

mike leonard



Knuckleheads Don't Give A Hoot About Bike Safety

It happened last July, but for Charles McClary, it could have been yesterday.

“I was going for a bike ride around the lake with a friend of mine and my son. We were riding out on (Ind.) 446 and were just past Paynetown, riding single file,” he recalls. “My buddy was in front, my son was between us; I’m third in line. We feel a vehicle go by us very close. And then it starts coming closer.”

The two middle-aged men and the 19-year-old are all experienced bicyclists. They’ve been in similar, pulse-quickening situations before — every time with the awareness that while motor vehicles and bicycles often have close calls, one day, it could turn tragic.

“The guy [driving an SUV] was hauling a boat and the trailer behind him swings even closer, the boat very close to brushing my buddy’s shoulder. When it gets to my son, the tandem wheels of the trailer push him off the road, into a ditch. Fortunately, he’s able to ride back up and on the road. But had we been at a guardrail, it would have been catastrophic.”

The men were upset, naturally, but as dedicated and experienced riders, they weren’t especially angry, says McClary, an IT director at Indiana University Recreational Sports. “We were on the downhill heading to the causeway and we were hoping the guy would be pulling over to the Cutright boat ramp. We did follow him to confront him, but not aggressively. We just wanted to say, ‘Hey, were you aware of what happened back there?’ Maybe he forgot he was pulling a boat and how that’s going to swing out wider than the car.”

The driver of the SUV was a young man about 20, with Indianapolis license plates, and he stared blankly at the bicyclists when they described what had just happened. “You can talk all you want,” he said. “But I don’t give a shit if I run you off the road, and I’d do it again.”

Says McClary, “It was just one of those jaw-dropping moments. ‘I would do it again.’ I can’t get that out of my head.”

This wasn’t someone in a hurry to get to work, pick up a waiting child, or take care of an emergency. This was a guy looking to put his boat in Lake Monroe and go have some fun.

McClary took photographs of the car, its license plate, and the boat and turned them all in to the Monroe County Sheriff’s Office. Nothing ever became of it. He’d have been happy with a simple call from law enforcement to the offender — a wake-up call if nothing else.

A story on page 48 in this issue reports on the City of Bloomington’s efforts to make the city a safer place for cyclists, motorists, and pedestrians. The experience the three cyclists had last July illustrates why it’s so important.

“You see those purple signs around town that say we’re a bicycle-friendly city but I don’t think you’d hear that from cyclists. You get it from the politicians,” McClary says. “Nobody’s willing to wait 30 seconds to get around riders — not even for someone’s life and well-being.”

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