

## Those? Spokes, Zarathustra

Hello, my name's Richard and I'm a bus user. I've been using buses for about 30 years, sometimes up to four or five a day. I'm not proud of that, but I know with your help, I can get clean. Thank you.

By way of 'getting clean', I have recently bought a bike. I used to cycle a lot in my youth. I had a BMX, as did most children growing up in the 1980s. I then graduated on to a racer at the age of thirteen. This bike quickly became a very close chum. I decked it out with a speedometer, fluorescent strips, mud guards and of course lights. I would ride the great and extensive country lanes of Cheshire, pack sandwiches and a book, and, when in need of respite find a suitable spot, prop the old steed against a five bar gate, inhale the bucolic perfumes, which would range from the most dreadful bovine effluvia to hints of primrose, jostling with mown grass. I would munch on my salami cob, read a few pages of Plato's Republic, then sink in to adolescent reverie in the shade of an oak, the distant hum of a tractor just masking the sinister reports of shotgun fire.

I would literally ride around all day. I would cover miles, and with incipient pubescent bravado precluding me from any true sense of perspective, I was excused from the facts of danger. I mean, I was careful, and knew that if a lorry were to hit me, I would undoubtedly be a footnote in tomorrow's paper. At the age of fourteen or fifteen, whilst studying for my GCSEs (I used to record all my notes on to cassette and listen to them on my Walkman whilst riding, hoping information would stick), I approached 50 m.p.h when I rocketed down the hill of the A538 from Wilmslow to Manchester Airport. 50 m.p.h! No helmet, tears in my eyes, barely appreciating the peril threatening my flimsy carcass. But that, was then.

Yesterday I was almost knocked off my bicycle by some Ostrogoth posing as a motorist. She was trying to break the sound barrier in a Datsun Sunny whilst turning a corner, half a nanometre north of my front wheel. Git. I have been cycling, if not solidly, then with some enthusiasm, for the passed three months, and that was my first narrow squeak. Pretty good going I think. At present I live in Cheadle (a small backwater province of equatorial Manchester), and the bus services are, in a word, kak. And in a sentence, can send you priapic with rage. But, they are still necessary sometimes. Are they? I think a bike could be used as an alternative to all forms of transport if your heart, mind, lungs and legs are in it with you. I'm still a novice really. Fitness levels down, stomach like a quilt, anxiety levitating off the charts and after a couple of miles my mouth becomes so dry it's as if I'm self-embalming. Along with mild lumbago, carpal tunnel syndrome and dhobi's itch, I'm not the most athletic of riders, and a distant howl from the lithe, hairless boy who used to keep up with traffic.

In this, my latest incarnation of Miguel Indurain, I didn't really know how much stuff you, or at least I, needed to take. Even for a modest distance of say ten or twelve miles, my panniers bulge like a pair of Hottentot's buttocks in a hula skirt. Waterproofs, jumpers, tarns of water, notebooks, lights, spare hosiery, inner tubes, wrenches, the BBC History Magazine and a selection of emollients. All this, coupled with my unholy mass of eighteen stone and a ferocious headwind, I'm lucky to make the end of the driveway by sundown.

But when I do and am finally moving, it's really quite lovely. Progression under your own steam is really very rewarding. Passing the stationary and turgid buses, as they wait for new drivers can be so satisfying that you can barely contain shouting, 'you fools, you mad fools!', as you bomb it past. But you don't, as you've got to stay vigilant for the madwomen in the Datsun who's trying to kill you! Herein lies the last section: The Highway Code. It is to be observed by every road user. Even those small, green tractors issued by the council to trim the verges have to have number plates. So, cyclists, if you only observe just one rule, let it be this: USE LIGHTS WHEN IT'S DARK! And yes, this includes the crepuscular gloom of dawn and dusk! And motorists, remember cyclists do not have a protective steel cage around them. And even though some of them deserve to be *in* a steel cage, it's not your job to mete out punishment by nudging them under a bus. If respect is shown and given on both sides, a safer and more pleasant a trip you will have. But whatever you do and however you behave, be extremely wary of registration plate BNB 262Y She'll kill us all!