

ORGANIC LIVING

By
Robert Rodale

BICYCLISTS NEED A TWO-WHEELED MODEL T

What this country needs is a good \$25 bicycle. Bicycles are everywhere. You can't drive down a city street or through a park on a nice afternoon these days without seeing hundreds of cyclists enjoying themselves by taking advantage of the warm weather after a long winter hiatus. Statistics on bicycle sales show that the pastime has



become so popular that for the first time since World War I, two-wheeled transportation has outsold the four-wheel category. On top of that, adults account for more than half the new riders. Children are no longer the main users of bicycles.

As a long-time bicycle rider, I welcome the company. Bicycle riding has untold advantages for the individual and pays big dividends in health. When you ride a bicycle you get around easily and cheaply, without hurting the environment.

There are, however, problems connected with riding bicycles that have been highlighted since the new popularity, such as the fact that bicycles can be dangerous; riders must share the roadway with faster-moving cars.

The National Safety Council, an organization that keeps tabs on automobile deaths, reported that for 1973 (the last year for which statistics are available), bicycle fatalities totalled 1,150. That's about five per cent higher than in 1972. The Council believes the total will continue to rise, even though the number of fatalities per mile ridden will fall.

Bicycles don't have to be dangerous. Simple safety devices like rear-view mirrors can be a big help in avoiding trouble. Also, a brightly colored pennant mounted on an antenna can help automobile drivers spot bike riders more easily.

Benjamin W. Hartley, a high school driving instructor in Winchester, N.H., says that the flags now used on many bicycles are "the only way my car-driving students have of identifying a bicyclist at sufficient sight range to avoid road-using conflicts."

Bicycles can also be equipped with better reflectors and lights to make them even easier to see, especially at night.

Night cycling is especially dangerous, and should never be done for recreation.

But if bicycling is to continue to gain in popularity and become something more than just evening or weekend recreation, bikes will have to come down in price. Less-complicated bicycles will have to be built, sturdier and cheaper than the models we now see. If you've shopped for a bicycle recently, you'll know what I'm talking about. Walk into any bike store and you're faced with a bewildering array of sophisticated 10-speed machines that can cost anywhere from \$80 to \$200 and more. Even a bicycle for a child just learning can cost over \$50.

The bicycle has become too specialized. Like a sports car, bikes break down because they're not as rugged as they should be. A breakdown is not a simple matter of turning a bike on handlebars and seat and doing a quick repair job yourself. No, a breakdown means a trip back to the shop and, of course, a bill.

What I would like to see is a sturdy, cheap (\$25-\$40) bicycle offered to the public, capable of being ridden miles and miles without worrying that the next bump you hit will cause something to fall off or come loose.

Like Henry Ford's product, the basic bike could be the Model T of the future travel world, providing sound transportation without frills. If a cheap but well-built bike were put into production, cycling would become a more widely used alternative to driving.

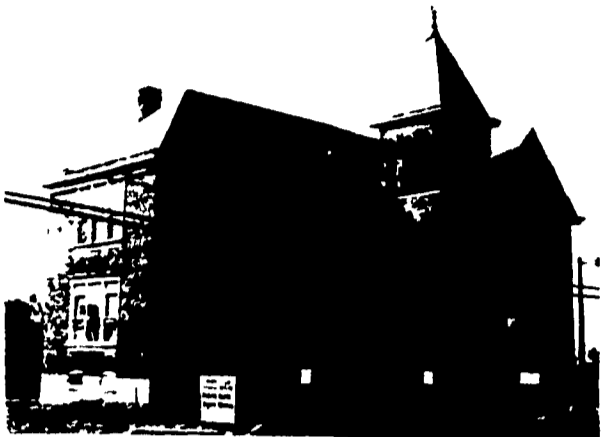
People in many parts of the world rely on bicycles for rapid transportation — for themselves and goods. And the sophisticated, expensive bike is not what they use. No, these basic bikes are simple, rugged and inexpensive. I think that form of unglamorous transportation could soon become important here in the United States.

The problem of making the bicycle convenient for people in hilly places can be solved in another way.

A company has started marketing a small gasoline engine that fits on the front wheel of bicycles. Instead of huffing and puffing up steep hills, the motor is started and helps pull the rider up. At the top, off goes the motor and the cyclist continues on.

Americans are ingenious in many ways. Some of this ingenuity could be used to put more bicycles on the road — not for recreation, but for work.

(Editor's Note: The opinions appearing in "Organic Living" are those of its author, Robert Rodale, an independent columnist. Rodale's comments do not necessarily reflect the thinking of the Lancaster Farming editor or anyone else on the Lancaster Farming staff.)



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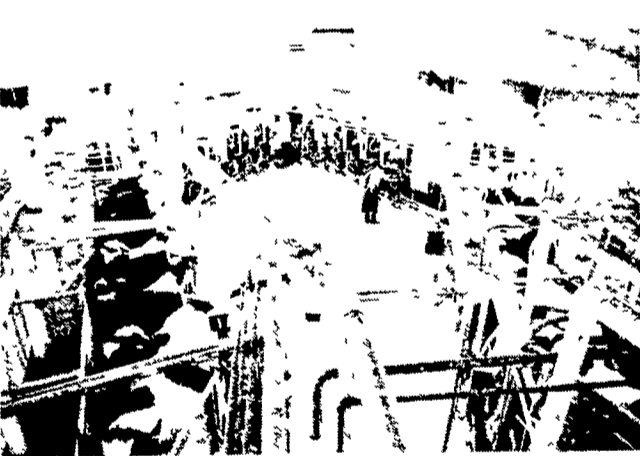
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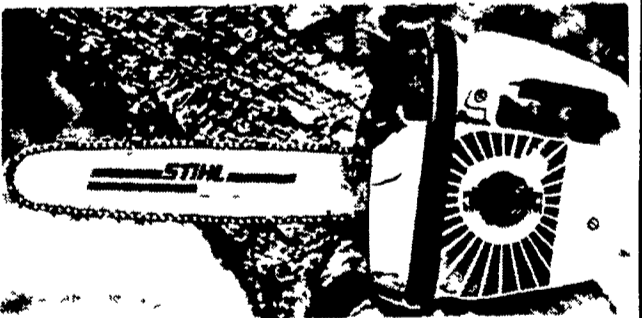
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