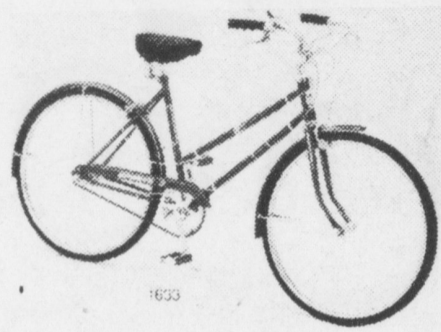
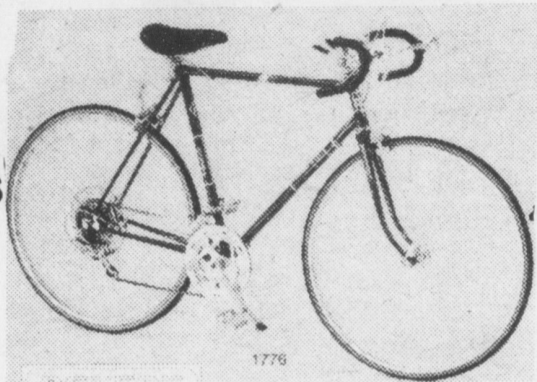


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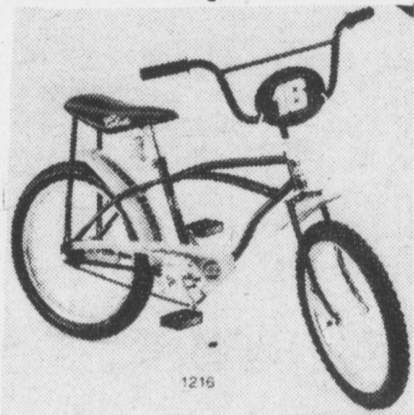
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# All about bikes



Bikes are great for children of all ages.

## Bone-shakers and High-wheelers

The forerunner of the bicycle was the "walk-a-long," invented in 1790. It had wooden wheels, no pedals, and couldn't be steered. Its purpose was merely to coast down hills.

As the 19th century wore on, the walk-a-long was followed by the "wooden horse", the "boneshaker", and the "high-wheeler" (the type with a huge front wheel and tiny back wheel - a triumph of fin-de-siecle engineering from which riders constantly toppled). The big breakthrough came in 1890 with the so-called

"safety" bicycle, so named to contrast it to the high-wheeler: you didn't have to worry about falling off.

The safety bike had the basic features of today's models; pneumatic tires, chain drive, spoke wheels, and tubular metal frame. Most advances in bicycle technology since then have come from new materials and racing bikes, prototypes of the common "ten-speed" of today.

Racing ten-speeds were developed for European

bicycle racing, which is a mania in France and other countries (French bike racers, like American football players, earn huge incomes from TV ads as a result of the popularity). While discount ten-speeds can be bought for about \$100, genuine racing machines can cost thousands.

Although occasional innovations appear, such as ellipsoidal sprocket gears, the bicycle hasn't changed much in the last fifty years. Like the auto, it seems to have either reached a plateau or fallen into a rut.

## Bike operation and safety

As a bike rider, you will find that autos tend to treat you in two opposite ways. Either they will slow down to a crawl at the sight of you, and pass at least ten feet on your left, or they will totally ignore you. Many people will open car doors in your path or pull out in front of you at intersections - they don't seem to even see you. You must drive defensively on a bike.

On busy highways, a bike is at a disadvantage, especially if there isn't a smooth shoulder. A less direct route along little-used back roads is better. Alleys in town are safer than streets.

Weather can present problems. If it's raining out, a car is more comfortable. Heat and cold are no obstacle, if one dresses properly. Don't overdress

in chilly weather - you'll be soaked in sweat by the time you've ridden a mile.

For night riding, get a light. The kind that straps onto your leg in the best, as it moves up and down while you pedal, attracting attention. For peace of mind, a bike lock is a must. Fasten the chain or cable through the bike frame and the front wheel, and around something high and solid, like a street lamp.

To become a proficient and safe biker, learn to pedal without your hands on the bars. This will give you good balance and prevent the erratic path that can put you under a truck. You should be able to stay on the yellow line without wavering: if you can't, practice.

Maintain your tires and brakes. Bald tires have poor traction, which is just

as important on a bike as it is on a car, if not more so: you don't have any metal cage around you.

In addition to the light, which is essential after dark, there are some other safety devices which are good ideas. One is a helmet made especially for bikers, with openings to conserve weight and air your scalp. One of these could save your life if you get thrown onto a curb. For greater visibility, get the kind of reflectors which spring onto the wheel spokes - they really attract attention at night. For daytime visibility, buy the orange flag on a pole (you won't have to wave it constantly; it attaches to the frame). It will give you a comfortable feeling when a truck is overtaking you from behind the crest of a hill.

*Jim Roberts*

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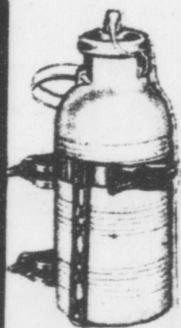
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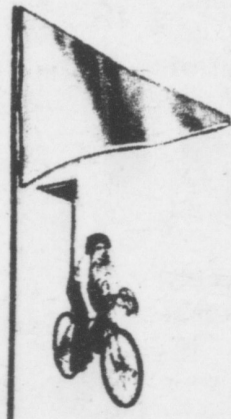
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