



CYCLING FACT SHEET No. 38

Mirrors improve your view of the world

Although cycling rear vision mirrors are not required by law, they are a highly recommended accessory for riders.

Mirrors do not replace the need to look behind when making a manoeuvre, but instead provide a means of increasing overall awareness. They are particularly important for cyclists who use busy roads, because a strong headwind can allow even the largest truck to silently sneak up from behind without the rider knowing.

There are several types of cycling mirror on the market and each has its pros and cons. Handlebar-mounted mirrors that either stand vertically from the bar or slip over the end of the handle and extend outwards, are the most popular, because they are easy to use and give a reasonable field-of-view. The downside is that you need to be steering straight to see directly behind and they can be stolen when the bicycle is unattended.

To help reduce blind spots, some riders not only fit a mirror on the usual right hand side, but also another on the left.

Handlebar mirrors create a small amount of additional wind drag and the view can be affected by vibration, although some versions have a dampening system.

A helmet mirror, as the name implies, protrudes out on a stalk and attaches to the bike helmet by clamp, velcro or adhesive patch.

Most of these come from North America or Europe and the packaging instructions tell you to attach the mirror onto the left front side of your helmet. This is misleading for Australia where, of course, we have to attach it to the right side.



Since this type of mirror sits close to the eye, it provides a wide field-of-view. By turning your head, you can instantly scan a very large area. Being featherweight, they can be easily broken and the helmet must be snug-fitting because any movement will place the mirror out of position, requiring constant re-adjustment. Helmet mirrors take a little getting used to but regular wearers become so comfortable with them that they will automatically glance to the upper right, even if they hear footsteps behind them when walking down the street.

A third type of mirror attaches to the arm of a rider's eyeglass or sunglasses. They suffer from less vibration than other versions, but because rain-splattered glasses are difficult to see through, these mirrors are not ideal in wet conditions.

The choice is an individual one, although the combination of a handlebar-mounted mirror and either a helmet or eyeglass mirror, would give a rider the best possible view of what is happening behind.

This fact sheet is one of a series dealing with the use of bicycles for recreation and transport in Western Australia. The series looks at a range of cycling-related topics including ride routes, touring tips, maintenance, safety, road rules, insurance and product reviews. You can find more cycling fact sheets online at www.transport.wa.gov.au/cycling

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