WHY NOT LICENSE BICYCLES?...

By Richard O. Bennett

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In the course of a lifetime, John Q. Public is frequently called upon to purchase a license and to do something or other. Maybe it's a license to own or operate a motor vehicle; maybe it's a license to do a job of plumbing; or maybe it's a recreation license, to hunt and fish.

Does Mr. Public ever stop to ponder why we have licenses? No, he just considers them necessary evils. If someone were to ask him point-blank why we have licenses he would probably produce a what-can-you-do-about-it gesture and remark: "These politicians gotta have dough!"

The trouble is Jack, as Mr. Public has come to be known, the terms "license" and "registration" confused with the term "taxation." True, the primary purpose of some required licenses is to produce revenue, but in a vast majority of cases licensing is for regulation. Certainly this is the case in registering and licensing bicycles.

Can you conceive what a disorderly jumble of streets and highways would be if there were no regulations; regulations made possible through registration and licensing of vehicles and motor operators?

Certain conditions are bad enough in spite of our traffic regulatory efforts, but just imagine how confused they would be if everyone drove just as he chose!

Believe it or not, this is the condition that exists with bicycle riders today. Generally speaking (there have been a few isolated efforts to control bicycling) bicycle riders conform only to their own, often accidental, best judgments which sometimes are not good, or even half good.

In cities such as Kansas City, Mo., Milwaukee, Wis., and Evanston, Ill., have demonstrated conclusively that the number of bicycle-motor vehicle accidents, can be greatly reduced through strict traffic regulation. If regulation can do the job for the automobile it can do it for the bicycle.

Obviously, we cannot have bicycle safety without regulation and we cannot have bicycle regulation without some instrument of control; in other words, an enforcement weapon.

This instrument is more necessary when dealing with bicycle riders than with motor vehicle operators because, as we said before, bicycle riders for the most part are children. In many states children are not subject to the same traffic court penalties as are their elders. Something special must be designed as a penalty for juvenile bicycle violators. This to be known, juvenile and other, can't impose woodshed penalties as they would like to in many cases, nor can they expect parental consent to the extent that it would. It goes without saying that monetary penalties imposed against the parents do not achieve the desired result with the children.

It must also be remembered that probably more automobile theft cases are solved than any other one type of criminal endeavor due to license identification. Too often the stealing of a bicycle is the first step toward a criminal career.

The fact that a bicycle can be identified through the license number will be a deterrent to many would-be juvenile bicycle thieves. Licensing facilitates the recovery and restoration, to the rightful owner, of a stolen bicycle.

Before a bicycle registration and licensing law can accomplish the desired ends a number of things are necessary:

Bicycle riders must know the purpose behind each section of the law.

The bicycle riders must know that the law-makers who enacted the law and the police officers charged with its enforcement mean business.

The attitude of law enforcement officers and courts toward bicycle riders must change.

The law must receive a high degree of intelligent enforcement and the courts must support the officers in their efforts.

Parents are important factors in the ultimate success or failure of a bicycle registration law—their cooperation is essential.

Owing to the human element, a Utopian condition cannot be expected. However, there can and must be an improvement in the bicycle accident and theft situations.