

Cycle History 11  
Proceedings of the 11th International Cycling History Conference



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# 11

Proceedings of the 11th International Cycling History Conference

Osaka, Japan, 23–25 August 2000

Edited by Andrew Ritchie and Rob van der Plas

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Back flap illustration: 1888 Japanese newspaper advertisement for an Ordinary (illustration provided by Outsu Yukio)

Frontispiece illustration: Japanese illustration of Ordinary cyclist and woman on stilts, 1889 (illustration provided by Outso Yukio)

**Index**

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# Introduction: An Osaka Diary

The eleventh international gathering of cycle historians took place at the end of August 2000, in Osaka, Japan. To convene in Japan was especially significant, since Asia has been the dynamo of so many developments in cycling during the second half of the 20th century. The Osaka meeting was made possible thanks to the unstinting logistical support and extremely generous hospitality of the Shimano Corporation, based in Sakai on the outskirts of Osaka. Despite having been reduced to rubble during the second World War, Osaka is the business powerhouse of Japan, and the economy of greater Osaka is now larger on its own than all but the top dozen nation-states.

Most of the conference-goers arrived via Kansai, the massive new airport serving the Osaka region, built on an artificial island which is sinking into the sea at the rate of about one foot a year. This will no doubt cause problems soon enough for motor traffic; for one participant who was just trying to ride to the Conference, the bridge was already a problem. Ron Sant was prevented by the authorities from crossing to the mainland under his own steam, and had to rent a minibus to get himself plus bicycle to the Rhiga Royal Hotel, where the conferees were staying. The hotel was conveniently connected by a walkway to Sakai train station, and was about twenty minutes by shuttle from the Shimano headquarters where the Conference was held.

The opening day was full of activity, beginning with a fast-moving tour of the Shimano factory and Research and Development facility. In the afternoon there was a visit to the Sakai Bicycle Museum, sponsored by Shimano to display the Shimano collection. This collection is based on the Batavus cycle collection, purchased by Shimano in 1982. Gertjan Moed gave an illustrated talk on the history of the collection. The curator of the Sakai Bicycle Museum is Nakamura Hiroshi,<sup>1</sup> who raced in Europe in the late sixties and became Japan's national road champion in 1970; he joined Shimano in 1972 and was sent to Europe to write a report for the company on the possibilities of competing on the professional circuit.

Lance Armstrong's 2000 Tour de France victory with Shimano equipment was the culmination of the company's strategic vision. Mr. Nakamura told me that his first reaction, on being asked to curate the historic collection, was a feeling that he was being put out to pasture, but he had come to see the Museum as a way to display Shimano's contribution to the continuing evolution of the bicycle. Mr. Nakamura was on hand that evening at the Rhiga Royal's Diamond Suite to help host a welcoming dinner that rounded off a very full opening day.

The next two days, Thursday and Friday, were spent on the fourth floor of the Shimano head offices, moving between the intensive schedule of Conference presentations in the wood-paneled auditorium and breaks for coffee and lunch in the adjoining suite. The whole operation was run with military precision by the highly efficient Conference organizer, Frank Berto. Very few of the visitors had any command of Japanese, but fortunately for non-Japanese speakers, there was an English translation provided in the case of papers delivered in Japanese, though not vice versa.

Cyclist on the grounds of the Imperial Palace in Kyoto.



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1. See note on page 7 regarding the order of quoting family and given names for Japanese participants.

The sessions were divided by familiar periodization and categories — early, modern, social, technical, industrial, and racing history. Conceptually, most of the papers were organized within standard geopolitical borders, that is, national (Japan, Austria, Netherlands, etc.), regional (Asia), or comparative (e.g., British vs. Japanese). An exception to these orthodox frameworks, as if in response to Iain Boal’s opening call for a “world history” of cycling, was Hans-Erhard Lessing’s stimulating paper, “What Led to the Invention of the Early Bicycle?” which broke out of the received categories of cycling history. Besides the intriguing suggestions that early bicycle design drew on the invalid carriage, the reading machine, the Chinese wheelbarrow, and estate garden machinery, Lessing’s most remarkable hypothesis concerns the possible stimulus of global weather change (following the huge 1815 volcanic eruption in what is now Indonesia) on Karl von Drais’ efforts to develop alternatives to horse-drawn vehicles in Europe.

In his illuminating paper “Sports Bicycles in Japan Before World War II,” the Tokyo scholar-engineer Koike Kazusuke showed how the Western category “sports” was culturally alien before the latter part of the Meiji period (1867–1912). He traced the pioneering role of Mr. Sugamura, a Japanese Anglophile and keen cyclist, in fostering cycle touring in pre-war Japan, and argued for its involvement with modern romantic notions of wild landscapes, and of

mountains in particular. [Editor’s note: unfortunately this paper was not received in time for publication.]

These two papers are mentioned in particular because of their methodological importance. Both Lessing and Koike move beyond the old dichotomization between internalist and externalist history. An internalist approach sees science and technology as a rational, coherent enterprise — explainable in terms of its own special methods and having an internal dynamic abstracted from social and political factors. Externalist history, on the other hand, looks to the social matrix — to factors of power, patronage, resources, reception, ideology, economy and culture — to explain the development of science and technology. The point, for cycling historians, is to get beyond one-sided accounts, and to show how the technical and the social interpenetrate in the making of the world and the artifacts we have built. In the case of the Japanese sports bicycle, the history of the technical development of tough, wider gears was inextricably linked to the demand for sports bicycles in the context of a particular set of attitudes to nature.

If just these few contributions posed a challenge to the standard assumptions of cycling historiography, there was still an impressive amount of new material for historians to digest. In particular, for those of us brought up in the Euro-American tradition, the papers tracking the history of the Japanese bicycle industry covered unfamiliar territory. In the various sessions,

Participants of the 11th International Cycling History Conference in Osaka, photographed in the reception hall of the Shimano factory.

Top row (left to right): Fujimura Ken, Okubo Kaoku, Clary Burgwardt, Mr. & Mrs. Howie Cohen, Connie Berto, Silvia Nagy, E. Hester, Anne Shepherd, Ron Shepherd, Nakajima Hiroshi, Kido Yuichi.



2nd row (left to right): Nakamura Hiroshi, Okuda Keizo, Roger Street, Theo Stevens, Bruce Epperson, Peter Matthews, Ron Sant, Patrick Chen, Rüdiger Rabenstein, Nakahori Tsuyoshi.

3rd row (left to right): Yagami Shiro, Andrew Millward, Nicholas Oddy, Gertjan Moed, Gábor Konrád, Rob van der Plas, Carl Burgwardt, John Pinkerton, Walter Ulreich, Kamada Tsunehisa.

4th row (left to right): Tony Hadland, Hans-Erhard Lessing, Chester Kyle, Frank Berto, Alastair Dodds, Ross Petty, Paul Farren, David Winch, Miura Kazuyuki.

new light was thrown on old stories (the ordinary and its diaspora, Dunlop and his pneumatic tires, Jugendstil décor) and intriguing questions thrown up (for example, How should one assess the claim that entrenched bicycle sport bureaucrats have seriously impaired design innovation? Why was there so much kitsch bicycle ephemera? How to explain that representations of this cutting-edge machine were frequently retro and archaizing rather than modernist?)

There was nothing archaic, however, about Solidarity, the workers' cycling association that flourished in Weimar Germany, now reduced to a tiny remnant of the once immense throngs of proletarians on wheels who caused the word cyclist to be spoken as a term of bourgeois abuse in the 1920s. Rüdiger Rabenstein, in his elegy to the long, slow quietus of red cycling in Germany, made no mention of the rise of critical mass rides which began in San Francisco in the 1980s and are now a familiar event in Berlin, Tokyo, London, Barcelona and dozens of cities around the globe. Perhaps the last red stragglers of Solidarity might feel scant affinity with black cycling, with those who ride beneath the flag of anarchy. Still they might agree that, though socialism did not arrive on a bicycle, a better world if it is won, will mean reclaiming the streets from the tyranny of "automobilism." It is the task of ICHC to help recover the real history of the complex material relations between the bicycle, the motor car and the roads they share.

The conference wound up with a plenary session chaired by Nicholas Oddy. Discussion of possible venues for upcoming meetings led to the larger question of the future direction of ICHC in general, and to

two issues in particular: first, the relation of the organization both to industry and to the academy, and second, the matter of opening up to new constituencies. Concerns were raised about the trade-off between the independence of the ICHC and the effects, on the one hand, of commercial sponsorship, and on the other, of closer links with institutional and professional sites (say, museums or universities). In any case, there seemed to be general agreement that there was a pressing need for more outreach. For example, cycling history that explores and is alive to the dimension of gender has been woefully under-represented, a fact presumably not unconnected to the overwhelmingly male composition of organizers and contributors. It was also noted that, while meeting in Japan was a marvelous development, there were no participants from China, India, Indonesia, South America, or Africa north of the Limpopo. In other words, the vast majority of the world's peoples who use human-powered vehicles remain without representation at the International Cycling History Conference.

A farewell banquet, generously hosted by Shimano Yoshizo himself, youngest son of the founder, was held at the Rhiga Royal Hotel on the Friday evening. After dinner, unsuspected karaoke talent was displayed. In the morning, a number of the participants went for a bicycle tour of Sakai in the 35-degree C summer heat, while others took the *shinkansen* to Kyoto to take in the sights of every temple there, and the rest of us said *sayonara* to old and new friends.

Iain A. Boal

## Editors' Notes

1. For papers presented by British contributors and others who have in general followed British English conventions with respect to spelling and punctuation, we have generally adhered to British usage, while papers presented by U.S. contributors and others who have in general followed U.S. conventions, we have in general adhered to U.S. usage. This accounts for the apparent inconsistencies between spelling, punctuation, and abbreviation between different papers.
2. For the names of Japanese contributors, we have adhered to the officially recommended format, as published by the Society of Writers, Editors and Translators (SWET) in the *Japan Style Sheet*: family name first, followed by the given name. To avoid confusion between Japanese and non-Japanese contributor names, we have generally used a comma following the family name in for Japanese contributors, as recommended in the *Japan Style Sheet*.

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Theo Stevens:	Early Bicycle Racing in the Netherlands
John Pinkerton:	What the Papers Say

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