Bicycling in Japan: General safety tips

From CFAY Safety Office

Bicycles on the road have the same responsibilities as a motor vehicle, so obey traffic laws: Beyond that, use common sense when merging into lines of backed up traffic. It is easy to forget the challenge drivers, particularly of trucks, vans and buses face in avoiding bicycles. Please stay attentive and alert.

Stop for/yield to pedestrians – Avoid colliding with pedestrians or other cyclists.

Give warning by sounding the horn when necessary. While riding on a sidewalk or public path, yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and walk with your bike if it's necessary.

Official U.S. Navy file photo

Follow lane markings – Don't turn right from the left lane. Don't go straight in a lane marked "Left-turn only."

Never ride against traffic – Motorists are not looking for bicyclists riding on the wrong side of the road (King and Howard Street bicycle lanes are the only exception).

Never ride abreast - Unless passing other bicycles.

Dress appropriately – Wear a brightly colored outer upper-garment at all times and a reflective outer upper garment at night or in periods of reduced visibility. Consider rain gear and additional layers. This is the first stop for defensive riding.

Lights on - Use a bicycle that is equipped with a front headlamp, rear reflector, and a working pedestrian warning device (horn or bell). Turn on your head light in the dark, rain, and tunnels.

Choose the best way to turn right. There are two choices:

(1) Like an auto: signal to move into the right turn lane and then turn right.

(2) Like a pedestrian: Walk your bike across the crosswalks.

Use hand signals – Signal as a matter of law, of courtesy and of self-protection.

Never ride with phone/headphones - While riding a bicycle, use of cell phone and earphones/headphones that encumber hearing capability is prohibited

Avoid tailgating – Ensure motorists can see you in their mirrors. Stop for stop signs and traffic lights just like the motor vehicles.

Always wear a helmet- Wear a Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), or Snell approved helmet at all times while riding a bicycle (both on and off base, required for all Navy personnel) with the chin strap properly fastened under the chin.

Scan the road behind you – Learn to look back over your shoulder without losing your balance or swerving. Use a rear-view mirror.

Make eye contact with drivers – Assume that other drivers don't see you until you are sure that they do. Eye contact is important with any driver that might pose a threat to your safety.

Keep both hands ready to brake – You may not stop in time if you brake one-handed.

Allow for extra stopping distance in the rain, since brakes are less efficient when wet. All bicycles must be equipped with two brakes in Japan.

Keep your bike in good condition – Adjust your bike to fit you and keep it working properly. Check brakes and tires regularly. Routine maintenance is simple and you can learn to do it yourself.

Don't pass on the right – Motorists may not look for or see a bicycle passing on the right.

Keep your bike in good repair – Adjust your bike to fit you and keep it working properly. Check brakes and tires regularly. Routine maintenance is simple and you can learn to do it yourself.

Look out for road hazards – Watch out for parallel-slat sewer grates, gravel, ice, sand or debris. Cross railroad tracks at right angles.

On board CFAY there are bicycling rules that must be followed.

Cyclists shall:

• Register their bicycle with Security.

• Follow all laws pertaining to motorists when operating bicycles on facilities under Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka's area of responsibility.

• Always wear a helmet and fasten chin straps properly.

• Use a bicycle that is equipped with a front headlamp, rear reflector, and a working pedestrian warning device (horn or bell).

• Dismount and walk (push) bicycles entering gates and through crosswalks.

• Use the bicycle lane on King and Howard streets. The bicycle lane in the tunnels on Howard Street is on the sidewalk and bicyclists must use the side walk traveling in both directions yielding the right of way to pedestrians.

Cyclists shall not:

• Ride over caissons, under portal cranes or inside buildings.

• Ride against the flow of traffic except in designated bicycle lanes.

• Carry passengers unless in an approved child seat.

• Transport bicycles in passenger elevators.

• Exceed 30 KPH at any time.

Hand signal refresher:

• For left turns, extend the left arm straight out to the side.

• For right turns, either extend the left arm to the side and up or extend the right arm straight out to the side. To signal for a stop or a decrease in speed: extend the left arm to the side and down. Hand signals shall be given continuously during the last 100 feet before initiating a turn, unless both hands are needed to control or operate the bicycle.

Helmet tips:

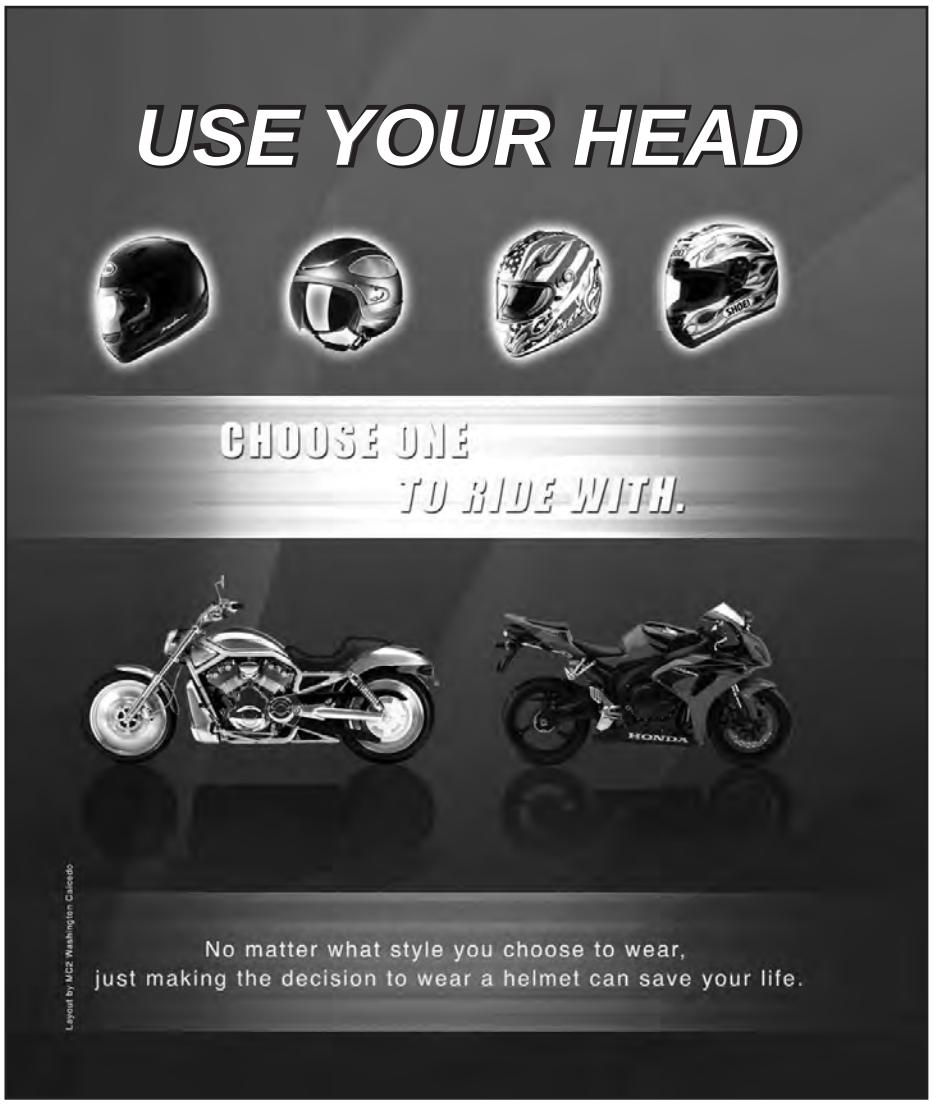
• Buy a helmet that bears a label saying it meets the CPSC, the Snell Memorial Foundation standard B 90,B 90S, N 94, or B 95; or the ASTM standard F 1447 93 or F 1447 94.

• Wear the helmet flat atop your head. Do not wear the helmet tilted back at an angle.

• Do not wear other headgear under the bicycle helmet such as ball caps and watch caps.

• Make sure the helmet fits snugly and does not obstruct your field of vision.

• Always wear the helmet with the chin strap firmly buckled. Make sure the chin strap fits securely and that the buckle stays fastened to provide impact protection. No combination of twisting or pulling should remove the helmet from the head or loosen the buckle on the strap.

• Do not use a helmet after it has been involved in an accident. Damage may not be visible to an untrained eye and even very small cracks in the helmet may greatly reduce a helmet's effectiveness in preventing injury. Either destroy the helmet and get a new one or have it inspected by the manufacturer.

For more information, contact CFAY Traffic Safety at 243-7354.