

BICYCLE HISTORY

Social and historical aspect on bicycles: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bicycle#History>

Socially, the bicycle helped to strengthen the gene pool for rural workers. It tripled their courting radius on the one day per week they had off and thus was a factor in reducing rural inbreeding. The two-wheeled, diamond-frame safety bicycle (basically the same one we ride today) **gave women unprecedented mobility, and contributed to their emancipation.** In the 1890s the craze for cycling amongst women, created a whole new set of **fashions such as "bloomers"** (a garment which is a cross between a skirt and trousers (pants)). which helped liberate women from the corset, and other restrictive clothing.

In cities, bicycles helped reduce the crowding in inner-city tenements by allowing workers to commute from single-family dwellings in suburbs. They helped reduce people's dependence on horses. They allowed people to travel in the country. They were three times as efficient as walking and three to four times as fast. Moreover, in terms of distance and speed traveled compared to energy consumed, the bicycle is the most efficient machine yet created.

On an historical note, the development of the modern bicycle had two important implications. First, manufacture of the double-diamond-frame safety bicycle required the development of advanced metalworking techniques to produce the frames, and components such as ball bearings, washers and sprockets. These techniques later enabled skilled metalworkers and mechanics to develop the components that were used in early automobiles and aircraft. The best examples were the Wright Brothers, who got their start as bicycle mechanics.

The second major implication of the bicycle was the political organization of bicycle riders and enthusiasts in such groups as the League of American Wheelmen, in order to persuade local and state governments to create a system of well-maintained and mapped paved roads. Both the model of political organization and the roads themselves later facilitated the growth in the use of another type of wheeled vehicle, the automobile.

In some Western societies, after World War II the bicycle was largely relegated to a device for children, particularly in the United States. In some western countries, most notably Northern European ones such as the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark, bicycle use for transportation remained fairly common. Interest has gradually returned elsewhere, mostly as a fitness activity, hobby, and competitive sport. More and more people are also using it as a short-range transportation tool, particularly in large, densely populated cities where slow vehicle traffic, high registration and parking costs, and environmental concerns have made commuting by automobile less attractive. This trend has been accelerated by the process of "gentrification" of the inner suburbs of many cities. Many cities are now providing cyclist-only lanes on roads, as well as cycle trails, for both commuting and hobbyist cyclists.

The bicycle remains a primary means of personal transportation in many developing countries. The image of Asian cities clogged with bicycles is a common stereotype, though as they become wealthier it is becoming less popular. According to the magazine, The Economist, one of the major reasons for the proliferation of Chinese-made bicycles on foreign markets is the increasing preference of its own citizens for cars and motorcycles.

Other transportation methods attempt to accommodate the local use of bicycles by providing attachment points on busses, trains, etc. To cope with frequent theft, many destinations provide bicycle racks or lockable bicycle mini-garages.

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