

Road safety watch

Bad driving and speeding are two areas a forthcoming Government road safety document must address, says **Roger Geffen**



This April the Department for Transport is due to publish a 'strategic framework for road safety', a hang-over from the previous Government's 'road safety strategy'. CTC wants two key elements present: a recognition that cycling gets safer the more cyclists there are; and a real incentive for councils and others to tackle the fears that deter people from cycling, such as speeding and bad driving.

The strategic framework must advise councils to aim for more as well as safer cycling. There is ample evidence that cycling gets safer the more cyclists there are, as CTC's Safety in Numbers campaign proved – see ctc.org.uk/safetyinnumbers. So it's no longer acceptable to scare people away from cycling as a way to reduce cyclist casualties!

The strategic framework must also directly address the traffic-related fears of potential cyclists, by making a commitment to lower speed limits and a stronger and better-enforced legal framework for tackling bad driving. Four recent incidents gave stark reminders of how poorly our society is doing at the latter...

Bike, camera... inaction!

Two of these incidents were filmed by the cyclists involved, as they had helmet-cameras. David Brennan, who wrote an article about using

David Brennan's helmet-cam footage of appalling driving was apparently not proof enough...

helmet-cam footage in the Feb/Mar 09 issue, was nearly wiped out by a lorry driver while commuting in Scotland. His camera was running and he put the clip online – search for '20cm from Death – Outcome' at youtube.com. However, the prosecuting authorities took no action against the lorry driver.

In England, cycling barrister Martin Porter QC and a fellow cyclist found themselves cut up by a driver, who then pushed Martin off his bike into the path of an oncoming car. It stopped 18 inches from him. The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) took no action despite the helmet-cam footage, and then failed to respond to a letter from Martin asking for the case to be referred to a more senior prosecutor. Martin's account can be found at thecyclingsilk.blogspot.com.

But some police forces have been able to use helmet-cam footage to secure convictions. The Met Police told CTC they had thought that they would only be able to issue warning letters to the owners of vehicles reported for involvement in bad driving via Stop Smidsy to their own Roadsafelondon website (met.police.uk/roadsafelondon). So they were pleasantly surprised to find they were able to secure convictions based on helmet-cam footage.

Dangerous = dangerous

The two other bad driving incidents were tragic: the cyclists involved were killed. The driver who killed time triallist Cath Ward, of the Solihull Cycling Club, received a community sentence. He was allowed to plead guilty to a charge of causing death by 'careless' rather than 'dangerous' driving. Yet he drove into the back of her on the A435 on a clear summer evening last August, when she was correctly positioned on the road. If that's not

'dangerous', what is?

CTC's Stop Smidsy campaign is compiling a growing dossier of cases where the police, prosecutors or the courts make decisions that fail to address the gravity of bad driving offences – see stop-smidsy.org.uk/case-studies. We are also building up parliamentary support for the idea that as we do not tolerate 'carelessness' from train drivers, on construction sites, or even in the management of playgrounds and swimming pools, we must not accept carelessness on our roads.

The other fatal incident did result in (in CTC's opinion) a legally correct outcome: the conviction of lorry driver Dennis Putz, who received a seven-year prison sentence and a life-time driving ban for killing cyclist Cat Patel through dangerous driving. The judge found that Putz had been talking on his mobile and had 'the most God-awful hangover' at the time.

Educating drivers

CTC is seeing growing interest from responsible freight operators – including Cemex and Aggregate Industries (sponsors of our Fillthathole competition, see page 7) – in promoting good practice solutions for cyclists' safety. These include providing actual cycle training for their lorry drivers, not just cycle-awareness training. This follows on from a ground-breaking scheme run by Lambeth Council for their refuse-vehicle drivers.

CTC is now opening up dialogue with motoring organisations to promote good driving – also through Stop Smidsy. CTC is also trying to persuade the Government to research whether young people who have had Bikeability cycle training become not just better cyclists but also better drivers thanks to the road-awareness they have learned.