

than 687 trips per person are made by car travellers compared with 15 by bike. "If car and bicycle journeys were equally safe or hazardous, trip for trip, one would expect 40 times fewer admissions for injuries to cyclists than to car occupants.... Per trip, cycling is more risky, as measured by hospital admission, than travelling by car," the researchers from the University of Surrey, Guildford, say in the journal *Injury Prevention*.

Compared to the UK, where just four per cent of the population use bicycles, cycling is much more popular in Holland, with 25 per cent of people getting about by bike, and Denmark, where one in five trips are made by bicycle. But these countries have much lower injury and death rates, suggesting that there is safety in numbers. International comparisons show that English cyclists are three times more likely to be killed or injured per mile travelled than their Dutch or Danish counterparts.

The town of Groningen in Holland has pursued a consistent policy of promoting cycling for the last 25 years, and 60 per cent of the population now regularly travel by bike – more than twice the Dutch average and 15 times the UK rate.



"In terms of hospital admission, cycling is more risky than travelling by car"

RESEARCHERS
UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

involved collisions with a vehicle. However, this may underestimate the number of accidents in which vehicles were involved, as a cyclist may be forced to take evasive action when a motorist passes too close or opens a car door. Potholes and other problems with the road surface may also cause accidents. The authors point out that increasing the number of journeys by bike will help combat obesity and save the planet – but when people feel it is unsafe, they may be right.

"Encouragement of walking and cycling needs to be accompanied by serious efforts to ensure that safe traffic environments are established for pedestrians and cyclists. Better separation of pedestrians and cyclists from motorists, and greater awareness among the latter of the risks faced by pedestrians and cyclists, are important."

The Dutch cyclist in Britain...



Richard Langedijk

IT IS definitely more dangerous to cycle in Britain than it is in the Netherlands. In my country, the status of the cyclist is much higher – almost to the detriment of drivers. In fact, having lived and driven in the UK for half my life, I now struggle with driving a car back home because of all the extra rules. If you turned a corner without checking in Holland and nearly hit someone, you would be totally vilified, but

In the early 1990s, politicians in Groningen backed radical proposals to dig up city centre motorways and create a town of traffic chaos and create a virtually car-free centre of green spaces, pedestrianised streets, bike paths and separate bus lanes. Although retailers feared a mass exodus of shoppers to out-of-town malls that could be reached by car the reverse happened, and local businesses have since demanded more "cyclisation" of streets. City planners say the reduced congestion has steadily benefited jobs and businesses. Faster journey times for employees have meant better pro-

ductivity, and a cleaner, safer environment has brought in extra shoppers. Cycling has become more convenient than motoring, with a network of bicycle routes stretching nearly 2000km. In the UK, cities such as York, Hull and Cambridge, where up to 20 per cent of journeys are made by bike, have

...the British cyclist in Holland



Hugh Salt

THE REAL difference between the two nations is that cycling in Holland is treated as an integral part of the transport network. The Dutch have excellent cycling policy, which covers the whole country. You get the same facilities in the middle of nowhere as you do in stations in big cities. The facilities are very good too – every station on the Amsterdam to Amstelveen tramline, for

instance, has a secure cycle park, a repair shop and good quality rental bikes. When you buy a ticket, you can buy it with bike rental built in, so you can choose how much of a distance you want to ride to work. Cyclists often have their own lanes and their own traffic lights, and the law is stacked in their favour. A motorist who hits a cyclist in the Netherlands has to prove he was doing all he could to avoid contact, whereas it is the other way round in the UK.

In Britain, however, cycling is very fragmented. Awareness is growing, and some councils are beginning to recognise the benefits, but many others still don't have a clue. What we need is a national cycling directive which has been designed as part of our overall transport policy. The financial impetus for this already exists, what with the high price of petrol, and all the congestion on our roads. If you hit drivers in the wallet, more and more will see that the bicycle is still the most efficient means of transport.

Hugh Salt, 57, runs dutchbike.co.uk and lives in Amsterdam and Cambridge

you don't think twice about it over here. It is a completely different mentality; nearly everyone in Holland cycles as well as drives, so motorists have a much better idea of what they can expect. As a result, your whole perception of the road changes, because the law is so much more in favour of riders, and because there are so many more of them. When you have things like groups of students riding four abreast, as a driver you have to have eyes everywhere. Furthermore, everything is designed with cyclists in mind: there are bollards and

special cycle zones. A trip in my home town, Vlaardingen, that may be half a mile on my bike could be six miles in a car with all the diversions. Here, the vast majority of people don't cycle, and haven't got a clue what someone on a bike is going to do next, so cyclists are in much more danger. Don't get me wrong, my family loves living in the UK, and you have great mountain biking, but I wouldn't let my kids cycle anywhere without a helmet.

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