



Q&A

Your technical, health and legal queries answered by Cycle's experts



Q I live in Cambridge near the longest guided busway in the world. It has a tarmac, traffic-free path beside it for cyclists, walkers, horse riders and others. Since it opened, there have been three fatal accidents from people being hit by buses. As well as fencing off the busway, the council has put up new signs for users, including a 15mph limit for cyclists (even though cycling speed has not been noted as a factor). What is the legality of enforcing this speed limit?

D Mitchell

While speed limits set under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 only apply to motor vehicles, those riding bikes can still be charged with careless or dangerous cycling offences, depending on the circumstances. There are no current plans to extend the speed limit legislation to cyclists on the public highway.

Legal e-bikes (electrically assisted pedal cycles or EAPCs) are restricted to 15.5mph while under motor assistance. At faster assisted speeds, an e-bike is not an EAPC and would be treated as a motor vehicle. The usual traffic speed limits would then apply.

People who cycle have a general duty, like all road users, to behave in a safe and responsible manner (as per the Highway Code). Those who do not adopt a responsible attitude become liable for prosecution.

The Crime and Policing Bill is introducing new definitions of offences committed by cyclists, with much higher penalties than were available to the courts previously. Evidence of speed will often be relevant in any prosecutions.

One example of speeding cyclists being issued with Fixed Penalty Notices relates to cyclists using London parks and commons, which are subject to bylaw speed limits. There remains doubt about the testing and accuracy of cycling speeds when punishment is on the cards. Many bikes have no means of displaying speeds. Unlike cars, pedal cycles are not required to have speedometers.

Commentators have questioned the enforceability of the Cambridgeshire speed limits for cyclists. But they were introduced – alongside the reduction of the speed limit for buses along the guided route – in response to a £6 million fine for health and safety breaches, and they were intended to improve safety.

Nadia Kerr

Q Is this chainring dead or worthy of another chain or two? I put a new chain on and there seems to be a notchiness about how it runs. It doesn't pick up from little to big in the smooth manner I'm used to.

Nearholmer, Cycling UK Forum

A correctly fitted new chain won't cause 'notchiness' unless fitted to worn sprockets, such as your front chainring. The teeth are showing clear signs of wear – a flat ramp leading into a hook. As wear progresses, the transmission will feel progressively 'softer' under power as each chain roller rides up its tooth ramp on engagement.

Deciding when to replace the chainring is subjective. A competition cyclist looking for peak efficiency would fit a new chainring long before this, while a utility rider wanting to maximise lifespan might use it for double the current mileage. It is, after all, 'useable' in the sense that it will transmit power until the chain skips teeth under load.

Richard Hallett

Q Could I use a lever that operates a dropper seatpost by pulling a cable as a gear friction lever?

cycle tramp, Cycling UK Forum

Dropper post levers work by pulling a cable to disengage the lock on the post, which enables it to be lowered by the rider's weight on the saddle. The cable is then released to lock the post in position. While you may get a dropper lever to move a rear mech, it won't keep it in position when you let go.

Richard Hallett