

Column: Chance encounter with a driver

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As a cyclist, you always need to have your wits about you.

Intersections usually are the most dangerous places to be for any road user, as dangers can be approaching at high speed from any direction, usually in the form of cars.

Drivers sometimes fail to look out for and see pedestrians and cyclists or underestimate the speed of cyclists when they make a turn.

You often read about the high prevalence of distracted driving, which causes about a quarter of all car crashes, or 88 fatalities and many more injuries every year in B.C.

Most cyclists understand that helmets and good behaviour offer little if any protection from it.

Riding along some roads can be tricky, too, especially when you're squished in between parked and moving cars, with or without a bike lane.

Kanaka Way is one of those roads that can be rather daunting, especially at rush hour, when commuters are in a rush to get to work or to get home.

Last Saturday, the sky was so amazingly blue, I had to get out for a ride. Didn't get very far, though.

On Kanaka Way, I passed a car that was parked along the curb.

I always try to check if there's anyone in the driver's seat of a parked car.

By suddenly opening their car door in your face, they can cause you to fall in front of a passing car, which isn't fun.

Cyclists getting 'doored' make up about 10 to 15 per cent of all accidents involving cyclists.

I always make sure I keep a good distance between myself and any parked cars to make sure it doesn't happen to me.

Sometimes that means having to stay out of a bike lane, which can turn into a danger zone when cars are parked right beside it.

Bad design.

In this case, the engine of the car was running. If the driver didn't see me, he could take off just as I was passing him. So I glanced into the car at the driver to make sure he was paying attention to me.

His head was tilted backwards, his eyes closed and his mouth wide open.

Something wasn't right.

So I turned back to check on him. His window was open, and I first talked to him, then yelled. No response.

He was sweating profusely.

His face and his arms were covered with droplets of sweat.

I grabbed his shoulder and shook him.

Still no response.

I could see the rapid pulse of his carotid artery.

This wasn't good.

I dashed over to the nearest house and banged on the door.

Thankfully, someone was home, and, with his cell phone in hand, Jim ran out to the car with me.

He called 9-1-1 and stayed on the phone with the helpful operator while we waited for help to arrive, kind of freaking out each time the fellow's breathing stopped for some time.

As Jim whacked him on his chest, he wheezed and started breathing again.

After what seemed like a long time, a fire truck arrived.

After some more prodding, the guy soon regained consciousness.

Then an ambulance and a police car arrived.

The guy claimed he was "just fine."

Right. When they tried to make him walk in a straight line, he didn't seem to be doing too well.

I left after leaving my information.

Jim told me the next day that his car got towed. I'm not sure what the penalty would have been and how long he won't be able to drive for.

The fact that he even passed out while behind the wheel surely is indicative of the seriousness of his actions.

It's a scary thought that there are people like this young fellow, a novice driver doing who knows what.

According to the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, 36.7 percent of fatally injured drivers in Canada tested positive for impairing drugs in 2008.

For alcohol, this percentage was 40.8.

Jim said that 10 minutes before I banged on his door, he'd been outside in his garden and the car wasn't there at that point. So mere minutes before he passed out, this young man was actually driving his car.

Fortunately, he was OK and nobody got hurt.

I hope he learned his lesson.

Jackie Chow is a member of the Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows chapter of HUB: Your Cycling Connection.