

**The Bikers  
Or  
Why One Should Not Make Assumptions**

It was around 10:30 on a recent Sunday morning in late April, and the first bit of good weather in what had been a dreadful spring. Down in Cassiobury Park two excited figures on bicycles appeared, oozing sheer joie de vivre at being able to venture out after being cooped up indoors for months. They came bumping and bouncing down the grassy incline in order to avoid the 'No cycling on the footpath' regulation. Apparently one of them had suggested dismounting but the other had an innate desire to thwart unreasonable authority wherever possible.

The more law-abiding one rode a flamboyant blue hybrid bike and wore a green reflective jerkin over his jumper and undershirt, track suit trousers and a cycling helmet. The more rebellious one was on a very shiny black hybrid bike with exceptionally thick tyres, but he wore no jerkin and no helmet, just a T shirt and a pair of shorts. Clearly their mothers had instilled different levels of safety awareness in them.

They arrived at the main bridge which is at the centre of a crossroads leading to adventure in several directions: the river and northbound canal towpath, the southbound towpath and a steep track up into Whippendell Woods. The bridge area was, as usual, thronged with children, parents, prams and dogs, the dogs repeatedly jumping in and out of the river to fetch sticks endlessly thrown in by their owners. Ah, such simple aspirations!

Green Jacket, aware that they really shouldn't be cycling at this point urged T-Shirt to dismount. He clearly didn't want any danger of someone going under his bike, not necessarily for the someone's sake, but more probably because he didn't fancy having any encounters with dripping wet dogs or enraged buggy-pushers.

They had a brief discourse about which way to go, T-Shirt being all in favour of invading the woods and squelching through the patches of mud and horse manure he knew would inevitably be there at this time of year, but Green Jacket won the debate and they took to the north-bound towpath. . Green Jacket, although on the face of it being rather more sensible than T-Shirt, had an alarming penchant for riding right on the edge of the towpath. "I shan't jump in to rescue you if you fall in" said T-Shirt. "It's OK, I can swim" said Green Jacket apparently not concerned with how he'd swim out carrying his bike. Chattering loudly, actually having to shout most of the time as they couldn't often ride parallel due to the constricted width of the tow path, they rode up toward Lady Capel's bridge.

Now here was a challenge. A ramp ran up to then over the narrow bridge in a steep spiral fashion and looked impossible to achieve without dismounting. T-Shirt proclaimed that he could make it up, across and down the other side of the bridge without stopping. Green Jacket snorted with doubt. So T-Shirt went back some way, changing both sets of gears to the lowest and took a running, or rather a walking aim at the bridge, his legs now whizzing round at high speed whilst his bike edged forward at a slow sedate pace. It was something to do with torque and leverage apparently. So pedals spinning crazily he steadily ascended the ramp and crossed the narrow bridge with exclamations of triumph. His victory was almost spoiled by a near collision with a walking couple who were about to ascend from the other side. They regarded him as if he was mad.

Green Jacket crossed the bridge more sedately, pointedly wheeling his bicycle. He remounted and they both disappeared into the distance. Peace descended for 30 minutes or so then familiar noises were again heard as they returned some time later, looking rather tired for someone of their age.

“Look at the sweet little ducklings” T-Shirt exclaimed, pointing to a mother duck with her brood on the canal. “How many do you think there are?” They spent a few minutes counting then Green Jacket said “I’ll race you to Cha Cha Cha’s and the loser buys the drinks”. Off they raced, ringing their bells and zooming around ambling pedestrians, arriving a little breathless at the café. They chained their bicycles against a fence and entered.

“Can I help you sirs?” said the nice young female assistant to the two puffed-out old geezers.

*David Silver, May 2013*