

Earth Day and Bicycle Power

I imagine this: Hundreds - no, thousands of cyclists jam midtown. Messengers, commuters, club riders, racers, occasional riders, everybody who owns a bicycle fills the street until nothing else can move. No cars, buses or anything big with a motor, just us and our bikes, on parade up the avenue. We laugh, we scream, we party our way on up from Washington Square to Central Park, picking up more riders, more energy as we go.

Why? Because it's been too long since cyclists have taken over the street in New York City. There's real power in coming in from the edge of the streets and the fringe of the city's consciousness. And there's a joy in riding with each other, freed for one symbolic moment from the solitary paths we must make through motor traffic.

I get a taste of this at the 5-Boro ride, that's why I do it every spring. But it's a bit too much like a holiday, out there on the officially closed-off BQE. It's not midtown, it's not taking back the street, it doesn't move me to scream.

August of 1987 is more like what I see, the month when the messengers led us onto the streets and stopped Koch's midtown bike ban. One night in particular, the motorcycle cops kept us penned into two lanes all the way from the Village to Central Park, until we finally broke free at 57th and 5th. Hundreds of us filled the intersection, bikes thrust over our heads, raised into the night sky. We were whistling and screeching, the noise so loud you couldn't hear your own voice though you were screaming at the top of your lungs. Every moment of terror we'd ever felt as NYC bike riders, every ounce of pride from years of braving the city streets was in that cry. Cops couldn't do a thing. It was three weeks, before the court struck down the ban, but that night we knew we had Koch licked.

The cycling community is due for another galvanizing event like this. Not that we need an excuse for another bicycle happening, but Thursday, April 22nd, is Earth Day, and Transportation Alternatives is going to celebrate by staging a bike-in to call attention to some of the city's transportation follies. Things like: lenient treatment of motorists who injure pedestrians and cyclists; lack of workable bike lanes; insufficient tolls - higher tariffs would help discourage driving and go toward subway upkeep, the backbone of the city's transportation network; the travesty of allowing cars in our parks, robbing New Yorkers (most of whom don't own cars) of their only oases.

But most of all, the bike-in will celebrate the beauty and efficiency and fun of bicycles.

The bike-in will leave from the Washington Square Park arch at 5 pm, hit the 6th Avenue entrance to Central Park around 6, and hang there to keep out the cars 'til 7. If you can't be at the start, join us along the way. And hey, pass the word along. Bring a friend. It's time for cyclists to come in from the edges and ride together.

It'll be a scream.

Charlie Komanoff, past president and an active volunteer with Transportation Alternatives, just began his third decade as a New York cyclist. For more information on the Earth Day Bike-in, or to offer help, call T.A. at (212) 475-4600. The Bike Path features commentary on bike-related issues.

Connecticut

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(203) 869-41

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Westport
(203) 222-19

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Darien
(203) 655-20

New Jersey

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Park Ridge
(201) 391-50

Cranford B
Cranford
(908) 276-60

Sports Peop
Bedminster
(908) 234-10

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