

LOOK MA, NO HANDS! Well, almost . . .

By Michele Schmidt

For most of my life, I have avoided situations in which I might hurt myself; you'd never mistake me for a risk-taker, that's for sure! Earlier this year, I began to see how the goal of keeping myself "safe" was limiting me. My world was becoming smaller and smaller and my life more and more limited.

My poor bike was languishing in the garage; I was afraid to ride it on the roads because I might get hit by a car! However, having moved to Folsom we now had access to the American River Parkway – 32 miles of paved multi-use/bike trail. Maybe this wouldn't be so scary or dangerous. My husband and I dusted off the bikes and set out for a ride. All was well until we began our descent from Beals Point (don't laugh – that hill felt like a mountain to me!). Derek took off flying, while I inched my way down with my heart in my throat. I'm surprised my rims didn't catch fire, as I rode the brakes the entire way.

Over the months, I gradually became more comfortable on the bike, but remained afraid to take my hands off the bars. Not a big deal, right? Wrong. This becomes a safety issue: I couldn't perform important tasks such as signaling a turn or a stop, alerting others to debris in the road, taking a drink from my water bottle, or simply wiping the snot from my nose!

Finally, last weekend I participated in a skills clinic run by Rob Kopitzke of Body Concepts/Peak Cycling. We met in the Body Concepts parking lot in El Dorado Hills and started with two-handed braking. Somehow, I managed to stay clipped in and not tip over! Next, we moved on to one-handed braking. I could feel my fear mounting, just thinking about it. With much encouragement, I found myself able to take a hand off the bars for a second, then two, then three . . .

We continued with more drills, such as riding through cones first with both hands, then with one, then the other . . . We did this on the tops, on the hoods, and in the drops. Okay, so I ran over a cone or two (or three), but I didn't fall over or crash into anyone or anything. Most importantly, I didn't cause any accidents!

Finally, we practiced some of the more practical things that riding one-handed enables: zipping and unzipping the jersey; taking fuel in and out of a pocket; and removing, drinking from, and replacing the water bottle. So, I still need LOTS and LOTS of practice, but I was able to get to a point of feeling more comfortable with all of these skills.

I'm looking forward to practicing these new-found skills more. Hopefully on group rides I won't feel like, or be viewed as, so much of a hazard and I'll be able to move up a bit in the paceline rather than staying at the very back so as to stay out of the way!

The sport of cycling has been so much more than something to do with my free time – it has been a catalyst in facing my fears and opening my life up to experience it more fully. Thanks to my CycleFolsom and Peak Cycling friends – for your patience and encouragement.