

## **The open road**

The perceived risk from the traffic on today's roads puts a lot of people off cycling on them, especially families. Here's the thing: it might feel less safe today but it isn't. You're actually safer now than you would have been in those halcyon days of 1950, when there were far fewer drivers. (There were more cycling fatalities, per billion kilometres cycled, in 1950 than there were in 2006.) It's more pleasant to ride on country lanes and back-roads than busy trunk roads, and you can often plot your trips so you can do just that. However, dense traffic tends to be slower traffic, and heavily-used urban roads can be quite safe for cycling so long as you ride sensibly and assertively.

Assertiveness is key. You don't have to get out of the way for the traffic: you are the traffic. That's not cyclists' rhetoric. If you hide in the gutter and ride submissively, you are less safe than if you're out there in the traffic stream, integrating with other road users.

Riding in traffic is about dealing with people. Car drivers aren't out to get you; like you, they're out to get somewhere. So long as they see you and understand what you're doing – both things that you can help them with – there's no cause for concern. If you act like traffic, you will be treated like traffic. This can be a big leap if you're new to cycling. It's a big topic too. The guidelines here are just a primer. To help you master the skills needed to ride confidently and safely on the road, get a copy of *Cyclecraft*, and consider getting some training (see <http://www.ctc.org.uk/desktopdefault.aspx?tabid=5116>)

You may remember cycle training in the form of the cycling proficiency test. It's evolved since then. It's not just for children, for one thing. However, children have much less experience as road users. Before they make journeys on their own, some kind of training – with an accredited provider or with you – is vital.

Children can ride on roads accompanied by you from a much younger age than they would solo, because you're there to handle the negotiation and integration with the traffic. There will come a day when they're ready to make independent journeys, such as cycling to school. It won't be until after they're capable of walking to school alone and it might not be until they get to secondary school. But given the skills, they can do it. Cyclists are made, not born.