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The Law of Riding a Bicycle in Ohio

Q: I often see people riding bicycles on the road. Is that really legal?

A: Yes. Ohio's Traffic Code defines bicycles as "vehicles," which may be lawfully operated on virtually all Ohio roads except freeways or certain limited access roadways.

Q: What rules apply to operating a bicycle on the road?

A: Ohio law requires cyclists to follow the "rules of the road" when riding a bicycle on a roadway. Cyclists must ride with traffic, obey basic traffic laws, stop at stop signs and red lights, and follow all traffic control devices.

When following the rules of the road, a cyclist has exactly the same "right of way" as any car, truck or bus driver.

Q: Do any special rules apply to cyclists on the road?

A: The key "bike law" in Ohio states that a bicycle must be operated "as near to the right side of the roadway as *practicable*..." The law further states that a cyclist does not have to ride along the right side of the lane when it is "*unreasonable or unsafe to do so*," such as when it is necessary to avoid:

- fixed objects or parked cars;
- surface hazards; or
- moving vehicles; and
- if the lane is "...*too narrow* for the bicycle and an overtaking vehicle to travel safely side by side within the lane."

Cyclists are also permitted to ride "two abreast" in the same lane. Ohio law does not require cyclists to move out of the way of faster traffic.

Q: Are there any equipment requirements for bicycles being operated on the roadway?

A: Yes. Cyclists must use a white light in the front and both a red reflector and a red light in the rear between sunset and sunrise or whenever the weather makes lights necessary. This is important, since many serious or fatal crashes occur at night or when weather causes poor visibility.

Q: When I'm driving a car, can I cross a double-yellow line to pass a cyclist?

A: The traffic law allows you to cross a double yellow line to pass ANY slower vehicle, but only if:

- The slower vehicle is traveling at less than the posted speed limit;
- The faster vehicle is capable of passing the slower vehicle without exceeding the posted speed limit;
- There is sufficient sight distance ahead to permit the passing maneuver to be safely accomplished, taking into account the speed of the slower vehicle.

This is not specifically a "bicycle" law, but rather a law that covers passing vehicles such as slower moving tractors and Amish buggies.

Q: Can my child ride a bicycle in the street?

A: Yes. Ohio law does not include an age limit or age requirement for riding bicycles on a roadway. However, riders of all ages must follow the rules of the road. Parents should evaluate their children's riding abilities and educate them about the rules of the road. Make sure your child can ride safely and predictably.

Q: Can I ride my bicycle on the sidewalk?

A: It depends. Ohio law does not prohibit sidewalk cycling. In fact, state law prohibits municipalities from imposing "bike bans" that force cyclists to use sidewalks instead of roads. Otherwise, Ohio law leaves it to municipalities to decide where cyclists can ride.

Many cities do not permit sidewalk cycling, but some cities modify this rule by banning sidewalk riders over a specific age or by banning sidewalk riding in defined "business districts." Check your local city ordinances to see if and where sidewalk riding is allowed.

Q: Must cyclists use bike lanes?

A: Surprisingly, no. "Bike lanes" are typically created by local governments and are not governed specifically by state law. State law mandates only that cities may not force cyclists to use sidewalks or "sidepaths" (bike trails that are not part of the roadway).

Regular road cyclists often find that bike lanes contain litter, gravel, dangerous sewers, glass and debris. Poorly planned bike lanes can also present dangers.

Q: If I am injured by a negligent motorist while riding my bicycle on the roadway, what insurance coverage applies?

A: Typically, the motorist's auto policy applies to pay your claim. However, cyclists are surprised to learn that their own auto insurance may come into play as well as their own homeowner's insurance, health insurance and any "umbrella" or excess coverage they may have. Be sure to consult with an experienced personal injury lawyer to before moving forward with any such claim.

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This "Law You Can Use" consumer legal information column was provided by the Ohio State Bar Association. It was prepared by attorney Steve Magas ("Ohio's Bike Lawyer") of The Magas Firm in Cincinnati.

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