

Opinion: Cycling community lacks strong culture of safety

By Daniel Borenstein, Tri Valley Times

As I descended a narrow road from Ebbetts Pass, elevation 8,736 feet about 50 miles south of Lake Tahoe, another cyclist whipped past. I immediately realized she wasn't going to make the next turn.

It all seemed to unfold in slow motion. She tried to correct as her bike slipped onto the dirt shoulder. Her back wheel slid out from underneath and she went splaying back across the pavement, upending the next rider. She was in bad shape; he seemed OK.

Some of us stopped. A few went back up the hill, shouting to slow down the next wave and prevent a massive pileup. Many riders passed carefully; but some were going so fast they couldn't stop and had to dodge the fallen cyclists.

It reinforced my belief that the cycling community must adopt a stronger culture of safety.

We were among more than 3,000 participants last weekend in the 32nd annual Death Ride. The ominous marketing name emphasizes the physical challenge of the beautiful 129-mile route, which includes 15,000 feet of elevation gain over five mountain passes in thin High Sierra air.

Most properly trained and were ready for the climbing. But we couldn't prepare for the reckless small minority of riders who seemed to think they could defy physics with no consequences and endangered all of us in the process.

They rode at excessive speeds; passed without calling out;

even went around on the right side. To be sure, they were the exceptions, not the rule. But there were too many of them.

We all know cycling comes with risks. We ride on thin tires prone to flats. Our bikes are harder to stop than automobiles. We have nothing to protect our bodies other than a helmet and common sense.

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