

Further Research Inspired by Dr. Ian Walker's, *Drivers overtaking bicyclists*¹

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ABSTRACT. *Objective.* The researchers demonstrated that different apparel worn by bicyclists garners different treatment by overtaking motorists. Or did they?

Background. **To our astonishment,** Dr. Ian Walker of the United Kingdom garnered international publicity in 2006 for a pretty stupid-sounding study “showing” that (a) the bicyclist’s lane position doesn’t affect the overtaking motorist’s lane position (an assertion roundly refuted before your very eyes by overtaking motorist videos available at <http://dualchase.com>) and (b) the bicyclist’s apparel affects the amount of clearance the overtaking motorist gives the bicyclist.

Specifically, Walker observed that the overtaking motorist gave the bicyclist an average of 3.3 inches more clearance when the bicyclist was not wearing a helmet. When the bicyclist wore a female wig, he got an additional 2.2 inches of clearance, for a total of 5.5 inches more.

The silliness of this measurement comes from the fact that the average clearances were over four feet. We think there are more important topics in bicycle safety than arguing about the difference between 4 feet 3 inches and 4 feet 6 inches of clearance. But for 30 years now, British dudes have had a real attitude problem about helmets (which, like cold beer and cars that don’t leak oil, were yet another annoying Yankee invasion, rubbing their nose in the decline of the British Empire) and so Walker set out to prove that helmets did Something Bad.

Since Walker’s passing clearance data was essentially meaningless, he used a deceitful presentation trick to make it seem otherwise: he chopped the Y axis on the graphs he distributed worldwide³. Suddenly, his insignificant difference looked like it might be important. If you didn’t look too closely, you thought he might have a point. Among those taken in by this slight of hand was noted ABC-TV reporter John Stoessel⁴.

And so we marched on with our thoughts. Why stop with a helmet and a wig? Why not a clown suit? Why not a Kermit the Frog outfit? Why not a Viking Warrior helmet, complete with blonde braids? And how ‘bout a French Maid outfit? Let’s see how they all compare.

Our decision to perform these tests was inspired when an anonymous donor provided Ms. Clarents with a bright orange clown wig.



Figure One. The wig that launched Significant Research

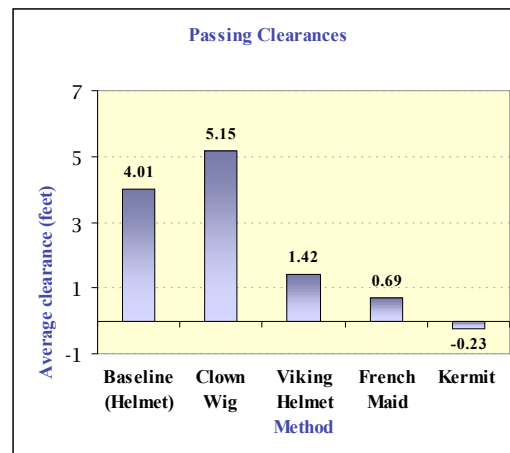


Figure Two. Passing clearances from our study

METHODS

Our test subject, Ms. Clarents, donned attire for each condition and rode her bike on a city street. Lateral clearances were measured with a dual parallax spectrographic imaginometer. A volunteer amphibious animal performed the Kermit the Frog experiment for us.

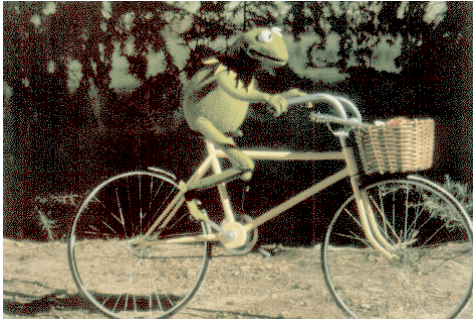


Figure Three. A Kermit the Frog costume resulted in negative passing clearance. The unfortunate test subject became a splotch on the road.

RESULTS

Riding in a normal manner with a helmet resulted in safe overtaking behavior by all motorists. Kermit the frog got squished; the French Maid got fondled; the clown got avoided, and the Viking got a macho close pass. However, all these results were hypothesized by our dual parallax spectrographic imaginometer.

CONCLUSIONS

Riding in a safe manner fosters safe road behavior from other road users. Bizarre riding costumes are especially appropriate on April 1, and they give us the opportunity to lampoon Dr. Walker's study. We don't think it matters much what you wear. Motorists don't have enough free time to care about that.

A SERIOUS POINT

Yes, there is one. Central to Walker's conclusions is the notion that bicyclists don't influence the overtaking behavior of other road users. Both our lifelong experience and the filmed evidence at dualchase.com say otherwise.

Ride safe. . . and the French Maid costume probably isn't a good idea.



Figure Four. Base case, ably demonstrated by co-author Clarents: wear a helmet, ride three or more feet from the curb, and most motorists give plenty of clearance when they pass.



Figure Five. The clown wig didn't just generate clearance, it generated aversion. The authors hypothesize that this could be due to common Coulrophobia⁵. (Hey, it makes as much sense as most of Walker's conclusions.)



Figure Six: Testosterone Alert: Ford F-150 truck driver, sees apparently macho rider wearing Viking helmet with horns, executes close pass.



Figure Seven: Ms. Clarents declined to model the French Maid outfit for our camera, so a body double did it for her. Overtaking motorists gave the French Maid minimal clearance, with frequent impromptu tactile examinations of the test subject's gluteus muscles.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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5. Coulrophobia: Fear of clowns

No animals or bicycles were harmed during this study—'cept for that poor frog.