

Cyclists, beware! I'm a red light vigilante on your case

A bike nearly crashed into me — it happens all the time

The Times
07 September 2025
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You might imagine that the number one topic of conversation on my WhatsApp groups would be Taylor and Travis's engagement or who on earth was advising Angela Rayner. But no, it's the number of cyclists who jump red lights, speed through zebra crossings and almost take us out on a daily basis.

Just last week a middle-aged man on a single-speed bike missed crashing into my nine-month-old's pram by inches. We were crossing at a busy junction in my corner of south London, just by my son's nursery — yes, there was a green man — when he came out of nowhere, swerving narrowly around us and speeding off without so much as a shouted apology. I actually felt the breeze, he was so close. What if, as so often happens, I'd had to stop because the baby had turfed yet another toy out of the buggy and he'd ploughed into us? Heart

pounding, I was furious with myself for not yelling. Next time, I promised myself, I would.

Don't worry, that next time will be along any minute. In news that will shock no pedestrian, the number of cyclists jumping red lights — unlawful under the Highway Code — is on the up. A survey in London, Glasgow and Manchester found that, at the worst spots, half of all bikes and scooters didn't stop, with rental ebikes and those delivering food the worst culprits. Times readers also report the problem in places from Cambridge to Nottingham.

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Another recent study found that in London commuters are the biggest offenders. I could have told the researchers that and saved them some time. Only this morning a friend messaged about a man in the City of London wearing a smart suit and tie “weaving through people crossing with the green man and acting as though it was somehow *our* fault and we were an inconvenience”.

That's a theme. “A man actually mocked me the other day when he nearly knocked me down,” one pal says. I'm still upset about a Mamil (middle-aged man in Lycra) who a few months ago screamed at full volume as he flew past me, missing me by centimetres, as if I was the one in the wrong.

I'm aware that I keep writing the word “man” here. Anecdotally I've had more near misses with male cyclists, but friends tell me about young women, yoga mats under their arms or phones in their hands, careering around corners. And people of all ages are doing this — enabled, I think, by the behaviour of food-delivery folk, under time pressure to drop their next order and risking

everyone's safety to do so. Before then I'm sure this was much less of an issue.

But let's apply the brakes for a moment, because I know what you're thinking and yes, of course cars kill more people on the roads every year than bikes. Many pedestrians also don't wait for the green man to cross (not illegal, incidentally). But that doesn't mean we shouldn't be angry with those cyclists who now seem to think red lights are optional. It's only a matter of time before the next awful accident.

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It's why my friends and I have made a pact to tackle them, yelling "hey!", "red light!" and "you're going to hurt someone!" as they whizz past. One pal, herself a keen cyclist, has taken to shouting "red light wanker!" at anyone barrelling through them (dropping the expletive in the presence of children). "I genuinely believe it will shame people into thinking twice, because they're kidding themselves that no one cares," she says.

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Is that what's behind this? Denial that it affects anyone else? When questioned, cyclist friends claim to "only do it if no one's there", which I don't believe. One study found that red light-jumping cyclists blamed "road design", namely a lack of protected cycle lanes and dedicated traffic lights. Which sounds about as convincing as "whoops, didn't see you there".

"Spare a thought for the 50 per cent who do wait at red lights," implores my husband, who commutes to work on his bike and is a stickler for the rules of the road (thank God). He reports that it's causing division in the cycling world too — new friends in his local club are warily venturing, "Er, by the way, I

wait at the lights,” when setting out for rides together. It is, he explains, “making things pretty awkward”.

Still, rather awkward than hurting someone, or indeed being issued a £50 fixed penalty notice by the police, who have been running a pilot scheme to catch unruly cyclists in the City over the summer. Meanwhile, Lime — the company behind those bright green rental bikes — has launched an ad campaign telling riders that it’s illegal.

The sooner the message spreads, the better. Until then I’m considering carrying a megaphone on the nursery run.