

## Bugatti Bicycles in Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic

By Jan Králík, Prague, Czech Republic

This story begins when the 26th (2015) International Cycle History Conference in Entraigues-sur-la-Sorgue ended, and I decided to go to the Musée Automobile de Provence in Orgon. The owner, Pierre Delliere, was at home and, what is more, he spoke English. In addition, amongst his beautiful historical automobiles were two extremely interesting Bugatti bicycles – a



Figure 1. Prinetti-Stucchi poster (1899). From: Steinhauser Norbert: *Ettore Bugatti: L'Artisan de Molsheim. Corseaux, Suisse, Editions Bugattibook, 2008, pg. 42.*

high-wheel bicycle, which had apparently been constructed by Jean Bugatti (1909–1939), and a touring bicycle designed by Ettore Bugatti (1881–1947). On the wall, there was even a drawing of Ettore's design, dated 18 October 1943. It is not clear whether Ettore Bugatti was also the builder of the bicycle. In any case,

it was his idea – a frame created of tubes, in every case four thin tubes instead of one thick one, as was common. It is not clear what inspired him to do this, probably his love of right angles; the cross section of the tubes forming the frame is a square.

Ettore Bugatti began his career in Milan with the Prinetti and Stucchi Company in 1897, [Figure 1] when he was 16. The company had been making bicycles since 1892 and Bugatti became acquainted with bicycles there, although he was attracted to engines. At the beginning of the 20th century Bugatti moved to France [Figure 2a], where he devoted himself to making cars. Although he only built some 8000 of them, the Bugatti trademark became a symbol throughout the world as a superlative car. It was the best specialized race car in the 1920's. I had long accepted the fact that I would never own a Bugatti, but never say "Never". When I saw a Bugatti bicycle, it occurred to me that it would be feasible to create a copy. Pierre Delliere was very cooperative, and he let me take pictures of both the drawing and of the bicycle and all their details. So, it was only necessary to find someone willing to build the frame.

I must interrupt this story to explain why I am so interested in the Bugatti trademark. At the time I visited the museum in Orgon, in 2015, I was working with a group of friends to put together a register of Bugatti automobiles in the countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire that were established after the end of the First World War; namely Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Yugoslavia. I should point out that there were about 150 Bugattis in Czechoslovakia at the end of the 1930's, more than in all the other mentioned countries together. This was to a large degree thanks to Eliška Junková (or Elisabeth Junek), an extraordinary woman (1900–1994). She raced Bugattis



Figure 2a. Ettore Bugatti at the turn of the 19th to 20th century. From: Steinhauser Norbert: *Ettore Bugatti: L'Artisan de Molsheim. Corseaux, Suisse, Editions Bugattibook, 2008, pg. 35.*

in 1924–1928, and in May of 1928, she won the Targa Florio race in the category of private drivers and ended up in 5th place overall. Her husband, Vincenc "Čeněk" Junek was also a successful driver but was unfortunately killed on the Nürburgring in July of 1928. [Figure 2b] After this, Eliška Junková ended her racing career. In any case it must be emphasized that the Bugatti trademark was extremely popular in Czechoslovakia at that time, and the whole nation loved Eliška Junková. Why am I boring you with Bugatti automobiles? Because they had an interesting continuation in bicycles.

A certain Czech dealer in bicycles, František Brauner, from the village of Mikulovice on the Czechoslovak – Polish border, published his first catalogue in 1929 [Figure 3], in which he included – amongst other things – a Bugatti bicycle. Everything indicates that he bought bicycles from the large Czech bicycle manufacturer Stadion. He then fitted the bicycles with a Bugatti nameplate and chainwheel with the Bugatti name featured in the casting, which he had made



Figure 2b. Vincenc Junek and Elisabeth Junek, Bugatti Type 35 Chassis 4572, Zbraslav-Jiloviště hill-climb, 9 May 1926. From: Karger Stanislav, Kožíšek Petr, Králík Jan, Němec Jan, Peda Maciej, Stauch Jakub, Tymeš Milan: *The K.&K. Bugatti Register, vol. 2. Ceauto, Wien, 2016, pg. 622.*

*Ettore Bugatti*



separately.<sup>1</sup> [Figures 4, 5a, & 5b] Thus the first Bugatti bicycles appeared on the Czechoslovak market in 1929, although, of course, they had nothing in common with Ettore Bugatti. Brauner anticipated that the popularity of the Bugatti name would help him sell his bicycles. However, Brauner did not expect that the Molsheim magician, as Bugatti was then known, would learn of



Figure 3. The catalogue of EFBE (František Brauner, 1929), in which he first offered Bugatti bicycles.

his commercial practices.

Material has been preserved in the archives describing how, in 1932, Ettore Bugatti lodged an action against František Brauner and demanded that Brauner immediately stop the production and sale of bicycles under the Bugatti trademark and, further, pay Bugatti 50,000 Czechoslovak Crowns (CSK) and all costs associated with the action. Finally, Bugatti demanded the right to publish the court decision at Brauner's expense. To give a better idea of what this meant – at that time 50,000 CSK was the price of about 80 standard bicycles.

However, the court did not rule in favor of Bugatti who was probably represented by a person who probably did not himself travel to Czechoslovakia for this purpose. Even though the plaintiff stated that it produced not only automobiles but also "self-propelled" vehicles, the court concluded that bicycles and self-propelled vehicles were not in competition and certainly that there was no competition between bicycles and automobiles. Briefly: according to the law at that time (i.e., Article 46 of Act No. 111/1927), the

two parties to the action were not in the position of competitors so there was no basis for the payment of a penalty.

However, the dispute did not end there. The plaintiff appealed and the appeals court set aside the higher courts judgment, and returned the case to the lower court for reconsideration. Bugatti then stated that he manufactured automobiles, bicycles, carts, bicycles (sic), etc. The appeals court had concluded that a bicycle and motorcycle or even a bicycle with an auxiliary motor could be considered to be similar goods and were thereby in competition. The preconditions for unfair competition were thus fulfilled. However, we know that Bugatti did not produce bicycles. Mr. Brauner defended himself stating that Bugatti did not manufacture either motorcycles or bicycles. If they did produce these vehicles, then they must prove it.

However, the appeals court looked at the case from a different angle. Regardless of whether Bugatti produced bicycles or not, the court stated that the law protected against misuse of someone else's ideas or work embodied in a trademark, no matter the kind of good for which the defendant used them.<sup>2</sup>

So, what was the decision of the new court? We aren't sure; we have not yet managed to find the final decision. Nonetheless, František Brauner continued to deal in bicycles. From 1931 he sold them, amongst other things, under the trademark "Buga" and not "Bugatti". Thus we can conclude that either the court prohibited him from using the Bugatti trademark or that he decided not to use it at his own initiative. He sneakily chose the

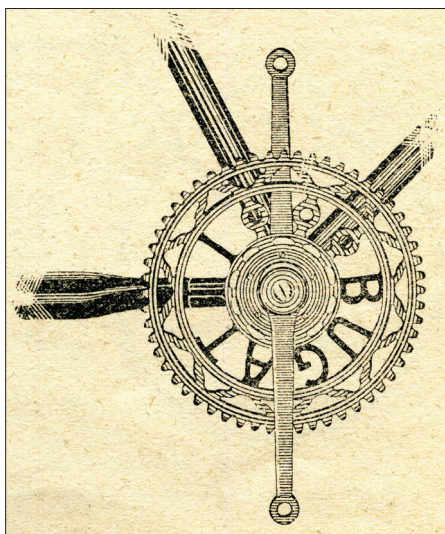


Figure 5a. Bugatti chain wheel from the catalogue (1929).



Figure 4. A page from the 1929 catalogue showing bicycles of the Stadion make. These same bicycles were alternatively equipped with Bugatti labels and Bugatti chain wheels.

new name "Buga".<sup>3</sup> Bugatti automobiles are still known in Bohemia by this name today.

This was the end of the story of Bugatti bicycles in Bohemia for quite some time. But, in 2015, when I came back from France, I looked for someone who would be willing and especially capable of making the frame of the bicycle. Through Helge Schultz I had contacted Marco Bertazzoni in Germany, who had built two Bugatti bicycles. He warned me that it was very delicate and demanding work and that it had taken over three months to put the frame together. He wrote that there were several copies around the world, but that – as far as he knew – only six were good quality copies. They included one in the museum in Orgon (maybe an original, but this isn't certain), two in the U.S.A.

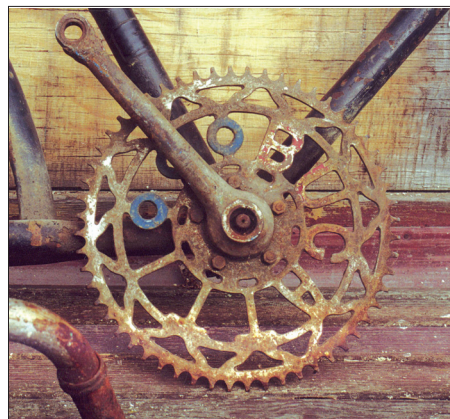


Figure 5b. Bugatti chain wheel by EFBE as found. Photo Jakub Stauch.



Figures 7a, 7b, & 7c. Frame (probably) constructed at the time of creation of the Bugatti bicycle drawing. Photos Jan Králík.

(one in the Mullin collection), one built by Helmut Feierabend and two by Marco Bertazzoni. I wanted the seventh good copy. In actual fact, more Bugatti bicycles have been made, probably including a tandem bicycle, but still the number of good copies is no more than the number of fingers on both hands.

Before describing how my copy was created, I must go back to the 1997 issue No. 145 of *The Boneshaker* magazine in which Gerry Moore published an interesting contribution: "The Bugatti Bicycle".<sup>4</sup> Amongst other things, he wrote: *Apparently he (Ettore Bugatti) never lost*

*his early interest in bicycle design and at his factory at Molsheim he took out several French patents relating to their design...* Patent No 734.067 dated 1. 12. 1913 is for a design for a bicycle frame constructed from light pressed sheet steel, a kind of monocoque construction. Probably the most interesting is the multi-tubed bicycle frame. It appears that a patent was taken out between 1910 and 1914 for an ultra-light bicycle frame. No details of this patent have yet been discovered, but we can assume that it was for the multi-tubed design. To confuse the issue, the Bugatti Trust

holds a full-scale drawing of a multi-tube frame dated 18. 10. 1943. Was this an update of the original design, or a method of recording the design as the original had been misplaced? [Figures 6, 7a, 7b, & 7c]

As the patent has not yet been found for the ultra-light frame of 1910 – 1914, it is difficult to conclude that this was a multi-tube frame. On the other hand, the full-scale drawing dated 18 December 1943 is not in doubt. The original drawing is held by the Bugatti Trust. There is also another date mentioned by Heinz Wiemeier, who also made a copy of a bicycle with a multi-tube frame. He presented the bicycle in Molsheim at the Bugatti Festival in September 2008. Wiemeier stated that the design dated back to 20 August 1937.

I did not manage to confirm this date on the basis of any other source than that given in *The Bugatti Revue*, Volume 14, Issue 1.

After some time, I managed to convince Bohumil Kasl to build the frame. From the days of his training he had worked in a special workshop of the Favorit factory, which was the only one manufacturing sports bicycles in Czechoslovakia. Bohumil built racing bicycles for the Czechoslovak representatives at the Olympic Games, World Championship, and various other events – road races, track races, cyclocross, circus stunts, and cycle-ball. From 1981 for five years, he managed a special workshop. He has now been retired for a number of years, but continues to build bicycles – he had made 30 copies of Pedersen bicycles by 2019. I couldn't hope to find a better mechanic. But I had to convince him. He could imagine what awaited him. I wanted a bicycle made to measure – I let him have my road bicycle that Robert Štěrba made for me years ago. Bohumil began in November 2018 by making a drawing of the Bugatti bicycle on a scale of 1: 1 and then we discussed various details and problems. [Figure 8]

Construction of the Bugatti bicycle turned out to be difficult. I won't wear you out by telling you how many times he called me, saying that the frame was warping and that making this bicycle was tremendous work. [Figures 9a, 9b, & 9c] However, it was finally finished in the spring 2019 [Figures 10a, 10b, & 10c] which was sooner than I anticipated.

In his article in *The Boneshaker*, Gerry Moore described how another two Bugatti bicycle copies had been constructed by Californian Art Stump in 1985. Stump

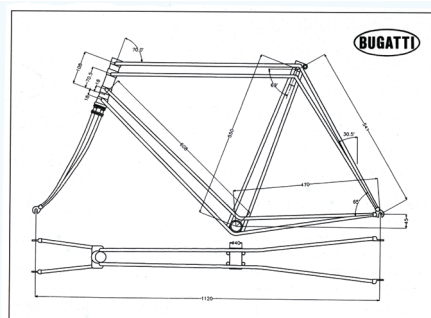


Figure 6. Computer-modified drawing of a Bugatti bicycle from 18 October 1943.

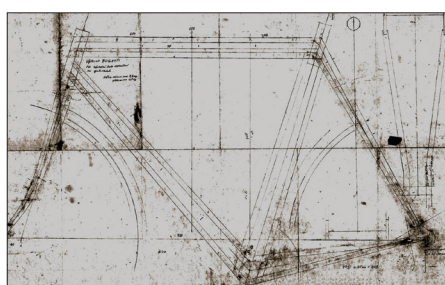


Figure 8. Bohumil Kasl transferred the frame of the Bugatti bicycle to paper on a scale of 1: 1. Photo by Jan Králík



Figures 9a, 9b, & 9c. It was not an easy matter. Photos by Jan Králík



Figures 10a, 10b, & 10c. But it was worthwhile. Photos by Jiří Antalovský

wrote about it: *Apart from dozens of tubes which have to be cut and finished, there was the problem of trying to hold the thing square while building it... as soon as you put heat on one place you are likely to ruin all the adjacent work. It takes an enormous amount of skill and patience to produce a frame so complicated.*

Art Stump created the frame from 4130 aircraft quality tubing. My frame is made of normal quality  $\varnothing$  12 mm tubes with supports made from  $\varnothing$  8 mm tubes.

I had some parts nickel plated, Robert Štěrba painted the frame (in "Bugatti blue" of course) and Jiří Svoboda fitted the frame with a golden Campagnolo (1983) set of components, which Tullio Campagnolo placed on the market to mark the 50th anniversary of the start of production of Campagnolo components.

I hope that my copy of Ettore Bugatti's bicycle can confidently be included among the purportedly good ones. The complete bicycle weighed 11.6 kg (25.6 lb).

When we prepare the second edition of the Bugatti register in the countries of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, this bicycle will be found described at the end of the book.

The unusual frame of the Bugatti bicycle makes it really very remarkable. But, does it constitute an improvement over the classical bicycle design? Dr. Alex Moulton, a first rate expert, observed in his letter to Gerry Moore of 22 May 1997 (Boneshaker No. 145), *...the random spacer tubes put in by Stump suggest that the fundamentals of containing the shear were not understood by Bugatti.*

Do you agree? ●

#### Thanks for help goes to:

Marco Bertazzoni, Pierre Delliere, Karel Kupka, Helge Schulz, Jakub Stauch, Jiří Svoboda, Jiří Uhlř, & Walter Ulreich.

#### Endnotes

- 1 "Efbe" Velkoobchod velocipedy František Brauner, Mikulovice, Ilustrovaný hlavní katalog č. 1, 1929.
- 2 The appeal court decision Rc 12028/1934.
- 3 Fahrradgrosshandlung Brauner, Niklasdorf, Schlesien, Preiskatalog No. 13, 1931.
- 4 Moore Gerry: The Bugatti Bicycle, in: *The Boneshaker* No. 145, Volume 15, Winter 1997, p. 4-8.

#### Other Sources

*The Bugatti Revue*, Vol. 7, Issue 3, also on <https://www.bugattirevue.com/revue19/bikes.htm>  
*The Bugatti Revue*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, also on <http://www.bugattirevue.com/revue37/bike.htm>  
 Carlson/A. Wenzel in: *Sport und Freizeit Tour* No. 7, Juli 1981, p. 26-29, 46.