You may be questioning the role of a motoring organisation in offering information about cycles and cycling. But GEM Motoring Assist has been a supporter of safer cycling initiatives for many years. Today, more than ever, we want to encourage greater use of bicycles wherever possible.

The benefits speak for themselves: cycling is great exercise, it can often be a faster means of making a journey – and in these days of spiraling fuel costs it’s potentially good for the planet and your pocket.

If you are already a cyclist, or are thinking about becoming one, we want you to be as safe as possible. With that in mind we hope you will find the information in this leaflet useful.

David Williams, MBE
Chief Executive GEM Motoring Assist
Introduction

This leaflet aims to set out a few basic points which will help ensure your cycling is as safe and enjoyable as possible. It’s easy to feel vulnerable, particularly on streets where there’s lots of traffic. That’s why it’s so important to ensure you’re always in full control, your bicycle is in excellent working order and you’re making good use of appropriate safety and visibility equipment.

Remember, when you’re on the public road, you are part of the traffic. The same rules generally apply to you as to cars, trucks, buses and other road users, so make sure you obey traffic rules and signals. We recommend a good look at the Highway Code, which as well as offering a lot of general information, has a section specifically for cyclists.

In this leaflet

Cyclists and the law 4
Visibility, clothing and helmet use 5
Manoeuvres, turns, stopping 6
Carrying and towing children 7
Maintenance 8
Bikes on cars and public transport 9
Safety checklist 10
More about GEM Motoring Assist 11
Cyclists and the law

The Highway Code is the best source of information for all road users – including cyclists. Remember, it is essential that you comply with every ‘MUST’ instruction (printed in red capitals in The Highway Code). You must also obey signals given by police officers, traffic wardens and school crossing patrols.

As well as the signs and signals which apply to every road user, the following rules constitute a selection of specific relevance to cyclists:

- You must not cycle on a pavement

- You must not cross the stop line when the traffic lights are red

- At night your bicycle must have white front and rear red lights lit. Flashing lights are permitted but it is recommended that you use a steady front lamp if you are cycling in areas without street lighting. It must also be fitted with a red rear reflector (and amber pedal reflectors, if manufactured after 1/10/85)

- On a cycle track segregated from a pedestrian track you must keep to the side intended for cyclists. Remember that pedestrians may not always understand the segregation and can wander into a cycle lane

- You must not carry a passenger unless your bicycle has been built or adapted to carry one

- You must not ride under the influence of drink or drugs, including medicine

Cycle Lanes

If you’re on a bicycle, it makes sense to use a cycle lane if it’s provided. The Highway Code doesn’t insist on this, but states that cyclists “keep within the lane when practicable”. On a bicycle you are often permitted to use dedicated bus lanes, but check local signage to be sure – and remember that bus lanes with specific timings can be used by other vehicles outside those times.

Advance Cycle Stop Lines

Many traffic light junctions now have these advance cycle stop lines, which offer cyclists a marked, coloured waiting area, usually with a cycle symbol on it. There are two key advantages offered by these areas. First, you get a safe and highly visible place to wait while the lights are red. Second, you can move ahead of other traffic, making it safer to turn left or right.
Your cycle helmet

If you are involved in any sort of collision, a helmet will protect your head and reduce the likelihood of head injury. That's because the helmet cushions your fall and will take some of the force of an impact which would otherwise be absorbed entirely by your skull and brain.

When you choose a helmet, check that it has a BS kitemark as well as CE mark. Check with the vendor that it also meets the appropriate British Standard (BS EN 1078) and is Snell certified. Check also that it is always fastened and fits comfortably around your head in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. Expect your helmet to last up to five years, but dispose of it immediately if it sustains a heavy impact.

See...

We have already established that the law requires you to use front and rear lights when cycling in the dark. These lights primarily help other road users to see you, though they also give you some view of the road ahead. A well-fitted light should shine directly ahead and slightly downwards. It makes sense to carry spare batteries and bulbs with you, especially on longer journeys.

... and be seen

It stands to reason that you want other road users to see you easily, as this greatly reduces the chance of being involved in a collision. Choose a comfortably-fitting fluorescent orange or yellow jacket that is also reflective. Alternatively a fluorescent and reflective sash-belt worn over one shoulder offers an effective way of ensuring you are conspicuous.

Clothing

Because cycling is good exercise, you should quickly become warm after a short time in the saddle. Keep dry with a set of lightweight waterproofs you can slip into and out of easily. Keep hands warm in cold weather with a sturdy pair of gloves or mittens which offer a good grip on the handlebars. It makes sense to keep a change of clothes at your place of work, especially if you plan a fairly energetic ride from home.

From a safety point of view, bicycle clips (preferably fluorescent/reflective) play the important part of keeping your clothing away from the chain, and will help make you more conspicuous to others.
Cycling manoeuvres

In a small leaflet such as this, there simply is not enough room to provide exact guidance for all the moves you make on a bicycle. Here, instead, are just a few carefully chosen tips relating to potentially hazardous manoeuvres which we hope will keep you safe:

Turning right

When turning from minor to main road:
- Give that all-important ‘lifesaver’ look over your right shoulder to check for other vehicles behind you.
- If it’s safe, give an arm signal which clearly tells others you intend to turn right.
- Keep looking all around for traffic, especially along both lanes of the main road. Remember, vehicles can come up to you very quickly.
- Try to make eye contact with other road users.

When turning from main to minor road:
- Give a lifesaver look before starting to pull out.
- Give the arm signal which shows your intention to turn right. Give another lifesaver before you make the turn.
- If the road behind you is clear, pull out into the centre of the road and turn right once there is no oncoming traffic. If there is oncoming traffic then stop in the middle of the road until it has passed.

Overtaking

- If you’re overtaking another cyclist or road user going slower than you, consider ringing your bell or giving a similar audible warning.
- Before moving out to overtake, give a lifesaver look to check for vehicles behind you.
- Look ahead before moving out, to ensure you have enough time and space to complete the overtake.
Cycling with children

Family cycling trips can be fun for everyone involved; just make sure you look after young children by following a few simple safety tips.

Infants and toddlers will need to be carried in properly fitted child seats which conform to BS EN 14344 2004, the appropriate British standard for child bicycle seats. Good cycle shops can advise on which seat might suit you best. It's worth paying extra money to get the seat fitted on your bicycle, especially if you may not be fully confident of doing the job properly yourself.

When choosing a seat, ensure there are footrests to guard against feet straying into wheel spokes. Check how the harness locks and releases, and make sure your child is comfortable in the seat. Lightweight seats are especially important when you'll be doing the pedalling!

Many little children fall asleep on bicycle journeys, so make sure you use the harness every time, to prevent slipping and injury. You will also want to ensure your passenger is warm enough. Finally, do insist your child wears a helmet on every journey.

Safe family cycling

- Make sure before you set off that every rider wears a helmet and high visibility clothing

- When riding in a family or mixed adult and child group, it's best practice to position one adult and the front and another adult at the rear

- If there's only one adult, he/she should ideally ride behind the child or children

- Be prepared to go at the speed of the slowest rider
Looking after your Bicycle

In a few short lines, we cannot cover every aspect of bicycle maintenance, but we would recommend the following before every journey:

- Check the tyre condition and correct inflation and check the wheels are secure in their frames.
- Check the condition of front and rear brake pads, also check brake cable function and tyre tread depth.
- Push the bicycle forwards and apply the brakes, to ensure they work.
- Check the gears are working (ask someone else to lift the rear of the bicycle while you pedal with your hands and change the gears).

It makes sense to ensure you have the following items with you on journeys:

- a bicycle pump (track pumps are best as most feature a pressure gauge and provide high pressure easily).
- a puncture repair kit.
- a spare inner tube.

Don’t risk having your bicycle stolen!

- Always lock your bicycle when leaving it, however briefly.
- Secure it to a proper stand, and lock it through the frame.
- Make sure the wheels are secure – or consider removing them.
- Remove anything that can be removed, such as lights and the pump.
- Lock your bike when you get home. After all, more than 50% of bicycle thefts are from owners’ homes.
Transporting your bicycle

On a car: If you choose a good cycle rack system, you should be able to transport up to four bicycles safely on your car. However, it’s vital to observe certain rules:

- Do not let the bicycles obscure the driver’s view
- Do not obscure the rear lights or number plate: not only is this dangerous, it’s also an offence
- Check your insurance situation regarding cycle racks: most insurers will cover you for theft of a bicycle from a rack.
- Make sure that your rack and cycles are all securely fixed and adjusted. It’s well worth stopping somewhere safe after a short distance to check everything and make any adjustments.

On public transport

Trains: Many train operating companies have policies on the carriage of bicycles on sections of route at certain times. Bicycle storage facilities are available at many railway stations. If you plan taking your bicycle by train, it’s worth checking in advance to see whether you need to reserve a place for your bicycle, and whether you will need to pay for it.

Coaches: National Express will carry fully dismantled bicycles, subject to space being available.

Ferries: It’s usual for bicycles to be locked on the car deck during ferry journeys. Check in advance with your ferry company in case you have to pay extra.