



## Your Guide to Outdoor Recreation & Active Travel

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**Expert Chain Gang** >



## Expert Answers

### Who Has What Rights on the Road?

#### Danny's Question.

**What are the biking laws as far as authority of bikes on the road? For example, do cars have to watch out for us or do we have to get off the road?**

#### Ethan Gelber's Answer.

The laws, as I understand them, are simple: Bikes are vehicles and subject to the same laws and etiquette as other vehicles on the road. Same roads, same rights, same responsibilities, as some people say. Thus, for example by law cyclists must stop at stop signals, be clear about any intent to turn, and even give priority to the right at crossroads without signals. Similarly, the unspoken rules of etiquette usually hold true whereby motorists (and bikers) yield to pedestrians. By extension, many motorists willingly yield to cyclists. However, there is no hard and fast rule that grants any right of way to cyclists (unless they are in a marked bike lane or managed by bike-specific traffic lights).



Ethan Gelber

Unfortunately, the confusion over who legally, logically, and morally has the right of way leads to many misunderstandings. Road rage — the term referring to a motorist's temper-driven inability to cope with people on the roads using alternative forms of transportation — is far too common. Right or wrong, drivers take the law into their own hands — often breaking them — and the results to cyclists can be mortal. For more on this, please read Patrick O'Grady's excellent [screed about road rage](#).

Given this confused and sad state of affairs, regardless of expected etiquette, moral might, and right and wrong, cyclists would be wise to pedal defensively and expect the worst from drivers. At least until law enforcement and department of transportation officials recognize the set of issues involved in sharing the road, and punish offenders — both motorists and cyclists (but especially motorists) — strictly but fairly.

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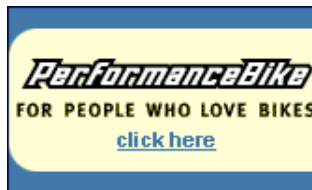
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In the meantime, I honestly believe that no matter what the law says, it is better to be pleasantly surprised by someone's generous road respect than it is to be flattened by his or her rage.

I also firmly agree with the strategy adopted by the League of American Bicyclists. Their "[Share the Road](#)" message is a solid base upon which to build a set of safe practices beneficial to all. For more about this, please see Chain Gang Expert Biker Dennis Coello's articles about [Bike Safety](#) and [City-Riding Etiquette](#).

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