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Critical Mass cyclists pedal on

The mood was more merry prankster than bicycle hooligan as the monthly Critical Mass demonstration rolled through Seattle Friday at rush...

By [Lynn Thompson](#)

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KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Conferring with a rider, a Seattle police officer was one of many on hand for the first Critical Mass trip since the violence that happened on last month's ride. The group, more than 100, leaves Westlake Center.

The mood was more merry prankster than bicycle hooligan as the monthly Critical Mass demonstration rolled through Seattle Friday at rush hour.

About 300 cyclists and a strong police presence marked the first ride since violence erupted last month on Capitol Hill. That encounter resulted in two bicyclists being arrested and a motorist injured. No charges have been filed, and police are still investigating.

The clash provoked angry responses in both the cycling community and among drivers, each side accusing the other of criminal behavior.

July's violence was very much on the minds of the bike riders who gathered at Westlake Center at 5:30 p.m. Friday. One woman distributed fliers with what she said were eyewitness accounts charging that the driver of the car had grown impatient with the passing parade of cyclists and revved his car into them, striking three and running over one.

The driver was hit in the head with a bike lock and needed stitches. His windshields were smashed and his tires slashed.

Seattle police officers Friday also distributed fliers, promising to protect the safety of both bicyclists and motorists. Forty-eight officers, on motorcycles, bicycles and in cars and vans accompanied the riders as they traveled north along Fourth Avenue, circled back through the Pike Place Market and headed toward Ballard along Alaskan Way. The ride ended at Gas Works Park.

Critical Mass demonstrations take place the last Friday of the month in cities around the world. The rides have no leaders and no set itineraries. Whoever is toward the front heads out onto the streets, followed by hundreds more.

"It's not about causing trouble, it's about 'Let's ride bikes,' " said Raz Barnea, 26, who said he's been participating for about three years.

The monthly ride is meant to assert cyclists' right to the road. The rolling protest moves as a group, with members stopping to block intersections as other riders pass by. On Friday the police also controlled traffic at intersections and accompanied the riders through red lights, much as they do for parades and funerals.

"For a few hours, once a month, they clog the streets like the cars do every day," said David Hiller, advocacy director for the Cascade Bicycle Club, which is critical of the tactics of the mass rides. "We don't support violating traffic laws," he said before Friday's ride.

Truck and car horns blared approval, and the bicyclists answered with whoops and dinging bike bells. Some pedestrians said they were "awe-struck" by the sight of so many bicyclists.

"It's fantastic," said Kenny Ramer, an artist with a studio near Fourth Avenue. "It's a moving expression of unity."

But some motorists weren't pleased.

Wahid Qureshi idled his SUV at an intersection near the Pike Place Market as the bicyclists blocked the road in front of him for several minutes. He said his girlfriend was diabetic and needed food.

"If this was an emergency, it would really be a problem," he said. "They're not even stopping for the red light."

Seattle police said the ride was completed without incident.

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