

University Police encourage bicycle safety

By MANDY CATER
Staff writer

Every semester Texas A&M is invaded by hordes of students. With construction and traffic jams becoming ever-growing problems, students are opting for alternatives to automobiles. The buzz is bike travel, which seems to continually blossom in popularity. Students take to sidewalks, streets and trails with the whizz of bike wheels.

Sgt. Allan Baron of University Police Department's Crime Prevention Unit said the lack of parking on campus is the main reason for this growth. Many students choose bikes for their easy access to buildings rather than fight with parking lot overcrowding.

This increase in bicycle traffic creates concerns for bike safety. "The main problem is that they [bicyclists] don't follow the rules of the roadway," Baron said. "They are required to follow the same rules as a vehicle."

These rules include yielding and stopping according to road signs and keeping to the far right of the roadway. Bicyclists are encouraged to ride with the flow of traffic, slowing at all corners whether or not there is a sign.

Perhaps the most important thing for cyclists is to be aware of their surroundings. Experts suggest cyclists should always be on the look-out for pedestrians and automobiles, using hand signals to alert others of movement.

The Illinois State Police said bicyclists should always let cars and people go first, not just dart in and out of traffic and crowds.

To avoid accidents, cyclists must be attuned to the presence of cars, both moving and parked. Listening for danger signals and staying at least a car-door's length away from parked cars are some tips for safe travel on the roads.

Eric Walker, a senior chemistry major, started riding his bike to campus after having problems with the bus system. He said as long as bikers are careful, traffic is not

a major problem. "I always look behind when I change lanes," Walker said. "A big problem with people riding bikes is that they don't follow signs and traffic rules."

Cyclists should avoid traveling on streets with heavy traffic, especially Texas Avenue, where a city ordinance prohibits bicycles. No matter how quick a cyclist can pedal, a car can always go faster and hit harder.

Being conscious of pedestrians is another key to bike safety. Being on a bike does not make one the king of the road. For example, bikers are expected to walk their bike through crosswalks that are not at intersections and slow

down for crowds. Tom Williams, Parking, Transit and Traffic Services Director, said bikers need to exercise courtesy to pedestrians.

"Bikers should consider themselves like a vehicle," Williams said. "They should not consider themselves pedestrians on wheels."

Wearing appropriate gear can also help keep bikers out of the emergency room. Even though many students might worry about looking different, wearing a helmet can be a lifesaver.

The University of Oklahoma's bike safety Web site reminds students that a fashion faux pas is worth it, if it keeps one from getting a cracked skull.

When those late-night munchies kick in, it is important to wear bright colors and make sure the bike has reflectors. Texas law requires a white light in the front, and a red reflector in the back.

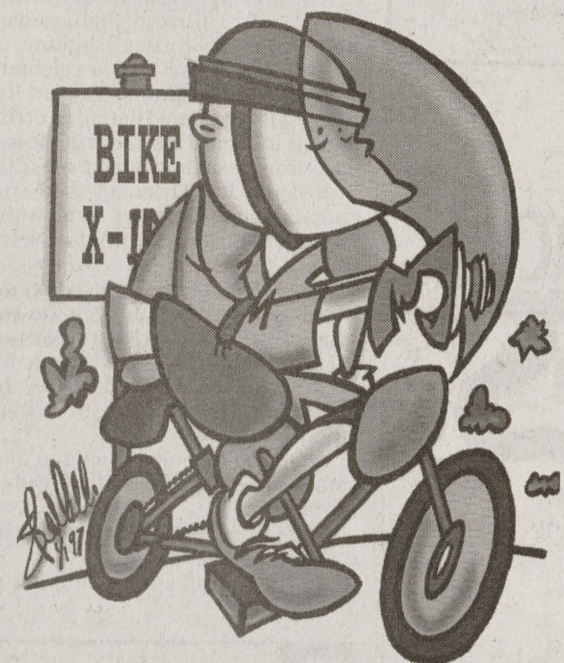
Biking is not for everyone. If one does not feel confident, they can choose other modes of transportation. Being unsure can make riding a bike an unnecessary frustration.

Haruka Kaneko, a sophomore general studies major, rode her bike to campus for the first, and possibly last, time Wednesday.

"It's really scary," Kaneko said. "It's very crowded, and pedestrians are always walking in front of you."

Although it may seem trite and common sense, bike safety is an important issue. Bryan-College Station citizen Wayne Bryan was killed this summer in a cycling accident. Bryan, the owner of AggieLand Cycling and Fitness was struck by a car while biking on Texas Highway 30.

Biking can be convenient, it is environmentally sound and there is no scrounging for gas money. But biking requires care and awareness on the streets and on campus. Bikers are encouraged to keep their bikes in good shape, sport that trendy safety gear and stay to the right on roads. And leave the popping wheelies and "pumping" people on your handlebars in childhood memories.



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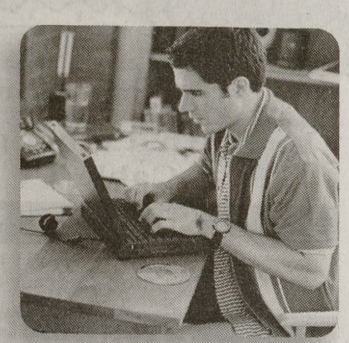
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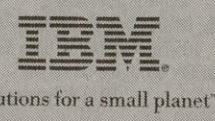
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