

KIDS, FAMILIES RIDE EN MASSE



Kidical Mass riders learn to ride safely, responsibly

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Alpha Wilson showed up for Saturday's Kidical Mass bike ride in what she calls her "West Eugene minivan" — a Bike Friday "Family Tandem Traveler" bicycle for herself and 6-year-old daughter Ruthanne, with 4-year-old son Charlie bringing up the rear in a Burley bike trailer.

"I commute to work by bike, and I teach at South (Eugene High School), so it's almost a seven-mile round-trip," Wilson said. "We get around (by bike) — go to the Saturday Market and do our shopping, as much as we can.

"We got this (adult/child tandem bike) because Eugene's just so bikeable."

At Saturday's event, it was all about bikes — and kids.

"We're trying to get more parents and kids out, and helping them to realize that riding on the road is not all that dangerous if they know what they're doing," said Paul Adkins, a Kidical Mass co-founder.

He was also the nominal organizer of Saturday's casual ride that started at Monroe Park in west Eugene, went for a loop on the Willamette River bike path and stopped for hot chocolate at Adkins' Whiteaker Neighborhood house before returning to the park.

Kidical Mass was inspired by the Critical Mass bike rides that have raised awareness about urban bike riding — and sometimes led to confrontations — around the country. But Kidical

Mass is a nonpolitical version whose goal is simply to teach children — and their parents — to ride safely and responsibly.

“A lot of it is teaching the parents to ride safely,” Adkins said. “A lot of people go the wrong way (on streets) ... or they run through a stop sign. But you can’t do that with kids.

“I have four kids, and my 6-year-old has been riding on roads for two years, and he does better than a lot of the other people out there.”

Kidical Mass is as much about setting an example as anything else, and it’s caught on around the country and even in Europe.

The first such event was organized in the spring of 2008 by Eugene bicycle activist Shane Rhodes, to celebrate a visit to town by his friend and bicycling filmmaker Ted White, whose 1992 documentary “Return of the Scorcher” added the term “critical mass” to the bicycling vernacular and who chronicled the movement in his 1999 film “We Are Traffic.”

Rhodes was already involved in Eugene’s Safe Routes to Schools program, which encourages parents and students to bike or walk rather than drive to school. And White, the filmmaker, had recently become a father. So Kidical Mass became a logical extension of Rhodes’ efforts and an appropriate way to mark White’s visit.

In less than two years, the rides have become monthly events in Eugene — the third Friday of each month during spring and summer, and the monthly third Saturday during fall and winter. Some summer rides have attracted as many as 80 participants, while some rainy-day winter events have ebbed at about 10.

On Saturday, there were about 20.

“The beauty of it is that it doesn’t have to be (the same people each month), or anybody in particular,” Adkins said Saturday.

Kidical Mass has developed an Internet presence (www.kidicalmass.org), and rides have been organized in various locations.

Cass and Andy SkinnerLopata of Eugene said they bike rather than drive as often as they can, and they saw Saturday’s ride — their first Kidical Mass event — as a learning opportunity for their children.

“We’re teaching these guys the rules of the road,” Cass SkinnerLopata said. “We thought this would be a good event.”

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