

Make room! Here come the cyclists

By **BOB MARSHALL**
Outdoors editor

It's early morning on Wisner Boulevard, and rush hour commuters are eager to get a head start on the day. As the traffic nears the I-610 overpass, it approaches a group of cyclists moving steadily in the right-hand lane, two abreast.

There isn't enough room for both cars and bikes in the right-hand lane, and one motorist is trapped behind the pack by traffic in the left-hand lane.

Within seconds her patience ends. A horn blares, and as she straddles the lane stripe to squeeze past the cyclists, an arm extends from the passenger's window. Single-finger insults are exchanged between motorists and bikers before the car speeds off.

It is a scene that has become part of the New Orleans traffic tableau. And a sign, area cyclists argue, of dangerous times ahead.

A sport that drew fewer than

100 serious local participants just a decade ago, cycling has been growing steadily in the metro area for the last five years. The New Orleans Police Department estimates more than 600,000 bikes are owned in New Orleans alone; active cyclists estimate three to four thousand of those are owned by regular, serious riders who take to the city streets daily for long, fast workouts.

At the moment they may be among the city's unhappiest residents, a group that feels it is ignored by state and city planners, denied its right to recreational space, and considered fair game by motorists ignorant of traffic laws.

"Riding a bike in this city has never been easy just because of the street system — Mexico has better streets than New Orleans," says Frank Douglass, a veteran cyclist who teaches courses on the subject at Tulane University. "The potholes alone makes it a

See **CYCLISTS, D-7**



A bicyclist grits his teeth as he breaks in front of the pack.

STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANDERSON