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Tell a non-cyclist you ride a bike and they assume you must be fit, sustainable, resourceful and self-reliant.

THE CYCLE OF LIFE

Like a retro music artist rediscovered after decades out of fashion, cycling is suddenly cool again.

From hip ad campaigns to mundane council leaflets, we're bombarded with images of happy people on bikes. Briefcase-toting commuters eager to get to work; carefree families bonding on a rail trail (*see* 'Glossary', page 119); racing pelotons cresting a mountain pass; flowing-haired young women in summer frocks with a puppy in their front basket...

The reality is often different: mending your second puncture on a windy November night on the bypass; being cut up repeatedly by the same bus; getting thrown off a train because your reserved bike space is blocked by a hen party's airline baggage.

Cyclists know this. Tell them you ride a bike and they will welcome you as a fellow chosen one – a member of the special people – who knows about quality of life, and who won't harangue them about jumping red lights, or cycling on pavements, or 'road tax'. But non-cyclists don't know this. Tell them you ride a bike and

they assume you must be fit, sustainable, resourceful and self-reliant.

They're instantly on the defensive, burbling excuses about needing their car because they live so far away. And they have to live so far away because nowhere else has parking. They know they should use their bike but it has a flat tyre. And there's a hill.

With all those media images in mind, they're envious of, and a little intimidated by, the vibrant, sociable and healthy lifestyle they presume you must have.

Riding a bike is great. It saves temper, time and money. You glide past traffic queues, arrive early feeling fit, and get 300 miles per gallon of coffee. It puts you in direct control of your resources.

Bluffing about it is even better, because it puts you in control of other people. And that's what being a bluffer is all about.

This short guide sets out to conduct you through the main danger zones encountered in discussions about cycling, and to equip you with a vocabulary and evasive technique that will minimise the risk of being rumbled as a bluffer. It will give you a few easy-to-learn hints and techniques that might even allow you to be accepted as a cyclist of rare knowledge and experience. But it will do more. It will give you the tools to impress legions of marvelling listeners with your wisdom and insight – without anyone discovering that until you read it you probably didn't know the difference between a velocipede and a centipede.