

## A Book Report by Gary W. Sanderson: **Alle Origini Della Bicicletta.** **1. L'evoluzioni tecnica** **di Alfredo Azzini (2023)**

[*The Origin of the Bicycle. 1. The Technical Evolution by Alfredo Azzini (2023, published in Italian)*], 221 pages.

This book [Figure 1] is a concise description of the invention of the first bicycle by Baron Karl Drais von Sauerbrunn in 1817 in Karlsruhe, Germany, and all the steps of its evolution into the various forms of bicycle in use today (ca. 2023). This first ever bicycle consisted of two wheels mounted at the ends of a sturdy wood plank, on which the rider sat with his feet touching the ground. The rider's hands gripped a 'handlebar' fastened at the top of a pole that came from the axle on the front wheel up through the front end of the plank. All of this was arranged so that riders could make this machine move forward by moving their feet on the ground as though they were walking, or, if the rider wished to travel more rapidly, as if they were skating. And, surprisingly, and more importantly, riders of these two wheeled machines could take their feet off the ground and simply coast along with their feet off the ground as long as the two-wheeled machine continued moving forward. The steerable front wheel on this vehicle was the reason that this machine's riders could maintain their uprightness when the machine was moving forward because they could maintain their balance by steering the front wheel to correct for their naturally falling from side to side as they rode forward on these two wheeled machines. [Figure 2] This machine was originally called a "Draisine" after its inventor, or a "Laufmaschine" because the rider seemed to be riding on air, but by the 1860s when pedals were added to the axle of the front wheel to increase the versatility of these machines, they became called "velocipedes", a name that evolved to "bicycles" which is the name used for all 2-wheeled human powered machines to this day.

This book does a good job of covering all aspects of the development of bicycles from their beginning with the invention of the Draisine by Baron Von Drais, up to present day light weight bikes, but there



Figure 1. Azzini book.

are a couple of aspects of bicycle history that make this book special. First, this book is special because it is written in Italian which comes from a language community that is very active and highly esteemed in the world of bicycles, but is underrepresented in recording and commenting on bicycle history. Second, the role of Henry John Lawson in the invention of safety bicycles is recognized. Up till this time, bicycle historians have tended to give credit for invention of the safety bicycle to John Kemp Starley with his Rover bicycle [Figure 3], but it is now realized that Lawson had designed, built, and ridden a bicycle called a Sussex Dwarf with all the characteristics of a safety bicycle on the streets of Brighton in England in 1876 [Figure 4] which was several years before Starley's Rover bicycle made its first appearance at the 1885 Stanley Show in London. Finally, Alfredo Azzini's book gives the English-speaking world an informed overview of the Italian bicycle industry and culture that has produced so many of the world's winning bicycles and champion bicycle riders.

The depth of the author's work in researching the material in this 221-page book is attested by the 296



Figure 2. A Draisine from 1817 invented in Karlsruhe, Germany. The Rider moves forward rapidly on land using a skating motion with his feet on the ground.

references to published research by cycling historians that is listed by the author in this book. Also, it is noteworthy that many of these 296 references used by the author are found in *The Proceedings of the International Cycling History Conferences* (ICHC). Unfortunately, the format used by this author for describing the references used that are central sources of information for his book is neither consistent nor complete in all cases so in many instances it is difficult to trace what is being referenced. In the case of articles from the ICHC Proceedings, it is often helpful to refer to the *Cumulative Index of the ICHC Proceedings, Vols. 1(1990) through 30 (2010)*: Copies of this Cumulative Index can be obtained from the author of this Book Review. Following is a short list of other important books frequently referenced as basic sources of information on bicycle history:

Kobayashi, Keizo (1990): *Histoire du Velocipede de Drais a Michaux 1817-1870: Mythes et Realities*, 406 pp.

Multiple Authors (1955-Present): *The Boneshaker: A Journal of the Veteran - Cycle Club* (United Kingdom), Published monthly since 1989.

David V. Herlihy (2004): *Bicycle, The History* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London), 470 pp.

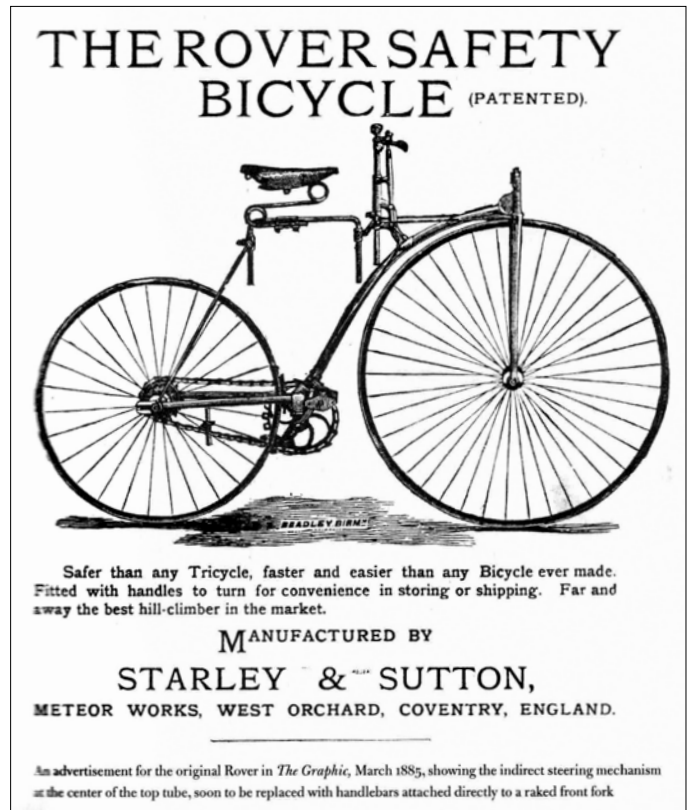


Figure 3. Copy of an advertisement for the Starley Safety in its first-designed configuration.

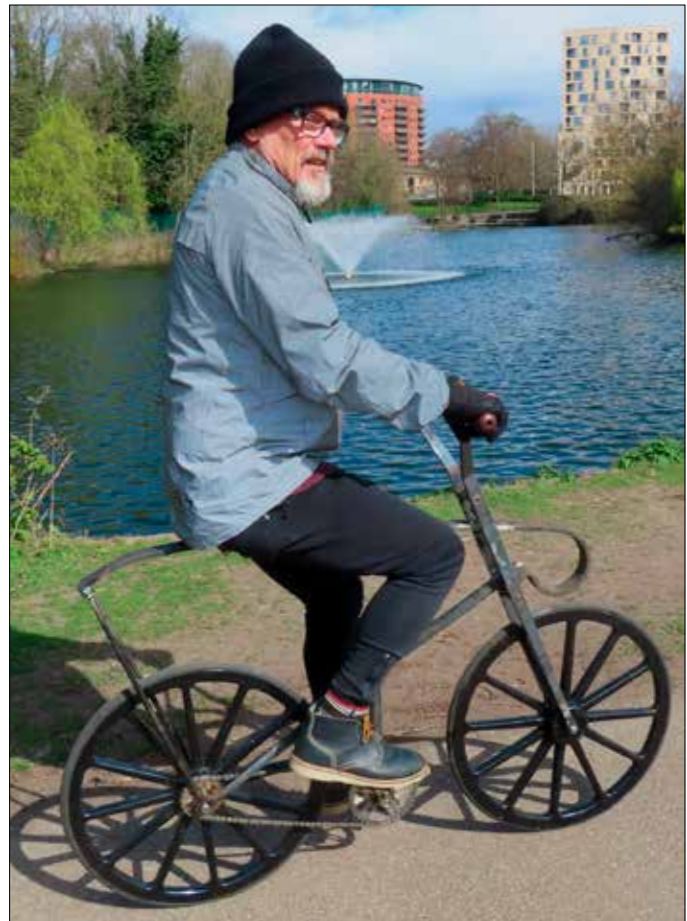


Figure 4. Edwin Knight on a bicycle that he built from designs for Lawson's Sussex Dwarf.