

Talking bike has a serious lesson: Don't become one of those statistics

"Hi, everybody. I'm Stinger the talking bike. We're here to talk to you about bicycle safety."

The children seated in a semicircle around the bicycle and the Extension agent who brought it giggle a little at the talking bicycle. Some try to see where the wires go out of sight. But they listen to the 15-minute dialogue between Stinger and the adult.

More than 10,000 elementary school students in six Arizona counties have seen and heard this 4-H bicycle safety presentation since it began in 1977, reports UA Extension Safety Specialist Mark Lloyd. Many other youngsters have seen it at Cochise, Graham, Pinal and Pima county fairs and at the 1978 Arizona State Fair. Usually, the safety program includes a film as well as the talking bicycle.

The presentation is amusing, but bicycle safety is serious business. Bicycle accidents in Arizona injured more than three people per day in 1978. Eighteen victims died. Two-thirds of the injuries and half of the deaths were to people less than 20 years old.

"We've found in the past that in about three-fourths of these accidents, the bicyclist is doing something he shouldn't," says Ross Kelley of the Arizona Department of Transportation's Safety Projects Service.

Lloyd worked with 4-H specialists in the State 4-H Office at the University of Arizona to develop the talking-bike safety presentation. The bicycle donated by Ehrhardt's Schwinn Bikes of Tempe is wired for lights, horn-tooting, and wheel-spinning as well as talking. "Much of the script is based on Arizona statutes about bicycle riding," Lloyd explains.

Soon after the bike was geared up for use around the state, Pima County 4-H Agent Gregg Mitchell put together another for use in that county. Kittle's Bike Shop of Tucson donated the bicycle and the Rincon Exchange Club bought the necessary electrical equipment. Lloyd reports that 4-H agents in other counties are also planning to assemble their own talking-bicycle programs since the presentation has been so well received in schools and youth programs.

"The younger kids are a good audience for learning about safe riding habits," he says. "And many of the safety practices for riding a bicycle will carry over as good habits when they're old enough to drive an automobile."



Youngsters at the Marana Community Recreation Center inspect the demonstration bicycle brought for a safety program by Pima County 4-H Agent Gregg Mitchell.

Opposite: A Cottonwood Elementary School student in Casa Grande tries to show the proper signal for a right-hand turn during Environmental Improvement Day at that city's Palo Verde Elementary. Extension Safety Specialist Mark Lloyd, left, corrected her on the signal (Do you know the right one?), and discussed how bike-riding saves energy.



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