

You are never too old to

The Mayor is providing money for cycle training and takeup is on the increase. *Tim Evans* finds out who offers tuition and who benefits from it

It's autumn 1999 and I'm cycling to a school in Southwark to meet a young man called Simeon. In the playground I find him and his colleague Vicky. They are marshalling six 10-year-olds. I'm here to see how they do it, and to find out if it's for me.

Ahead of the revolution

Ten minutes later we are a few streets away, on a well trafficked road. We are looking at a pedestrian island, and Vicky is discussing with the kids what to do when they cycle through the narrowed roadway between the island and the pavement. Another five minutes and the children are practising: in turn, each cycles towards the island, looks behind, signals firmly to

the ever present motor traffic, and moves boldly smack into the centre of the traffic lane before passing through the narrowing. I'm watching Cycle Training Ltd at work. And a revolution is about to happen.

Cut to July 2005. Cycle Training Ltd is now Cycle Training UK (CTUK), the UK's biggest independent provider of cycle training, with contracts in several boroughs. It is an accredited National Cycling Standard Instructor teaching centre and has taught nearly 10,000 cyclists. A non-profit co-operative, it has 12 office staff and a network of some 45 instructors across London. I'm in Lambeth, on an instructors course, my fee paid for by a TfL

grant obtained by STA Bikes, a school cycling project in Hackney. Also on the course are a transport researcher; a cycle mechanic and activist with funding to set up a bike project; an Islington playground worker and three staff from Bangladeshi youth projects in Tower Hamlets. We have two instructors.

In the past six months, around 100 Londoners have qualified as instructors. All over the capital, in the summer term just finished, kids, and adults, too, have been learning how to take the lane at road narrowings. In London councils, officers are learning not to talk about 'Cycling proficiency': the revolution is under way.

Cycling proficiency RIP

Cycling proficiency died a long time ago. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) stopped teaching it in 1974 and was relegated to a reference body. Responsibility for cycle training passed to local authorities and by the 1990s around 30% had stopped providing training. Of those that did, only about half the schemes included exposure to a real road.

'Cycling proficiency' was taught by people who didn't cycle or by volunteers with varying skills and ideas. It wasn't a way to get more people enjoying the benefits and pleasure of cycling, its aim was to stop kids getting hurt. But there were points of light dotted about where people had seized the initiative to change things: CTUK, York City, Bristol's Cycle West (now Life Cycle UK), Patrick Field's London School of Cycling, Manchester's BikeRight. RoSPA was looking at



child training and the CTC at provision for adults.

The right people for the job

In 1999–2002 a group coalesced: the points of light, thinkers such as John Franklin, cycling organisations, RoSPA and the road safety officers association LARSOA, with the CTC volunteering to co-ordinate. They had to find a teaching approach everyone could agree on and use; and set standards for the safeguards required for work involving children: child protection, police checks; and

(Below) Instructor training, (Bottom) The author Tim Evans aka Dr Bike



Rob Brown

to learn something new



At a cycle training session with STA Bikes in a park, for the first time 17-year-old Nick lifts both feet off the ground while on a bike

All images, unless stated, Tim Evans

also for meeting health and safety law: risk assessment, training and information for instructors, and insurance.

In May 2003, the CTC published and piloted a standard for adults (Adult Cycle Training – A Guide for Instructors and Organisers) to be joined in March 2005 by the standard for children (Child Cyclist Training National Standard and Guidelines). The working group became the Cyclist Training Reference Group, which is now the governing body for the National

Brenda's lessons

I went to my first cycle training lesson thinking there was not much I could learn, having been a cyclist for about 15 years in London. But I got a surprise.

I think the most important thing that I learned was to negotiate with the traffic: to be more aware of my positioning on the road, and of the way I was behaving.

I learned to be much more confident about holding my position on the road: in situations where it would be dangerous to be overtaken, to hold my position and not let anyone overtake me. That was a big leap into the unknown. I've always avoided car doors but I would squeeze over to the kerb if I felt a car accelerating behind me, or a bus. When I was turning right I'd be over to the extreme right. But my instructor taught me that if it's necessary to be in that position on the road, then don't worry about the traffic behind you. He taught me to negotiate with traffic behind me by craning my neck to make eye contact with the driver, which I never did before – I would just glance back.

I was always worried about being trapped between two fast moving lanes of traffic if I overtook on the right, but we went through the procedure of moving back into your own lane, and making clear signals to the drivers that you want to do so. Also now at a queue I won't automatically try to squeeze through to the top – I'll often hold back and wait for the traffic to move on. I give a lot more clearer hand signalling and I find this works – car drivers and motor cyclists do hold back, and I think they respect you more when you're much clearer about what you're doing. You don't get honked. If you show you're confident then the driver

responds accordingly.

I also learned lots of little things:

- braking techniques – sitting back when you're braking;
- to keep pedalling when cycling round a tight corner so you have control.

You need to have someone to point out how

to be more in control if you use these techniques, and a chance to practise them in the company of somebody who is supportive and encouraging.

The next stage is for the instructor to accompany me to work because I cycle along the A10, across London Bridge, and round

the Elephant and Castle. My route is all gyratories and dangerous roundabouts. I work in Lambeth and the council subsidised the lesson. It cost £5 and I was quite happy with that! I now recommend cycle training to people, particularly those who are nervous about cycling in traffic.
Brenda Puech

You need to have someone to point out how to be more in control



(Above) Before her training Brenda would signal feebly from outside the traffic stream, making it hard for her to get into position for a right turn



(Above) After taking training Brenda signals firmly and occupies the lane, thus making herself visible and controlling the traffic behind her

Standard. One hundred training places were funded, and the courses to teach the first National Standard approved cycling instructors started on Monday, 9 February 2004.

In the year following my first meeting with Simeon and Vicky, I worked as one of the network of freelances they were recruiting. The trainers were LCC members, Critical Mass-ers, and the like. I was impressed by the training manual we worked from. Simeon had read Franklin and Forester, had talked to pioneers of adult cycle teaching, such as Patrick Field, and added in experience gained from his own training as a language teacher. Widening experience

brought continuous revision. All of which meant that when the Reference Group needed practical guidance on how to run training, it was to hand. Alongside Franklin's *Cyclecraft*, the latest version of the CTUK manual is a key text for teaching the National Standard. It is based on assertive cycling.

Assertiveness is all-important

Assertive behaviour is a tool developed by feminism. When people are systematically marginalised and bullied, they can build up self-destructive habits as a defence: they may retreat into self-effacement or lose control and become aggressive. This behaviour is rarely successful, instead it confirms in the view of the other person that you are weak, or irrational, or both. Assertive behaviour means taking your rightful place in a situation without being cowed or provoked – the cornerstone of the new cycling standards. (For an example of assertiveness in practice in cycling, see 'Brenda's lessons' on the previous page.)

Does assertive cycling really change the world? To find out, TfL commissioned CTUK to survey the people it had trained. The results found that trained cyclists:

- feel more confident on the road;
- cycle further;
- make more trips by bike, and
- are more likely to carry on cycling all year round.

It also revealed that they make nearly double the number of trips of between three and five miles – exactly the length of the journeys campaigners are trying to convince people to make by bike rather than car.

In London, TfL stepped in. Since 2002 it has been providing money for cycle training, which boroughs could claim via their annual spending plan. Last year the boroughs gave on-road training to over 5,000 children



Patrick Field

Tim Evans of STA bikes sets off for a parks training session with bikes, stall, tools and weather protection, using Hackney Cyclists' megatrailer

and more than 1,000 adults or teenagers. In February, the boroughs put up money for 80 London-based instructors using CTUK as the training centre. So far about 60 people have completed that course, and carried the word back to the 'hood. With support from TfL, more boroughs are now training their own staff – up to 10 new instructors per borough.

Challenges unique to London

Rose Ades of TfL's Cycling Centre of Excellence explains some of the challenges: "Other towns are able to start with a blank sheet. Or as in York, there's one authority, it's accredited, it's been doing it for years, so it just rolls out what it has been doing.

"In a London borough, it might be the road safety department or the cycling officer that does the training. They might get CTUK, the London School of Cycling or STA Bikes to do it. They might use in-house staff, professionals, or volunteers.

"There is a lot of experience out in the boroughs we can build on. What we have to do is get a handle on what is going on, spot the gaps, train and equip people who are providing training, and cascade skills and expertise out to the wider community. Borough teams are best placed to stimulate and respond to local demand."

And the TfL programme is adding new people to the mix – school teachers and parents,

youth and community workers, LCC group members.

Whoever does it, the results have been good. "At least 10 more boroughs are on board with the whole idea of the National Standard, and adapting how they are doing things," says Ades. "I think that funding training for new instructors nominated by the boroughs was key. Provided the boroughs are given the resources to adapt, they will adapt, and they have."

Ades says, "The Centre hopes to increase the boroughs' capacity to provide high quality training that meets local needs. There is a huge demand from Year 5 and 6 children and their parents, so our first priority is meeting that. Then I'd like to generate interest in secondary schools for advanced training."

More training for more people?

As I wrote this article, the DfT (on behalf of Cycling England) had advertised for bids from training bodies for a grant to deliver a capacity building programme for cyclist training. The aim is to increase the level, and improve the quality, of the cycle training available.

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For further information

CTC National Cycle Training Helpline 0870 607 0415
www.ctc.org.uk

Helps you find or become a cycling instructor.

Cyclecraft: Skilled Cycling

Techniques for Adults, by John Franklin, published by The Stationery Office, £12.99
ISBN 0 11 702051 6
www.lesberries.co.uk

The basis of the riding style taught in the National Standard.
Cycle training works: a summary of the survey on the effectiveness of cycle training, CTUK, 2004.

Tel: 7582 3535

www.cycletraining.co.uk/

Effective cycling

by John Forester, MIT Press, £19.21 (from Amazon.co.uk)
ISBN 0 262 56070 4

A woman in your own right, assertiveness and you, by Anne Dickson, Quartet, 1982, £6
ISBN 0704334208.

A classic on assertive behaviour.

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