



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

Cyclists ride along Highway 9 Saturday promoting the need for safe passage between Santa Cruz and Felton.

Road warriors

Jamming Highway 9, cyclists make a statement about safety

By JOHN ROBINSON
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FELTON — It was the start of a cycling revolution — pedal power to the masses — or so hope organizers of a Saturday morning bicycle ride to Felton that called for the periodic closing of Highway 9 to all cars.

The group's goal was met briefly as more than 100 bicyclists slowly peddled up Highway 9, blocking traffic and creating a long line of sometimes irritated motorists.

"You can't ride six abreast on the highway," a visibly irritated California Highway Patrol officer told the group. "Why didn't you pull over? Do know what will happen when a car coming at 40 miles per hour around a curve meets you? You are going to get hurt — badly."

That's just the point, several riders responded, saying there is no safe bicycle route on Highway 9, or for that matter from the San Lorenzo Valley to Santa Cruz.

"Anybody who rides this road puts up with that everyday," said cyclist Roger Grigsby. "Cars go by at 40 miles per hour all the time."

The ride was sponsored by

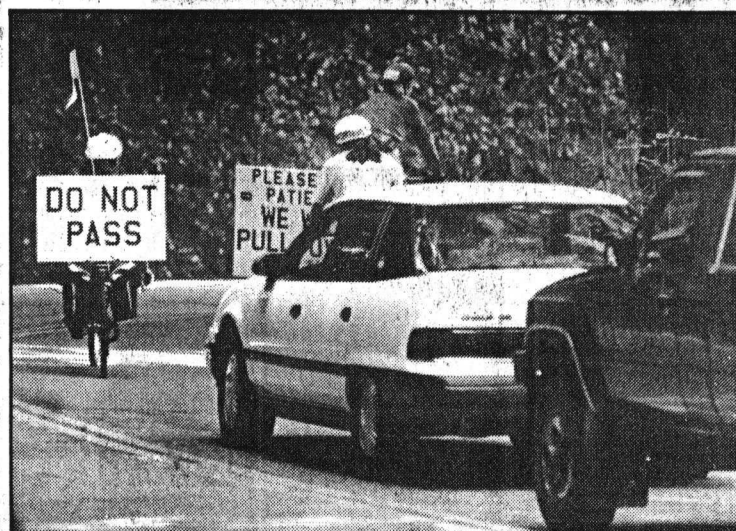
People Power, a group dedicated to promoting bicycles as an alternative to automobile transportation. The group has called for closing Highway 9 from Felton to Santa Cruz to all cars for at least one day a week.

That idea has been rejected by Caltrans and organizers said although they don't necessarily expect the state to comply, but are using the idea to make a statement.

"Most of us really don't think they will close the road, but it's a statement," said rider Geoffrey Smith. "We need rights for bikes."

Under the law, bicycles may be entitled to an equal share of the road, but in practical use, it is often not so, said organizers.

"You may have the protection of law in court, but it doesn't do you much good if you are a corpse," said ride organizer Ron Goodman. "This is the beginning of a biking revolution in the San Lorenzo Valley. Other roads have been closed (by the state) but it doesn't happen when 150 bicycles riders want it. But when (San Lorenzo Valley Supervisor) Fred Keeley sees his constituency wants the road closed, he'll start lobbying Caltrans."



Motorists trail the pack of bicycle riders and use their horns to signal their displeasure.

Goodman and others want to see bicycle lanes put on Highway 9 to make the road safer for cyclists. The current problem, according to Goodman, is that some sections of the road have wide shoulders, while others have none at all, forcing bicycles into unsafe traffic lanes.

The move for closing Highway 9 came after a landslide closed the road for repairs last winter. Bicyclists were able to use the scenic road without fear of meeting a car.

"It was a playground," said Martin Krieg, a publisher of "Cycle America," a directory committed to bicycle transportation.

"In a car you don't smell things, or hear things. On a bike you are totally integrated with the world around you."

Krieg and other said that if safe bicycle riding routes are provided that more people will begin leaving their cars behind in favor of cycling.

"Why can't we make Santa Cruz County a playground for bicycles?" Krieg asked.

Krieg and others said that if Highway 9 is not made bicycle safe — or exclusive — an alternative might be to build a bicycle path alongside the Roaring Camp railroad lines through the mountains from Felton to Santa Cruz.