



Bicycle: The History

By David V. Herlihy

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During the nineteenth century, the bicycle evoked an exciting new world in which even a poor person could travel afar and at will. But was the “mechanical horse” truly destined to usher in a new era of road travel or would it remain merely a plaything for dandies and schoolboys? In *Bicycle: The History* (named by *Outside* magazine as the #1 book on bicycles), David Herlihy recounts the saga of this far-reaching invention and the passions it aroused. The pioneer racer James Moore insisted the bicycle would become “as common as umbrellas.” Mark Twain was more skeptical, enjoining his readers to “get a bicycle. You will not regret it—if you live.”

Because we live in an age of cross-country bicycle racing and high-tech mountain bikes, we may overlook the decades of development and ingenuity that transformed the basic concept of human-powered transportation into a marvel of engineering. This lively and engrossing history retraces the extraordinary story of the bicycle—a history of disputed patents, brilliant inventions, and missed opportunities. Herlihy shows us why the bicycle captured the public’s imagination and the myriad ways in which it reshaped our world.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Each day, in cities from Bangkok to Baltimore, millions of people mount their bicycles, strap on a helmet and ride off to school, to work or just to get away, giving little thought to the hundreds of years of invention, evolution and development that afford them this simple pleasure. Herlihy has dedicated many years of research and study to uncovering this history, and the result is a comprehensive genealogy of the two-wheeled savior of mass transit. In the late 1700s, when transportation was ruled by the horse and buggy, inventors challenged one another to develop a human-powered vehicle to replace the inconvenience and expense of the horse-drawn carriage and make man, once and for all, self-sufficient. It took nearly 200 years for the four-wheeled, multi-person machines first thought to be the answer to this dilemma to evolve into the two-wheeled speedsters we know today. The author's vivid account of this story could not be more detailed if Herlihy himself had personally lived through every experience he recounts. Each chapter is filled with eye-catching illustrations and photographs spanning nearly two centuries, and colorful sidebars like "The Velocipede in the Service of Love" and "Women and the Velocipede" add character to the often technical, textbook-style prose. In uncovering interesting characters like 1860's racer James Moore, who predicted bicycles would soon be "as common in homes as umbrellas," and documenting hundreds of little known facts, Herlihy takes what could have been just another history book and makes it a story worth telling your friends about.

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From [The New Yorker](#)

The bicycle began life, in the nineteenth century, as a diversion for rich Europeans. Physicians, theologians, anti-feminists, and journalists condemned it as a hazardous fad—"Man is a locomotive machine of Nature's own making, not to be improved by the addition of any cranks or wheels of mortal invention," wrote one opponent—and cyclists were sometimes set upon by mobs. By the century's end, however, with a safe, efficient model available to the commuter and the Sunday pleasure seeker, the bicycle created thousands of jobs, spurred road construction, and transformed fashion, while daredevil, brandy-swilling racing cyclists acquired heroic status. Herlihy portrays the men who pioneered this gravity-defying wonder; they worked in near-obscurity, lit by the Industrial Age's spirit of invention, the capitalist impulse, and the utopian hope that the bicycle would "take men away from the gambling rooms and rum shops, out into God's light and sunshine."

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Review

"David Herlihy's epic *Bicycle: The History* is a comprehensive guide to the early evolution of the bicycle. Filled with anecdotes from the late 19th and early 20th century, along with hundreds of photos, drawings and catalog excerpts, this is a book that can be consumed in bits, browsed or read with careful attention." —**Kent Peterson, *Outside***

(Kent Peterson *Outside*)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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