

Cycling History 14
Proceedings of the 14th International Cycling History Conference



Presenters at the 14th International Cycling History Conference
Canberra, Australia. 23 - 26 February 2003

- Front row:** Peter Hines, Graham Bradshaw, Ron Shepherd.
Second row: Paul Farren, Sally Dillon, Annemarie Driver.
Third row: Michael Kater, Stephanie Maxwell, Jack Hopher.
Fourth row: Rolf Lunsmann, Clare Simpson, John Bazzano, Rod Charles,
Geraldine McFarlane.
Back row: Rob Hess, Bob Tait, Kazusuke Koike, Elsie Huntington, Iain Boal

Cycling History

14

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Edited by Ron Shepherd

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Foreword

It is curious how bicycling hits some people, and then leaves others free. Some say the urge to bicycle is like a virus, in many cases incurable.

It is the silence that is so beguiling. There is no noise of outside propulsion, no huffing of steam, no clatter of hooves, no pounding of an internal combustion engine, just this aerobic quiet. The only equivalents are gliding, ballooning or downhill skiing.

The surprise comes when one realises it is possible to cover large distances, across town, across the State or across a whole continent. Then comes the satisfaction, a supreme satisfaction that this is done all by one's own muscle power. At a speed where it is possible to observe, listen, hear birds and speak to local inhabitants.

The virus, if we can call it that, was virulent in the 1880s and 1890s. Yes, the bicycle was a marvellous device for transportation, but it was more than that. It was a social machine, a recreation device; bicycle clubs were everywhere. In the mid-1890s it was absolutely the thing to ride a bicycle. Arthur Balfour, leader of the House of Commons, rode to Parliament on his bicycle. Field Marshal Lord Roberts, V.C., commander in chief in Ireland, rode a bicycle. The King of Greece was a bike rider, Queen Amelie of Portugal was crazy for her bike. It was suggested in newspaper advertisements that Britain's Royal Family had taken to the bike, including His Royal Highness, Edward, Prince of Wales. Considering his girth in 1895 one had to be skeptical, but his mistress, the beautiful actress Lily Langtree, was certainly a bike rider. Princess Maud of Wales, according to Melbourne *Punch* in August 1896, received 48 bicycles among her wedding presents. Who didn't ride a bike? Even George Bernard Shaw suggested that a bicycle was just the thing for a literary man and he rode his bike around Hyde Park.

In Australia, the Governor of Queensland, Lord Lamington, was an enthusiast, The

Governor of South Australia, Sir Thomas Fowell Buxton and the vice-regal family were devoted to the wheel and Lady Brassey in Melbourne was a fanatic. Her husband, the Governor, Lord Brassey, was not quite so keen. He was somewhat portly and preferred a tricycle. He claimed his record on a three-wheeler was 23 miles.

The bike as a great social instrument went into depression exactly with the rise of the motor. In the United States 131 bicycle firms closed in 1897 alone. In Australia one by one cycling journals closed down. The *Austral wheel* expired in April 1900. On 9 August 1900 the *N.S.W. Cyclist* announced its last appearance as a weekly journal. It ran for a short time as a fortnightly and the *Australian cyclist*, which had attempted to be a really national magazine, folded two years later. It took another 60 years before the bicycle boomed again.

The importance of the bicycle in our history was always under-rated. Some of the feats in the 19th century deserve much greater recognition. One thinks, for example, of Jerome J. Murif, who rode on his own from Adelaide to Darwin. He started on 10 March, 1897 and arrived on May 21. He did not have a train of camels to carry his gear. To my mind it was a feat more heroic than that of Burke & Wills. He found it comfortable to ride in his striped pyjamas. He lived on damper, salt meat, sugar and tea. He very nearly died. He dreamed of water. He saw constant mirages, and had strange dreams that he could hear water flowing. Frequently he had to carry his bike over loose sand hills, and his tongue was swollen in his mouth. In his moments of delirium he talked to his bike as his only friend. He called it "Diamond."

At this 14th International Geraldine McFarlane looked at the heroic achievements of George Burston and Ron Shepherd covered that amazing tale of 1899 when Arthur Richardson, the White brothers and Donald

McKay tackled the 18,000-kilometre ride around Australia. But I was always fascinated by the courage of the ladies. There was Mrs E.A.Maddocks who started the Sydney Ladies Bicycle Club in 1895. She believed ladies should remain ladies. No rational dress for her. There are photographs of Mrs Maddocks, on her safety bike, unsmiling, determined, wearing her voluminous skirt displaying not an inch of ankle, blouse with puffed sleeves, tight little waist and straw boater on top of her hair.

Mr and Mrs Maddocks bicycled from Sydney to Melbourne in 1894 and the road was so bad they had to walk many miles, but they did their 570 miles in 10 days. The following year they rode to Brisbane and back and averaged 80 miles a day. Clare Simpson in her paper on New Zealand bicycling tells of Alice Burn, who must have dressed in gear just as absurd as Mrs Maddocks. In January 1893 she cycled from Oamaru to Hokitika and was acclaimed as the first woman to ride 100 miles in a day.

The history of the bicycle has never received the attention that it merits, but the International Cycling History Conferences have gone a long way to correct this. They have taken place every year since they began at Glasgow in 1990. It has been all over the world to France, Germany, England, USA, Canada, the Netherlands, Japan, Italy, and now Australia. On every occasion eminent bicycle historians have delivered papers.

This is developing into a resource, a store of knowledge, which scholars can only dream about. So in Canberra, February 2003, 20 presenters added brilliantly to this treasure store. Paul Farren told of us of the Singer Company, which in the 1880s was the largest manufacturer of bicycles in the world. Rod Charles gave a history of cycling in Geelong and we learned that in 1869 William Kernot, a Geelong man, rode a velocipede 64 miles in teeming rain from Melbourne to Geelong in 9 hours. This same William Kernot became Professor of Engineering at Melbourne University. The Australian Dictionary of Biography reported that one day Kernot was riding his velocipede in East Melbourne when

he passed Melbourne's founder, John Pascoe Fawkner, riding in a carriage. Fawker looked 'in astonishment at the demonstration of hostility by this novel vehicle.' The professor said Fawkner died soon afterwards but whether the novel sight was too much for him and caused his demise he was not prepared to say.

Sally Dillon gave us fascinating information on ladies bicycling fashions. Of course, the big problem was petticoats. How did one protect one's modesty in high wind? There were weighted hems and all sorts of devices to hold them down. Gaiters too were useful to prevent any immodest glimpse of an ankle.

Elsie Huntington produced the diaries of the ABC and Leeds Ramblers Bicycle Club from 1881 to 1883. There is a tremendous nostalgia reading of happy times so long ago. How can you resist these lines:

Four young men rode out from Leeds
All astride their iron steeds.
The road was good and the sky was fair
And their hearts within them light as air
Save one of the four, who was not so spry
A big ham sandwich made him dry.

So many diaries tell of night rides and the joys of riding by moonlight, the quiet, the peace and the wonder. This is something few of us would dare contemplate in the 21st century.

Then talking of nostalgia it is hard to believe that the Malvern Star has been with us for 100 years. Some of us can remember Malvern Stars handed down through the family. Essex tourers, Hudsons, V-8 Buicks, would rust and disappear, but somehow a trusty, ageless Malvern Star was there forever. Rolf Lunsmann has done a splendid service in providing us with a history of that machine, as important an item of Oz culture as Vegemite or the Hills rotary clothes hoist.

William Hudson gave us the brilliant line in "Myths & Milestones": What do the following have in common... a derailleur gear, an aluminium frame, the freewheel, disk wheels, anatomically correct saddles, clipless pedals, suspension forks, folding bikes? Answer: they

were all ideas that originated in the late 1800s. And he quotes John Pinkerton: "Think of an idea in bicycle design and someone will have already invented it, probably in the nineteenth century.

But wait a minute, maybe the ideas are 100 years old, but some of them have been immensely refined. John Bazzano told us the story of Shimano, how they had been in the business of manufacturing bicycle parts for 83

years. Shimano, what a name in gearing! There are few of us who have not counted blessings on Shimano through a long hill, which never seemed to end.

It was a great Conference in Canberra with papers of a very high standard. In some ways it was no different from back in the 19th century. When bicyclists get together they always have a wonderful time.

Keith Dunstan

Keith Dunstan is a well-known author and journalist. He has written lyrically of the joys of cycling, notably in Confessions of a bike nut, Melbourne, Information Australia, 1999. Keith and his wife Marie have been keen cyclists for thirty years and crossed the USA as part of the Bikecentennial event in 1976. Keith described this trip in It's all Uphill, Toorak, Pegasus Books, 1979.



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