

Cyclist, 51, Peddling Safety

By Leo Fitzmaurice

Of the Post-Dispatch Staff

Like the biblical voice crying in the wilderness, Martin Pion says he feels his call for bicycle education and the integration of cyclists into the traffic mainstream is falling largely on deaf ears.

But the soft-spoken and meticulous advocate of cycling is not about to give up. Pion, 51, continues to preach the gospel of safety in cycling. And he continues to ride his adult tricycle to work in Berkeley and back daily — winter, summer, sunshine or snow — from his home in Ferguson. His cycling has been a habit since 1974.

Pion, British-born, has been a cyclist since childhood. In recent years, he has preferred a tricycle because of its greater stability and better traction on pockmarked roads. For the most part, he says, he prefers cycling in the United States, his adopted country, to that in the land of his birth.

Pion attended London University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in physics and mathematics. He has done graduate work in physics, and he was employed as a research engineer with STL in England in 1974, when he began riding a tricycle to work.

In 1977, he transferred to Roanoke, Va., in the employ of ITT Corp. In 1980, he began working for McDonnell Douglas Corp., based in Hazelwood. There, his field is laser communications.

Pion's daily rides to and from work four miles



Wayne Crosslin/Post-Dispatch

Martin Pion of Ferguson, pausing during a ride on his custom-made tricycle.

Cyclist

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ings from some drivers.

"They find me a little unusual," he said in an understated way.

Pion says he's found American drivers very courteous on the road, an experience contrary to that of many cyclists. He uses the quickest route, driving on busy Airport Road, as well as on quiet residential streets in Ferguson and Berkeley.

His blue tricycle, about the weight of a 10-speed bicycle, was fashioned by Ken Rogers, a machinist who makes custom tricycles in a suburb of London. His shop is near London Airport, so the tricycles, with collapsible axles to conserve space, can be whisked to customers, many of them North Americans.

Pion and his wife, Joyce, a native of France, ride a yellow tandem trike, made by Rogers according to Martin Pion's specifications. The cycle has hand brakes for both riders, which gives his wife a more secure feeling, Martin Pion says.

The Pions were living in Harlow, England, with their young son, Jerome, when Martin Pion was designing the tandem tricycle. Joyce Pion suggested the need for a basket for groceries and a seat to carry their son. So Pion designed a seat and shopping basket larger than one for a normal tricycle. His wife "thought she had silenced me, but I found how

to manage it," Martin Pion said jokingly.

In his ride to work, Pion wears a yellow-and-red reflecting jacket over his business suit and has a small rear-view mirror attached to his plastic helmet. In winter, he piles on three inner and outer garments, as well as three pairs of gloves.

In choosing a trike over a bike, Pion cites the extra stability provided by two rear wheels; the advantage of brakes on each of the rear wheels — more effective, he says, than brakes on a bicycle's single wheels; and the larger basket possible on a trike to carry a child or belongings. A sudden stop is also easier to make on a trike than on a bike, which tends to tip over, he says. A bicycle's one advantage is in turning at a high rate of speed, Pion says.

Pion has had no accidents involving motor vehicles while cycling. One of his three mishaps on a tricycle occurred when he rode down a hill too fast, a second when a dog crossed his path, and a third when he rode on ice-covered Airport Road and overturned.

In extremely icy situations, Pion says, he simply gets off and walks his trike.

In comparing cycling in England to that in the United States, Pion says American roads with stoplights and signs are "great for cyclists." In England, traffic is regulated by circles and other traffic patterns, and cyclists often have long waits before continuing after a stop. In the States,

he said, signals and stop signs give cyclists a chance to move with motor traffic. But cyclists are more common and more accepted in England, he noted.

Pion said clashes between cyclists and motorists — such as two accidents in the St. Louis area that killed two expert cyclists within four days last month — could be lessened by widening roads several feet to accommodate both. All that is needed for safe coexistence of cyclists and motorists, he says, is widened roads and trained cyclists.

"I'm absolutely appalled at the high level of incompetence of cyclists here," Pion says. Training and the understanding of a bicycle as a human-powered utilitarian vehicle are lacking, he said.

Bicycles here are used primarily as recreational vehicles, Pion says, although he quickly adds, "There's nothing wrong with that."

But Pion says that recreational cyclists should be trained for safety's sake, a training that actually would increase their enjoyment of the sport.

Pion says people — and even the police — ignore dangerous cycling habits of the young. Ideally, he says, cyclists should "become part of the road-using community." Like other cyclists, "I want my place on the road," Pion says. "I have it without question when I take my car out and add to the congestion.

"People say, 'I don't want my child riding in the road.' But they don't think about training a child to ride a bicycle properly."

Cyclist Lists The Rules For Safety In Riding

St. Louis County

Martin Pion is an enthusiastic, though restrained, disciple of John Forester, the British-born founder of the Effective Cycling League, which has headquarters in Sunnyvale, Calif.

“I’d like to see it (League principles) flourish,” says Pion.

“Schools need instruction in cycling as well as in motoring.” Such training would produce responsible cycling that would give young people (with limited funds) much more mobility, Pion maintains.

League advocates believe cyclists fare best when they act like, and are treated as, what they are - drivers of vehicles. As such, they should follow the rules of the road that govern motorists, he says.

Even 10-year-olds can employ the five principles set out by Forester for safe cycling on roads, League members say.

The principles are:-

- * Ride on the right side of the road
- * Yield to traffic traveling on a road larger than yours, looking and delaying until traffic on the larger road has ceased moving
- * Precede lateral movements on the roadway by looking over one’s shoulder until the cyclist sees no approaching traffic in the lane behind.
- * When approaching an intersection position oneself in a lane according to destination - next to the curb for a right turn, near the center line for a left turn and in the lane between for through riding
- * Between intersections, position oneself according to speed relative to other traffic - parked vehicles at the curb, faster near the center line and lesser speeds between them.

Forester and Pion say cyclists cause 80 percent of the accidents they are involved in.

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