



May 27, 2020

Wearing a bike helmet could save your life someday, stylish or not

Bike helmets save lives. There are more stories about a serious injury being avoided or a life saved by wearing a helmet than there are the inverse. Perhaps there is a reason for that. While bike helmet laws vary from city to city, there is no doubt that it is an integral piece of safety equipment to wear when cycling.

Actual evidence varies, but the general consensus starting with childhood is that wearing a helmet is part of riding a bike. As riders age, many decide to cease wearing a helmet. We observe this on streets and sidewalks, children wearing helmets riding with adults not wearing helmets. Wearing a bike helmet might save your life someday, but you won't know if you don't wear one.

Yet, in places like the Netherlands, one of the safest countries for cyclists, almost no-one wears a helmet. Contrast this with the U.K., where there was a push for mandatory use but current law still states helmets are a personal choice and not required to ride. That doesn't mean you shouldn't wear one, but you should take into account how your city infrastructure supports cyclists as well as the overall attitude of drivers towards cyclists.

For instance, some research points to helmets offering less protection in the way cyclists are perceived by passing drivers, in the sense that a driver is less inclined to give a cyclist more space when passing. Considering the rate of speed of most e-bikes, it seems like this hypothesis would be a reason to wear a helmet, as cars are less likely to give as much space to a motorized e-bike than a traditional bike.

Wearing a helmet might be a great safety device but it's not required.

Logic might dictate that anyone in the possible path of a vehicle should wear one, including pedestrians, but that likely wouldn't go over well. So the only real detractor to wearing a bike helmet is how fashionable it is. The complaint can't possibly be "because I don't like protecting my head" so it must be "this doesn't look cool on my head" instead. It's a series of padding and straps, how could it possibly be cool?

Thankfully, there are a lot of weird helmets to choose from. Or you can go with some super engineered helmet to protect your dome. I prefer the classic style of skateboard helmets even though they are usually too small for my head, so I have to relent and settle for a regular bike helmet. Of course, I had to add my own artistic twist to it.

When it comes to wearing a bike helmet you have two choices.

There are tons of different styles to choose from, all performing the same function of protecting your skull from cracking (or at least being a handy scoop for your brains). A helmet doesn't allow you to ignore the rules of the road, it's not impervious armour. A helmet does allow you to ride with a bit more caution though, which is a good thing. The decision here isn't about style, it's between protecting your head or not protecting your head.

We have this strange approach to wearing bike helmets, because it is a personal choice in most places. The choice being, "do I want to die today?" When riding an e-bike, consider the increased rate of speed. Consider the bike lane, which may have slower-moving bikes in it. Consider pedestrians, consider cars attitudes towards e-bikes, consider bumps and unfinished asphalt.

There are so many variables on the road, each one able to cause an accident and a head injury. So find a helmet that matches your style — in the sense of style being keeping your skull in one piece — and ride safe.

Curtis Silver