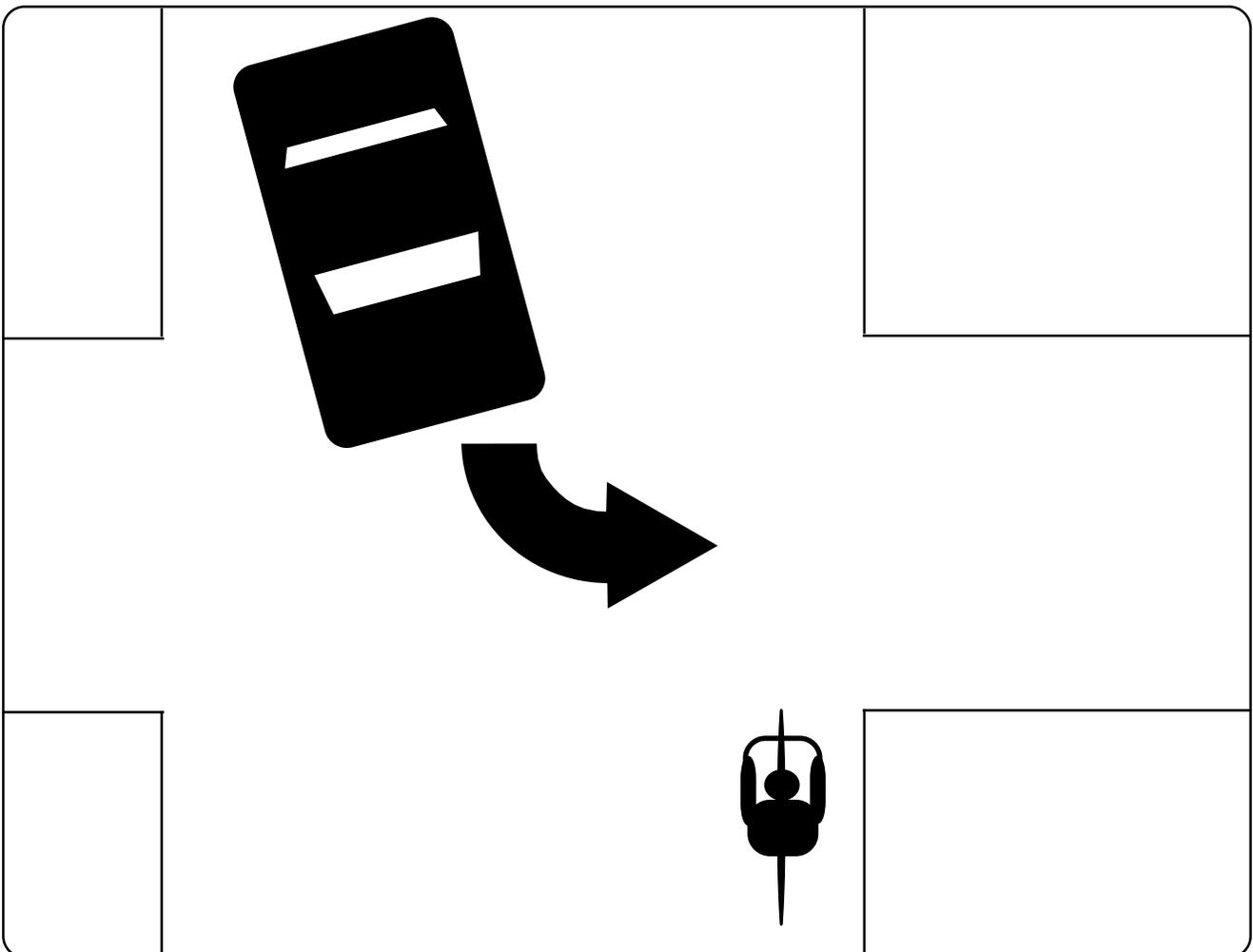
Ironically, to be safe, most cyclists agree that it is better to actually move out into the flow of traffic, thus denying the cars the opportunity to squeeze past at an unsafe distance.

Ultimately, cars should **NEVER** get within 5 feet of a cyclist.



3. The “Loony Left” -- Turning left at an intersection in front of a cyclist traveling the opposite direction. Again, usually because they do not realize how fast cyclists can move, some cars cut across in front of cyclists coming the opposite direction.

The safe and correct way to make a turn at any intersection when a cyclist is approaching the intersection is to wait until the cyclist clears the intersection or wait until the cyclist comes to a stop (as she should if there is a stop sign or traffic light). Intersections tend to be the most dangerous areas of the road. A little caution and awareness and just a few seconds of patience can literally save a life.

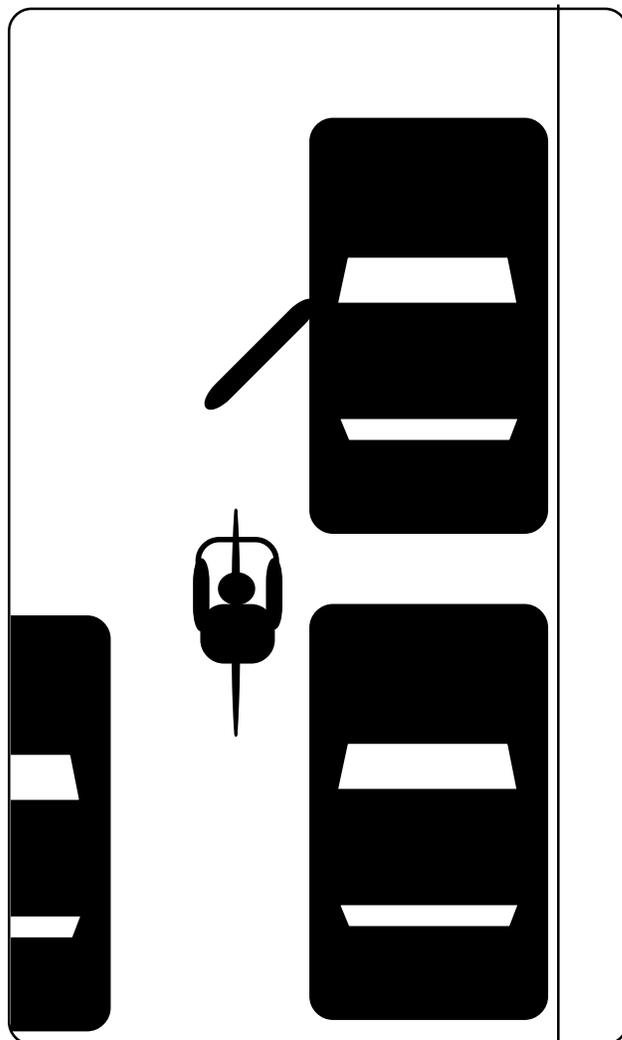


4. The “Jack-in-the-Box” -- Opening a door in the path of the cyclist. Drivers who are not paying attention sometimes don't think about the consequences of even the most mundane actions -- opening a door, for example. It seems like a mundane thing to do. You park your car, you gather your things, you throw open the door. And a cyclist gets seriously hurt or possibly killed.

Cyclists are usually very cautious about parked cars -- they usually know to go by them slowly, to look in the windows to see if there is somebody inside who might suddenly open the door, and to give them a wide berth whenever possible.

But sometimes it is not possible. Sometimes the flow of traffic forces cyclists to ride close to the parked cars. And sometimes there is not time to slow down. And tinted windows sometimes make it impossible to tell if somebody is in the car.

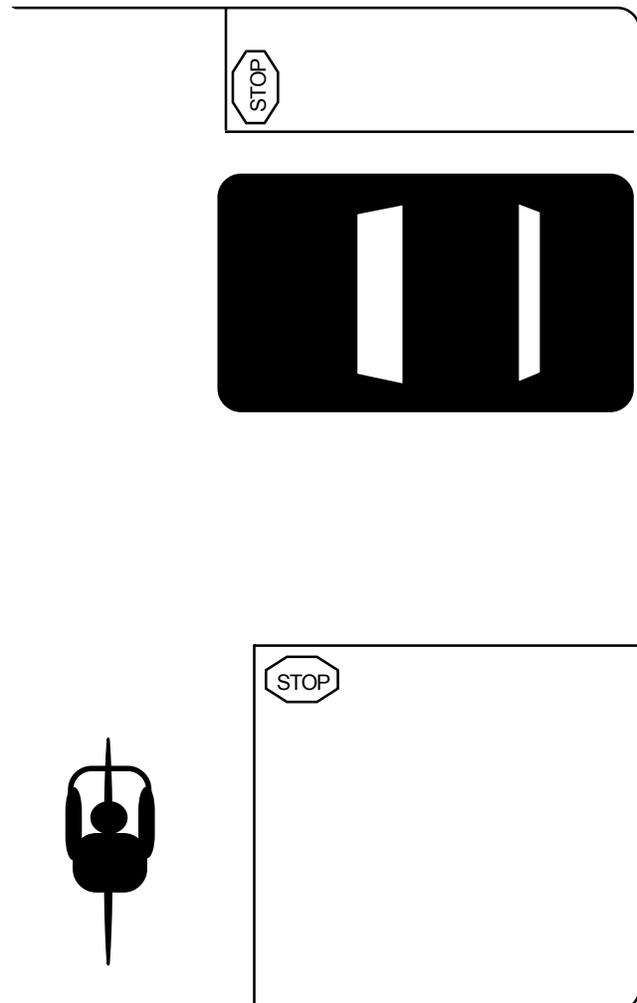
To be safe, learn to open the door just a few inches. Wait for a second, look behind you, look in the rear view mirror, and be sure that no cyclists are coming before **SLOWLY** opening the door the rest of the way and exiting the car.



5. The “Staring Contest” -- Waiting for the cyclist to go at a 4-way stop when it is not the cyclists’ turn. When a car gets to a 4-way stop before a cyclist, the car should take its turn and GO. Some drivers think they are being polite by letting the cyclist go out of turn, but it just makes the 4-way stop confusing. The cyclist and the car end up staring at each other, waiting for the other one to go first. It’s like a scene from a Three Stooges film.

Bicycles are vehicles of the road, and should be treated as such. If a cyclist gets to a 4-way stop after a car, the cyclist should wait -- the car should go first. It is, admittedly, a good idea for the car to wait for just half a second to be sure the cyclist isn’t a moron who will run the stop sign. But after that hesitation, the car should take its turn and clear the intersection.

If a car and a bicycle arrive at the intersection at the same time, then the vehicle to the right should go first.

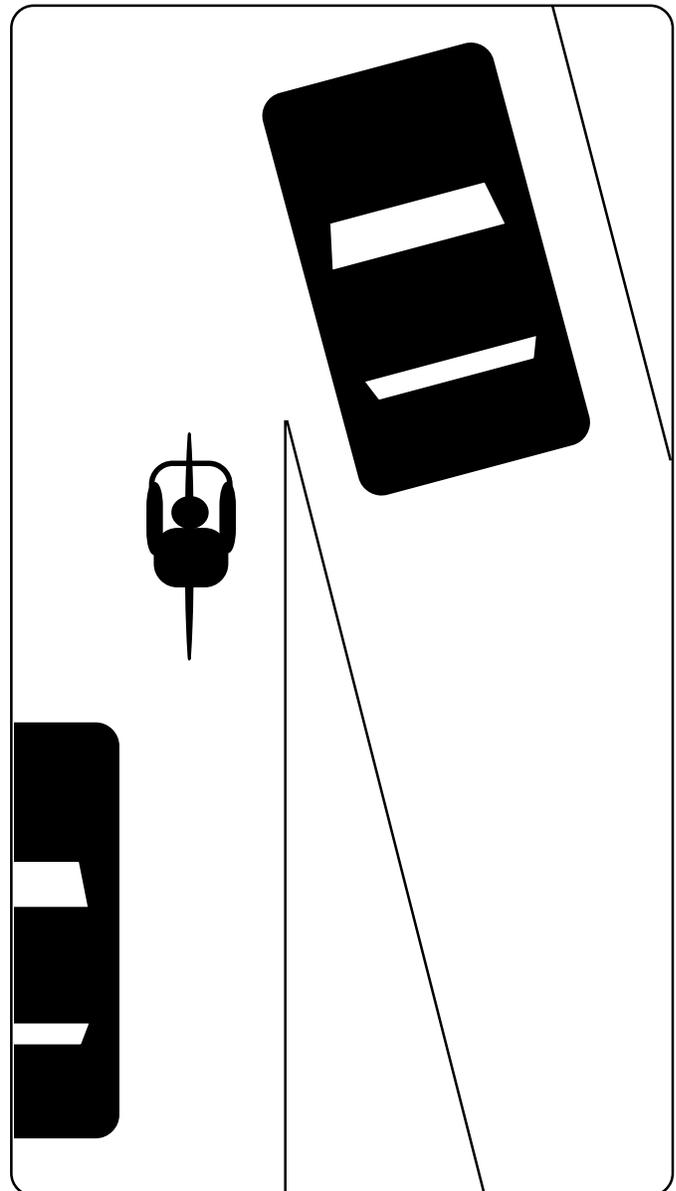


6. The “Blind Merge” -- Entering a flow of traffic without noticing the cyclist already there. Some intersections, in order to make it easier for cars to make right turns, actually feature a right “merge” lane. At a normal intersection, a car wishing to turn right into the flow of traffic must either wait for a green light or must come to a complete stop and look for cross traffic before proceeding. However, with the invention of the right-turn express lane, cars are able to turn right and accelerate right into the flow of cross-traffic. This is arguably the single stupidest traffic engineering invention ever.

Ideally, cars using this right-turn express feature will still slow down and yield to cross traffic. But drivers often just accelerate like crazy and merge blindly.

This causes a lot of traffic accidents anyway, but it is potentially lethal when bicycles are involved. The cyclist is forced to swerve out into the flow of traffic or get hit by the merging car.

Traffic engineers should do away with these right-turn merge lanes. They are dangerous to both cyclists and pedestrians.

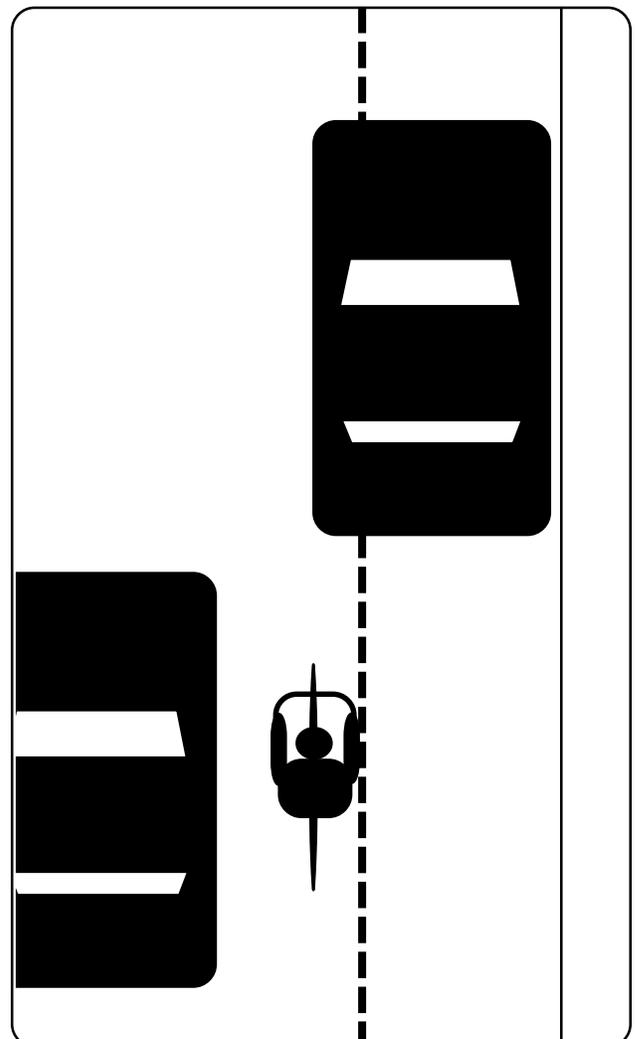


7. The “Bike Blockade” -- Parking in the bike lane. Bike lanes are most common on streets that are frequently traveled by bicycles, but which are also somewhat dangerous. Cyclists DO try to ride in the bike lane whenever they can, but obstacles in the bike lane often force cyclists out into the flow of traffic.

Debris, potholes, construction damage, broken glass, branches, wet leaves, trash cans -- these are all obstacles that often drive cyclists out of the bike lane and into the flow of traffic. But the most common and dangerous obstacle of all is parked cars.

In dangerous traffic, cyclists will stay in the bike lane even if it means dealing with trash and debris and potholes. They don't like to, but they will if the flow of traffic is too scary. But a parked car absolutely forces cyclists out of the bike lane and into the flow of traffic.

Other passing cars often do not make room for the cyclist to exit the bike lane and go around the parked car, and in those situations the cyclist is caught between impenetrable moving traffic and an immovable object.



8. The “Wheel Sucker” -- Following a cyclist too closely.

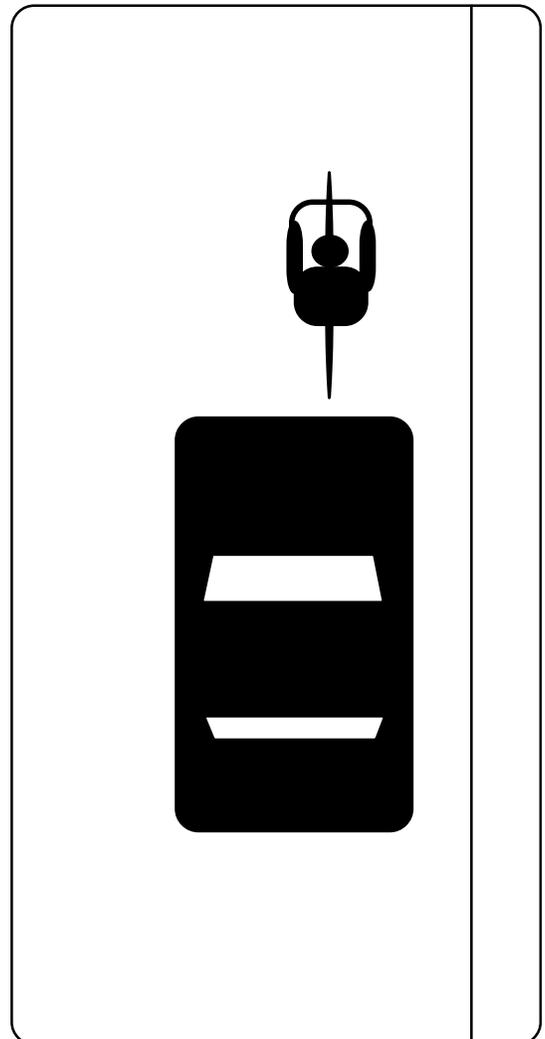
Tailgating is a problem with all vehicles. Drivers in a hurry think they can go just a little faster if they crowd the vehicle in front of them.

This obviously does not save any time at all, but when people are in a hurry, they think irrationally.

Tailgating a car is stupid, and it is one of the leading causes of traffic accidents. But tailgating a bicycle is especially stupid. First of all, the bicycle can stop much, much faster than a car. Bicycle brakes are much more effective than car brakes. And unlike cars, there are no warning lights when a cyclist suddenly hits the brakes. There is nothing to alert the tailgating car to the actions of the cyclist.

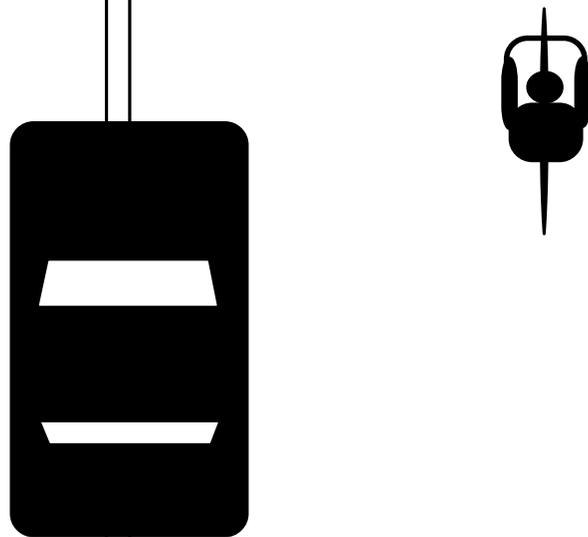
But most importantly, sometimes cyclists have accidents. If a car is following too closely behind the cyclist when the cyclist hits a puddle of oil or has a flat or just loses control of the bike, the tailgating car could run over the cyclist and kill her.

With every vehicle on the road, it is safest to follow with a gap of two full seconds or more.



9. The “Hail Mary” -- Attempting to pass a cyclist when the visibility of the road ahead is poor. This is a big problem on country roads or serpentine roads. A car approaches a cyclist from behind, and tries to pass even though the road ahead is not clearly visible. The car moves over into the flow of oncoming traffic, even though another car could appear from over a hill or around a curve. The two cars could hit each other head-on, and could possibly hit the cyclist, too.

Waiting for 20 seconds for better visibility is surely better than risking several lives.



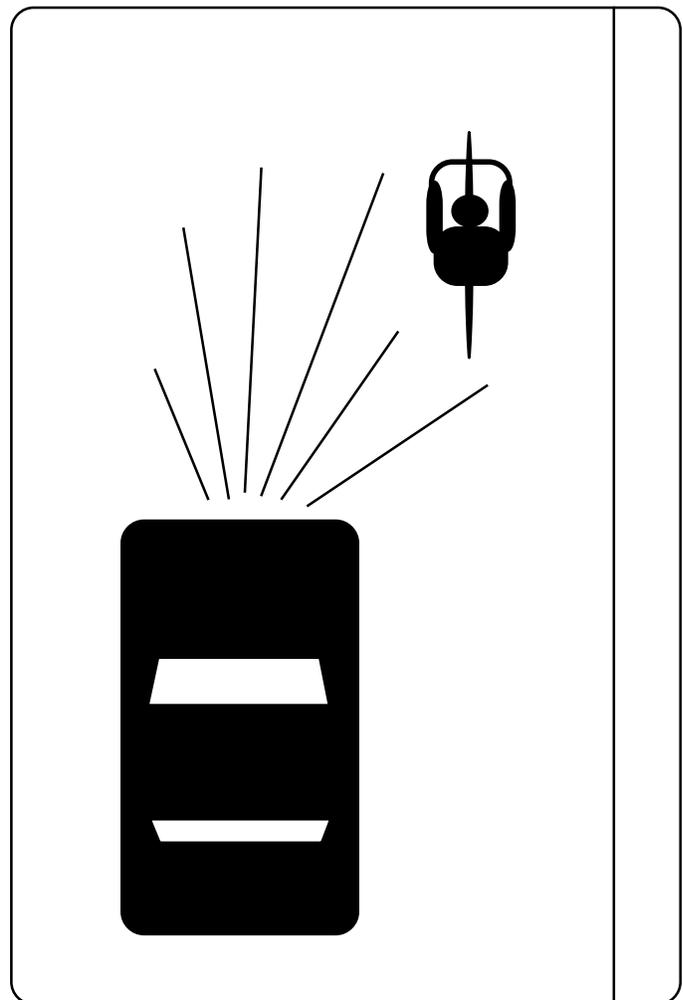
10. The “Psycho Goose” -- Honking at a cyclist. Some motorists seem to think that they need to “warn” a cyclist that they are approaching. That is really, really unnecessary. A cyclist can almost always hear a car coming. A horn does not help -- it startles.

A car horn can produce a noise as loud as 120 decibels. That’s loud enough to damage hearing over a sustained period of time. It is definitely loud enough to startle the cyclist.

A startled cyclist might look to see what the threat is, causing her to weave in the road. Or the startled cyclist might jump with fright and lose control of the bike. In extreme cases, especially with young children, it could actually make the cyclist crash.

Some cars honk to be friendly (perhaps because they know the cyclist), and some honk to be deliberately annoying. In either case, honking is very loud and is actually dangerous.

The horn should only be used in an emergency.



Seven Moronic Things Cyclists do to Threaten Their Own Safety and the Safety of Those Around Them

By Sebastian Wren

1. The “Me-First Maneuver” -- Ignoring traffic signals and signs. Some cyclists think that it is too burdensome to actually stop for stop signs or red lights. This is a very dangerous practice, and it understandably makes car drivers very nervous and angry.

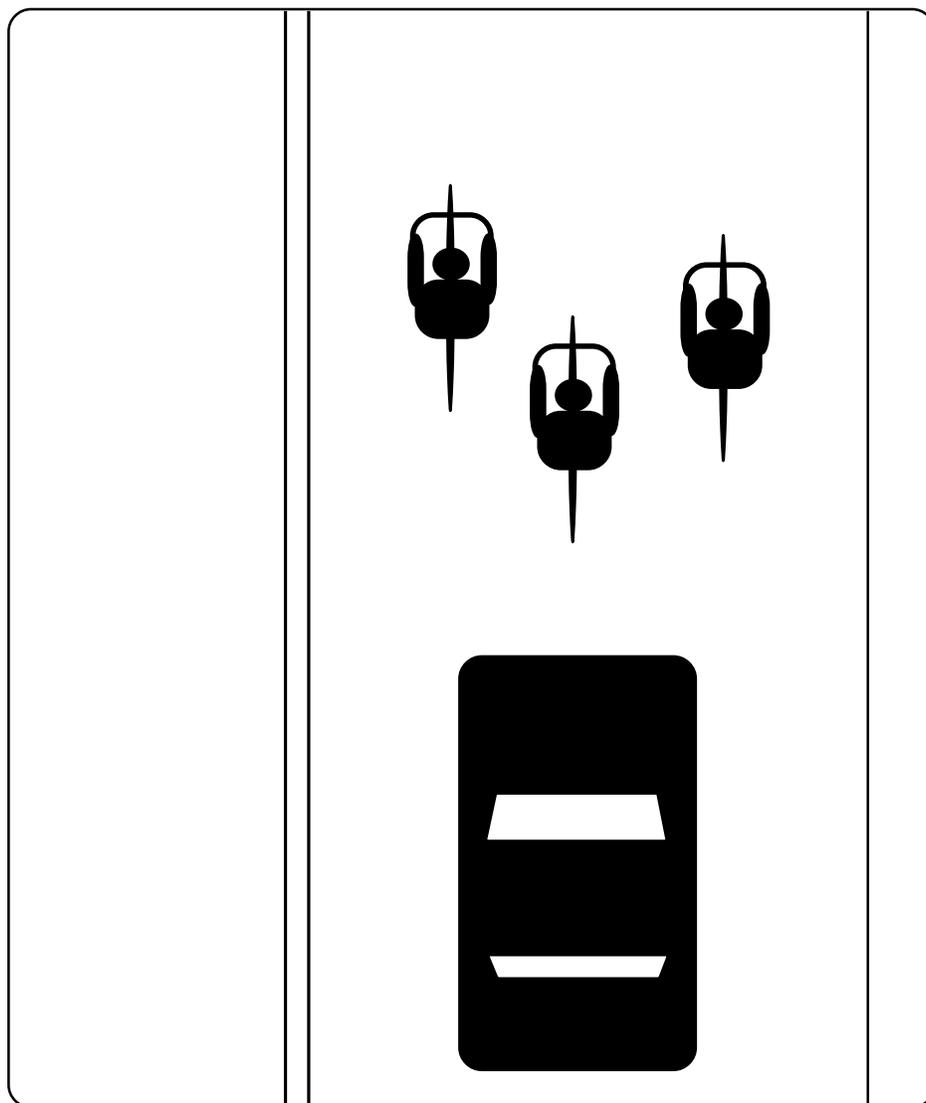
More than anything else, this is the source of friction between cars and cyclists -- blowing through a stop light or a stop sign is the most blatant violation of traffic safety there is. It gives all cyclists a bad reputation.



2. The “Road Hog” -- It is understandable for cyclists to “take the lane” at times -- sometimes that is safer than staying to the right. But when cyclists just ride shoulder-to-shoulder across the road, they are just being annoying.

Bicycles move slower than cars -- they are rarely able to come close to the speed limit. It is simple courtesy to move out of the way when it is safe to do so. Cyclists that are oblivious to cars behind them are no better than cars that are oblivious to cyclists.

Be safe and be courteous. Pay attention to the traffic around you. Ride single file and keep to the right unless it is dangerous to do so.



3. The “Sidewalk Surfer” -- Riding on the sidewalk.

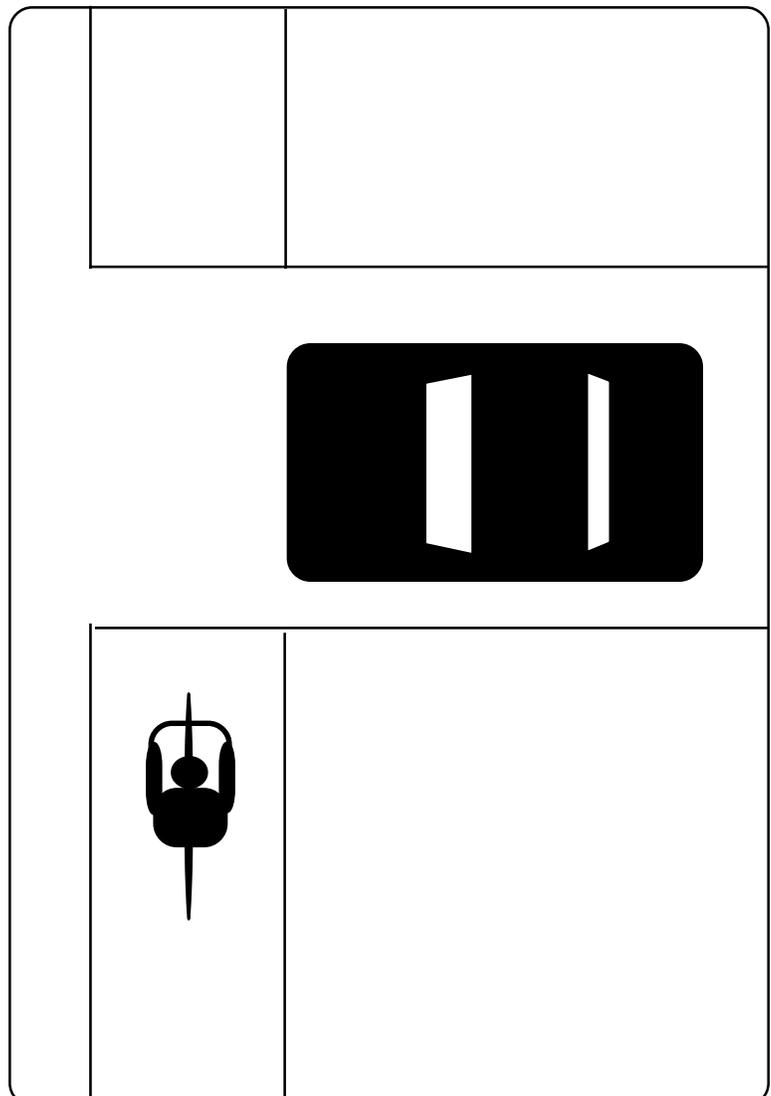
Sidewalks were made for pedestrians. It may not be illegal to ride your bike on the sidewalk -- sometimes it is, sometimes it isn't -- but it is extremely unwise.

Cars entering and leaving a road do not expect cyclists to be riding on the sidewalk. They pull out of or into driveways and cross streets, paying no attention to the fast-moving cyclist on the sidewalk.

Cyclists also pose a risk to pedestrians who are where they belong -- on the sidewalk.

And sidewalks are often cluttered with dangerous obstacles -- telephone poles, signs, benches -- all of these things can be deadly to cyclists. Hooking a handlebar on one of them can send a cyclist right out into the street on her head.

If it is truly necessary to ride on the sidewalk, cyclists should exercise **EXTREME** caution and demonstrate maximum courtesy to pedestrians.



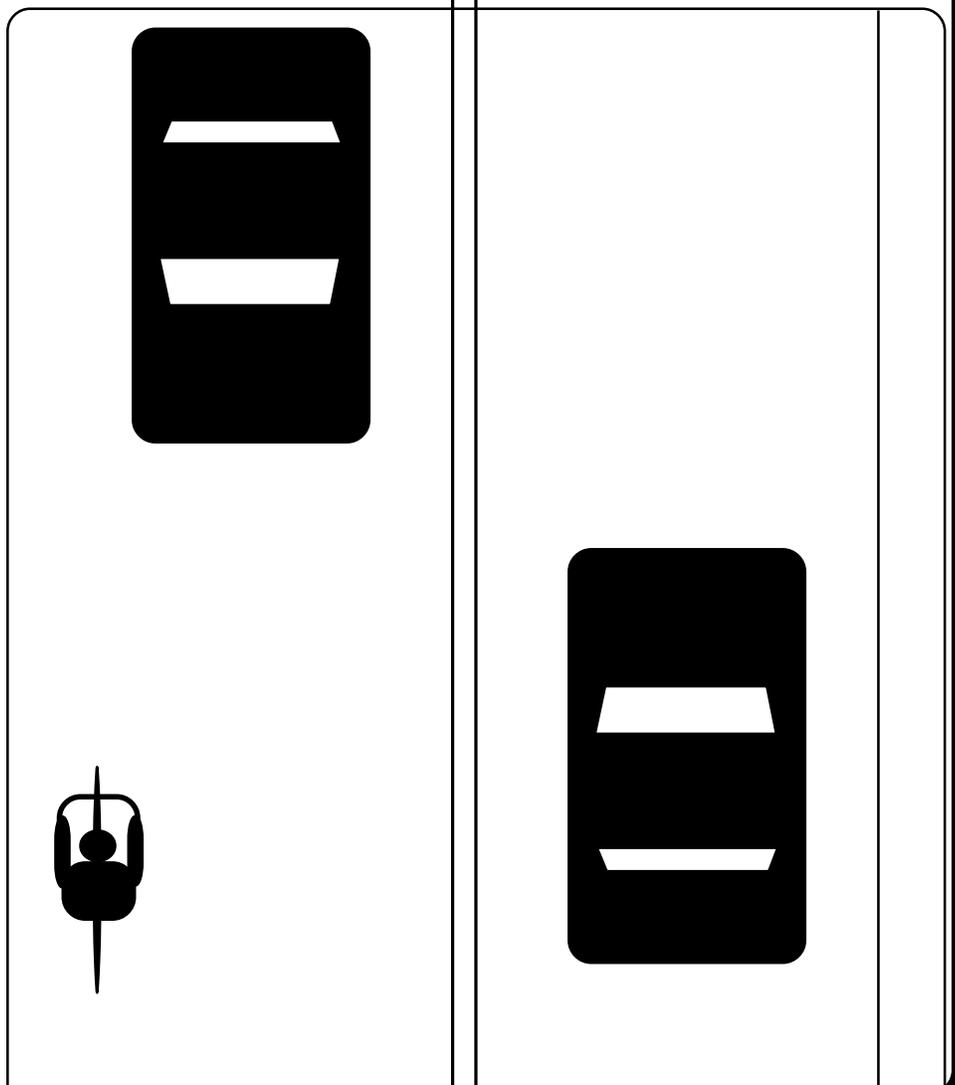
4. The “Chicken Player” -- Riding on the wrong side of the street.

Some cyclists think that it is safer to ride against the flow of traffic. They have probably heard that pedestrians should walk against the flow of traffic, and they assume that the same goes for cyclists.

That is not the case.

A bicycle is a vehicle of the road -- it should move and behave just like a car or a motorcycle.

Running against traffic is especially dangerous when cars are entering or exiting the road. They do not look for traffic riding on the left side of the road, so a cyclist doing so could get hit.

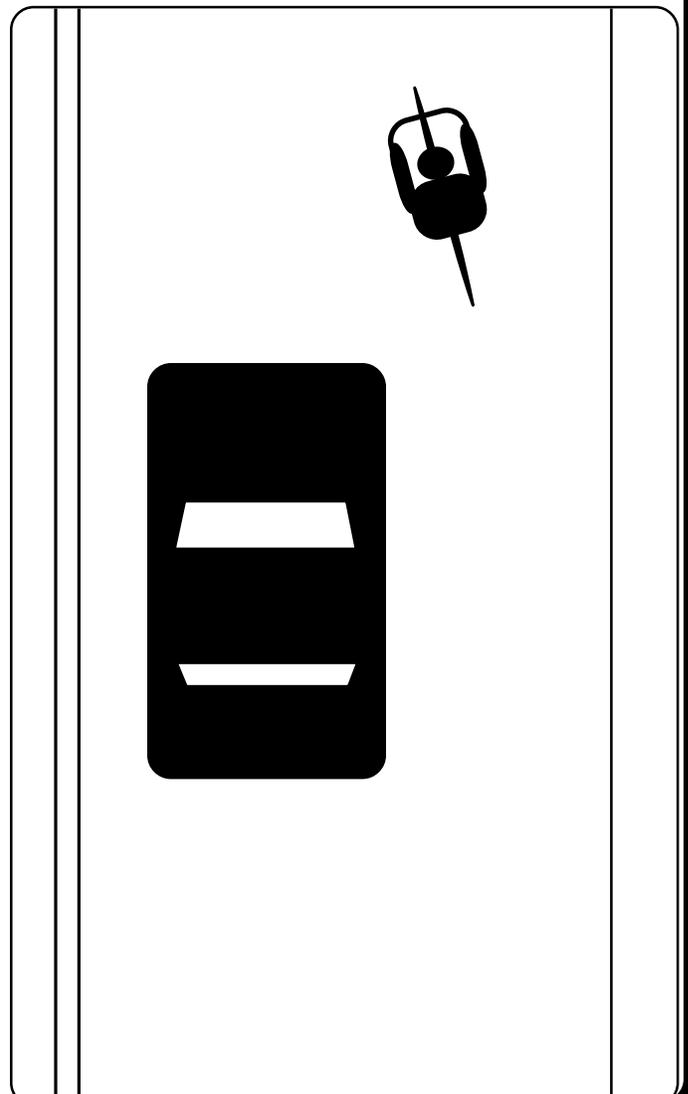


5. The “Random Movement Generator” -- Weaving unpredictably around the road.

Some cyclists -- especially young cyclists -- have not learned how to hold their line while they ride. They weave around fairly unpredictably. This is a threat to themselves and to other cyclists. A weaving cyclist can touch the wheel of another cyclist, causing a crash. And it can also cause cars to behave erratically, which is a threat to all cyclists in the area.

Some cyclists also think it is fun to “hop” curbs and jump their bikes on and off the road. Those cyclists are to be avoided.

Sometimes there is an obstacle in the road, and it is necessary for a bicycle to weave a little to go around it. In this case, weaving is somewhat understandable. However, even then, the cyclist should still look behind to see if anybody will be affected by the weaving, and if possible she should signal her intent to weave with a hand signal.

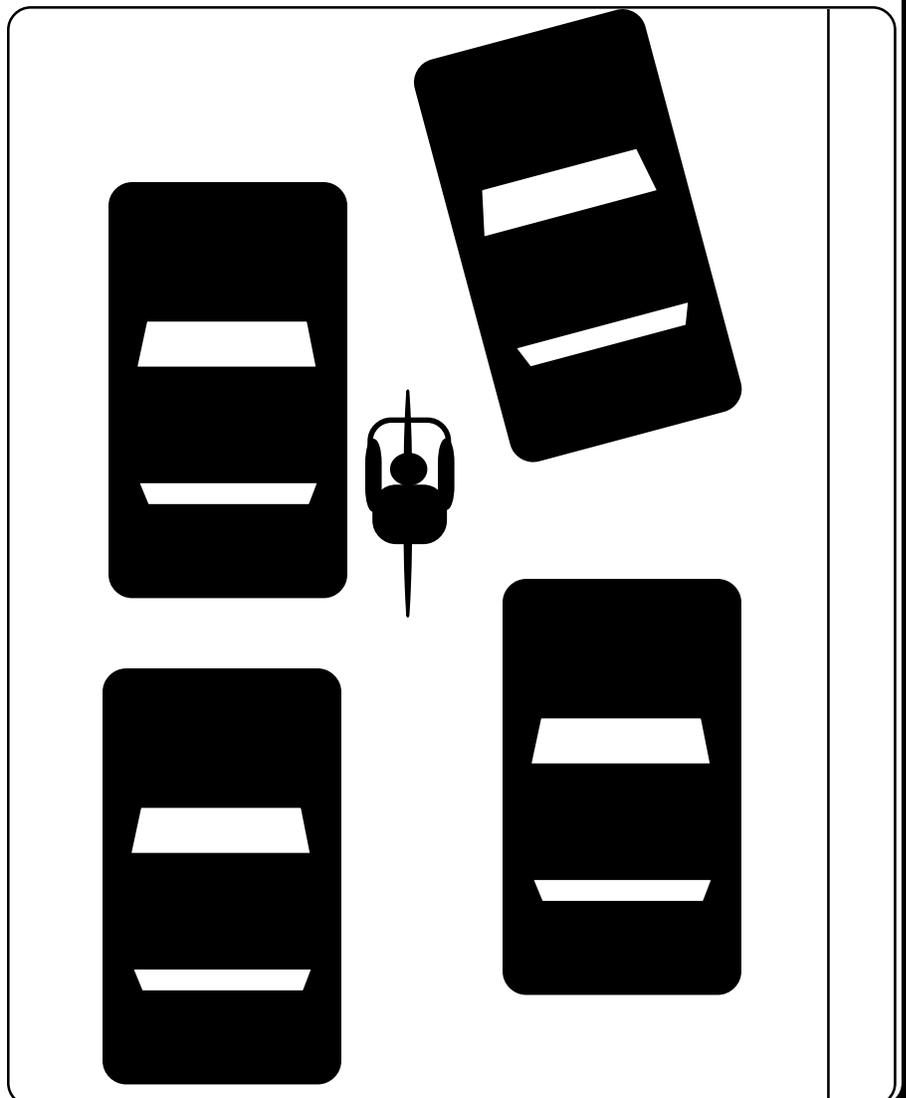


6. The “Lane Maker” -- Riding in the space between cars.

Gridlock traffic is extremely annoying when you are on a bike. All of the exhaust fumes, sitting in the sun, getting nowhere -- nobody wants to experience that. However, it is also fairly dangerous to just weave around and through the stalled cars.

Cars that are stuck in traffic are often driven by impatient people who want to get un-stuck. If they see a break or a space, they will take it, and they will usually do so very aggressively. If you are a cyclist coming up between cars, you could easily get hit by a driver trying to quickly lunge into an open space.

The right thing to do in this situation is VERY slowly and cautiously move up the right side of traffic, close to the curb. Be especially careful at driveways and intersections. And as soon as you can, get off of that street -- move over to a less-busy, parallel street if one exists.



7. The “Phantom” -- Riding without lights at night.

Riding at night is a lot of fun, but it is also dangerous -- most bicycle accidents that involve adults happen in the dark. Car headlights are extremely limited in their power and scope, and they do little to illuminate a cyclist riding in the dark. Reflectors help some, and reflective vests are a very good idea. However reflective materials do not help the cyclist who is attempting to cross traffic, or who is outside of the beam of a car's headlights.

Nothing beats lights for safe riding at night. A headlight actually does not have to be very bright to be seen, and a flashing tail light can usually be seen from both the side and rear.

The brighter, albeit more expensive, headlights are preferable and recommended for night riding. Nocturnal animals wandering the streets in the dark can cause a very nasty accident -- a dim headlight might not be sufficient to reveal a racoon or possum wandering down the road.

Just a few dollars invested in front and rear lights can easily save a life, and make night riding a lot more enjoyable.

