

Night Biking

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On the surface it might seem really dangerous, riding your bike at night over the long winter nights, but not only is such a task doable, but riding at night can almost be a magical time, especially during the holiday period.

I don't consider myself a night-riding expert, nor am I a fanatic about it. Yet if it is a choice of putting a bike on a wind-trainer down a basement, or taking a short ride on a safe route on a good-weather night, the actual on the street bike ride wins every time.

If you have done night riding for a while, you probably have your own system down and agree that taking the recumbent out for occasional night spins can be done. But for those who have not ridden at night, I would offer the following advice...

General Advice

Think "Invisible" – By far and large, the phrase you should be repeating over and over when you are riding at night is "I AM INVISIBLE". That means to ride imagining that nobody can see you, and thus taking the proper precautions. Never, ever, assume someone in a car sees you, even if you are shining a light in their eyes.

Obey The Law – Always be a predictable cyclist by obeying all traffic laws and signals (stop lights and signs), especially at night. Motorists don't expect people on bicycles at night (especially the later the hour of the night), but where they really don't expect them is riding against the traffic or running stop signs. Also, Michigan law requires bicyclists riding at night to have an operating headlight as well as a rear reflector. But by all means go beyond what is legally required and right with a working bright rear light too.

Route – I have an 8 mile route scoped out from my house that keeps me either on low-speed (25mph limit), residential streets or bike paths. There are some roads, however, that I will ride during the day, which I would never ride at night, mainly due to a lack of road shoulders. My general advice on routes, then, is to scout out some routes during the day with the thought on whether these would be safe at night. Once you have a route picked during the day, make your first night rides towards dusk to gain confidence and to check out your equipment.

Bike Advice

Lighting – Headlights: I like to be lit up like a Christmas tree when I am riding at night. This means a minimum of two headlights and two tail-lights. For headlights, I am a big believer in having one light, in a flashing mode, mounted on my handlebars to bring attention to me (such as a Cateye HL-EL135, around \$20) and then a helmet mounted light to actually light up the road (I use an older NiteRider unit).

Helmet mounted lights allow me to move the beam exactly where I want it to be, which is sometimes a brief pointing to the driver of a car to let them know I am there. Helmet lights, along the lines of what you get what you pay for, tend to really light up the pavement in front of you, whereas cheaper lights might just give a little glow on the ground. And while helmet lights can get very expensive, you can find some good buys in the \$100-ish range, such as the NiteRider MiNewt Mini-Plus.

Lighting – Rear Lights – By far and large, the light I really like is the Planet Bike Superflash (<http://ecom1.planetbike.com/3034.html>). This is one bright light that has a pulsing light to really get attention and run around \$25. However, there are loads of other rear light selections at your local bike shop.

Clothing – Wearing bright clothing, or at least a safety vest, is really recommended.

Some other web resources about general night riding include...

<http://www.bikexpert.com/streetsmarts/usa/chapter8a.htm>

<http://circlecitybicycles.com/ccnride.htm>

