

Cyclist-friendly cars?

Poster presentation report

David S Garfield, The Oaks, 37 Lamb's Lane South, Rainham, Essex RM13 9XH, UK

Context

Probably one of the most persistent of the potential hazards confronting the urban Bicycle-user is the possibility of a vehicle door being opened in his or her path - either by accident, carelessness or, even, deliberately. Serious injury to the rider can result. Pedestrians etc. can be similarly affected. As vehicle numbers are predicted to rise, and we are working to encourage more cycling, the contingency for conflict is likely to increase.

Problem description

The doors of modern cars and vans universally are now hinged near the front edge. Furthermore, many have the top rearward corner finished in an acute angle with a minimal (hardly detectable) radius, as illustrated. Even worse, some have exposed glass at this point. One can readily imagine the kind of injuries that could occur, especially to the facial area - and if a Child Cyclist is involved!



As far as the author is aware, this aspect of vehicle design serves no useful purpose in terms of aerodynamics, access to, or structural strength of the vehicle. (Indeed, the door frame in the bodywork invariably has a curved internal corner at the point in question.) The only consideration seems to be aesthetic - to give the profile of the vehicle 'rakish' and dynamic good looks. Even the Volvo Company, which has built its reputation around safety, has fallen into the same trap. It appears that only the effects of the forward motion of the vehicle have been contemplated.

Answers & suggestions

- Should we legislate to regulate the design and construction of vehicle doors etc. to be more Cyclist-friendly? A radius of at least, say, 100mm at the top rear corners would help obviate entry to the eyes or mouth etc.
- Would Designers feel unfairly restricted, even though the regulations would apply equally to all competitor Manufacturers?
- Alternatively, should Bicycle-users constantly be reminded to leave sufficient clearance when riding past stationary vehicles? In many urban situations this is hardly practicable.
- Is Driver and Passenger education adequate?

In the UK., following motions to respective Annual General Meetings, both the CTC and LCC have pledged support for this campaign.

Information sought on reply slips:

The relationship between vehicle door design and cyclists' safety

- Accident & Injury Statistics
- Comments on Viability
- Your own experiences (including near-miss incidents)
- Practical alternative suggestions

Received suggestions & feed back:

- Legislation against rear window tinting to allow cyclists to see the driver;
- For the same reason: transparent headrests;
- Adequate clearance between cycle paths and parked vehicles;
- Not every risk can be solved by better car design. Therefore ongoing education of cyclists is required to make them avoid such hazards.
- Outside airbags.