

Mass only had maybe 500 bikers compared to the well over 1,000 we would be likely to have in the middle of the summer back home.

Another notable difference: While in Chicago we try to take up both lanes of the streets, for the entire London CM we were on our lane, while oncoming car traffic surreally headed past us on the other side, which actually I found rather dangerous given my position in the middle of both lanes!

A third immediately perceived difference was the lack of rider-pedestrian interactions that are generally triggered by our "Happy Friday!" and other spontaneous callings. In Chicago we are used to people Happy Fridaying back to us, or waving at us in various gestures of support. The London CM was notable in this absence of such relatedness with the pedestrians. In fact, it was a tad more aggressive from cars, with cars trying to head into our lanes behind us where the Chicago auto

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(very small, like the back wheel). 3) "Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving," is a quote attributed to Albert Einstein. 4) Which musicians brought us the following bicycle classics: Bicycle Race (1978), Motorcrash (1988), My White Bicycle (1968), and The Pushbike Song (1971)? Bicycle Race is from Queen's 1978 album Jazz. It is the one close to the spirit of the Mass when it sings, "I want to ride my bicycle, I want to ride my bike, I want to ride my bicycle. I want to ride it where I like." Motorcrash is a song from the 1988 album by the Sugarcubes about a girl on a bicycle who loved checking out motor crash accidents! My White Bicycle is a psychedelic classic from the band Tomorrow from 1967 that Jimi Hendrix once told a reporter was his favorite English rock song that he heard during his stay in England. The Pushbike Song is by the Mixtures, an obscure Australian rock band, from 1970. Why did I include it? It is so far as I can tell one of the earliest invitations to participate in a Critical Mass. Its music video (1970) showed a large procession of bikes (including a Penny-farthing) and a few roller skaters heading along a large highway in Melbourne, Australia, blocking traffic as it went! 5)

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drivers would likely try to stop until we passed by. Even with bikers volunteering to stop cars at intersections, somehow cars would find their way into our parade, and even try to hit the backs of the bikes, which has happened apparently all too frequently. This led to at least one fisticuff between a biker and a car driver, which I missed. Cops have also been known to arrest or ticket single bikers going through red lights, so the Mass as a whole has a tendency to cross red lights only very cautiously, when riders know they are not in the presence of the law. One rider was similarly afflicted during the ride I was in, with no other bikers stopping in solidarity, which I found disturbing. Last observable difference: No willow handing out our fanzine, which has also helped to produce cohesiveness in our group in Chicago.

But what an amazing ride! We went over incredible bridges, past the Houses of Parliament, past Trafalgar Square, and we stopped for fifteen minutes at

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Which country first saw a Critical Mass? Critical Mass is generally deemed to have begun in San Francisco on September 25th, 1992, at 6 p.m. Previous to that, hundreds of bikers have taken to the streets before in the early 1970s in Stockholm, Sweden. Can you believe



HOW TO CHOOSE A BICYCLING ROUTE?



With an eye out for neon, I scout for throngs of the mirthful thirsty. Scanning unfathomed taverns, I have at 'em.



Late nites I detour past cronies' cribs. A light on means I lock up, knock loud, and talk down till kicked out.



Laws of physics: two vehicles can't share the same space. But I pause the laws when the commute galls, and aim for the lane where the traffic jams.



Each of us: ultimately alone, sez Nietzsche —esp. while traffic cycling. So when a cruise gives me blues I choose a street ped-tight where a red light or faked-up breakdown helps me meet a sweet.

Author of *Urban Bikers' Tricks & Tips* ■ www.mrbike.com

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Buckingham Palace before heading off to the West End where the theatres are. It was an amazing ride. I spoke to lots of first-timers, which was encouraging.

I have to admit that after all the nervous excitement about getting to London by train with my new bike, finding the Mass, and completing it on a rather dodgy machine, I found my next half-hour of just biking around on my own around London in the dwindling sun (the sky did not darken until almost 10 p.m.) the most enjoyable part - around the West End, and then back and forth across four amazing bridges, before making it back on the train to Kingston!



Great ride, but I wouldn't trade it for our little Chicago cult!

—Danny Vocal, special correspondent for the Derriere.

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that on April 20th, 2008, in Budapest, the Critical Mass had 80,000 participants? However, in Budapest the event takes place not monthly but on either Earth Day (the April one) or International Car Free Day (a September one). 6) What part of the body does the derailleur sound like? (Clue: you sit on it on your bike.) I have for a long time referred to the Derailleur as the Derriere! 7) True or false? There are many more bicycles than cars in the world. True. The statistics vary depending on the source. Several similar figures in different sources examined (all online, sorry for the sloppy journalism!) suggested there are roughly 500 to 650 million cars and one and a half billion bicycles. Half a billion of the bicycles are in China. Asia possesses a large monopoly on bike use on account of the negligible cost of transportation. However, in recent years, Americans are now buying more bicycles than cars per year also due to the financial costs of sustaining each (changes in thinking about the environment likely a factor but a difficult one to quantify as a variable in the soup). At the turn of the 20th century, prior to the mass production of automobiles, almost all of the world's cars were in the United States and numbered

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Answers to The Easy and Hard Bicycle Competition

1) True or false? The bicycle evolved in the 18th century from a machine invented to help with WALKING, not RIDING! True. According to pedalinghistory.com, "In 1817 Baron von Drais invented a walking machine that would help him get around the royal gardens faster: two same-size in-line wheels, the front one steerable, mounted in a frame which you straddled. The device was propelled by pushing your feet against the ground, thus rolling yourself and the device forward in a sort of gliding walk. The machine became known as the Draisienne or hobby horse. It was made entirely of wood. This enjoyed a short-lived popularity as a fad, not being practical for transportation in any other place than a well-maintained pathway such as in a park or garden." 2) One of the earliest bicycles was called the Penny-farthing. Why was it named that? The Penny-farthing owes its name to the British coins the Penny (very big, like the front wheel, a name preserved in our own currency) and the Farthing

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less than 8,000. Today the United States contains roughly 50% of the entire world's cars, or about 333 million of the existing 650 or so million automobiles! Car culture has been detrimental: pollution, wars for oil, deaths from accidents, depletion of raw materials and serious environmental threats during extraction of these, destruction or prevention of mass transit systems and people living further and further from work (more loss of time for each individual to the economy), and huge taking up of space at the expense of nature and community for roads, highways, and garages. Kill car culture! 8) Okay, this question was likely to weed out the less obsessive and more mentally balanced competitors. My bicycle shares the same name as a 1960s hippie band and a 1990s punk-inspired band. The answer is Nirvana. You probably all know the Kurt Cobain band, but the English band from the 1960s was an early influence upon later progressive rock bands. It produced some rather excellent psychedelia over three albums. 9) Creative section: Why do we scream, "Happy Friday!" on Critical Mass rides? (E-mail your answer to danny.vocal@gmail.com for your chance to win a prize.)

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