

Maddog Unleashed

Bikes, Scooters Beware: The Cages Remain, And Beasts Lie Within

“It’s a citywide issue of people sharing the road, whether on foot, a bicycle, a Vespa or in our cars. Manners have just gone out the window.”— Jeanne Field, a Mandeville Canyon resident, speaking with *The Los Angeles Times*



BY PATRICK O’GRADY

It must be terrible to be chained to the helm of a ponderous land yacht these days, with the asphalt sea suddenly alive with bicycles, motor scooters and Smart cars frolicking about like so many mechanical dolphins.

Put the foot in the firewall to lurch around some backpacked cyclo-commuter crouched over his handlebars and zoom, just watch that fuel needle race west toward E. The battle thus won proves but a Pyrrhic victory, because while the hare takes five (or 10, or 20) at the next filling station, that two-wheeled turtle comes plodding on past, a look of grim satisfaction on his face.

Or how about that scooterist whirring along, laying claim to an entire lane as though he were the entire Castro chapter of the Hell’s Angels? (And I’m not talking Cuba here, honey). Call that a motor vehicle, do you? Well, yes and no. It’s a motorized bicycle—and in a lot of states, that means no written or driving tests, no license plates and cut-rate insurance. Plus you visit a gas station for a gallon or so every other Leap Year and park on the sidewalk.

And then there are the itzy-bitsy Smart cars, so teensy you can park on a dime and give five cents’ change.

But those things are just silly. Twenty years ago the wife’s Daihatsu Charade had a 1-liter, three-cylinder engine that got better mileage and on regular unleaded, too, with a bigger gas tank but an admittedly lower cuteness factor.

And I can tell you from bitter experience that if you didn’t mind being passed by Yugos on hills you could put two bikes on the roof and drive the sonofabitch from New Mexico to California and back. Try that with a Smart car and you will look very dumb indeed.

A Time to Be Born, a Time to Die. To everything there is a season, as the song goes. And with a garage full of bicycles (plus a new Vespa LX 50 scooter), it’s hard not to smirk when I see a clenched expression behind the wheel of a Hummer, the sound of gnashing teeth nearly drowning out the rumble of its gas-gulping power plant.

Still, even if this is evolution, and two-wheelers the mammals to the V-8’s dinosaur, it would behoove us to remember that these aging lizards still have some thunder left in them and are not to be trifled with as they head for the exit.

You may think your strength is as the strength of 10 because your heart is pure, but you will think again when you’re trying to bench-press that Dodge Durango off your rib cage.

The Corner of La Brea and Eternity. Why kick these dinosaurs as they’re going down into the tar pits of transportation history, especially when they can kick you back ever so much harder?

If a road is clearly unsuited for cycling or scootering, find an alternate route. With even Ford seeing the light, converting three truck factories to small-car production, it can’t be long before the herd thins. Meantime, obey the traffic laws, wherever and whatever you ride, and encourage your friends and customers—especially the newbies—to do likewise.

And you scooterists—pardon me, my fellow scooterists—stay off the bike paths. I’m already hearing bad things about you 49cc lot, and I’ve only been one of you for a couple of weeks. Don’t make me stop this column and come back there.

Keep your eyes on the road ahead and if we’re lucky, those noisy, lumbering giants in the rear-view mirror will be off the road and in the history books. Now smile and wave bye-bye.