

## Why Do Some Cyclists Have Fewer Flats?

The savviest way to avoid flats is to avoid riding over stuff that causes them.

About ten years ago, two RBC cyclists rode from coast to coast, following essentially the same route, and when they got back, they gave a report at the Annual Winter Meeting. One cyclist reported riding on the shoulder most of the way and she had three flats, not bad! The other reported riding in the lane most of the way, and she had zero flats, better! Now, anecdotal evidence is proof of nothing, however, please continue reading:

### Plan Ahead

Try to avoid swerving wildly about and crashing into your club mates, while at the same time avoiding running over rocks, pot holes and similar obstructions. Familiarize yourself well enough with your bike so that you can correctly judge what you can run over without getting a flat. From time to time, you will find that you need to run over something, such as a small patch of gravel, in order to avoid running into one of your cycling buddies. It's good to know what the limits are.

Get in the habit of unweighting the bike, especially getting off the saddle and using your knees as shock absorbers, when crossing unavoidable obstacles like railroad tracks. "Riding light" can significantly reduce the number of pinch flats that you experience. The rear wheel takes most of the punishment, otherwise. Really abusive, "heavy" riding can bend rims and break spokes.

### Choose Your Path

Motorists, with their wide tires, sweep the pavement of broken glass, Michelin wires and gravel. The motorist tire tracks are the best places for cyclists for this reason.

Further, the frequency of motorists' using these tracks, and the weight and speed of their vehicles, result in these sections of the pavement being polished smooth relative to the road as a whole, until they begin to pot hole. The smoothness of these sections has the added advantage of providing the least rolling resistance for the much narrower and much higher pressure tires of our vehicles. Therefore, in these sections, you will go faster with less effort than you would have had you been riding nearer the road edge or even in the middle of the lane.

### Know Your Rights

It's also legal, courteous and safe to ride in the motorist tire tracks under most circumstances, even though occasionally, there will be motorists who do not understand the "courteous" part. The fact that some motorists don't understand this does not mean that it is discourteous of you. Doing something unusual and being discourteous are not synonymous. And as is always true, legality and safety (especially your safety) trump perceived courtesy. Console yourself with the sure knowledge that the motorist who is honking at you has probably seen you and is therefore less likely to rear end you. (Extremely unlikely in any case, if the collision statistics of the past forty years are to be believed.)

On crudely-paved roads, the sections outside of the tire tracks can produce a less conformable ride and even present a fall hazard in extreme cases. The closer to the edge we choose to ride, the more likely it is that we will fall.

I hesitate to use the grammatically-correct possessive -- "motorists' tire tracks" -- because to do so would imply that these are possessed by and therefore owned by the motorists. No one pays a road tax. Very likely you pay income taxes, and very likely you are also a motorist and pay gasoline taxes. The road is "owned" by the people, even by the people who pay no taxes, just as the air and the airwaves are also owned by the people.

God does not levy taxes on the use of the Earth and the air and the water. Keep that in mind, and enjoy your ride.