

History of Bicycles



From kids going for a recreational bike ride, to adults riding to work or utilizing cycling as a physical activity, bicycles are one of America's favorite forms of transportation.

The very first bicycle-like machine was created in the year 1817 by Baron von Drais, who wanted to develop a "walking machine" that would help him travel the royal gardens faster. His machine was made entirely of wood, and while it has two wheels like our bicycles today, the "rider" actually walked rather than rode the contraption.

In 1865, pedals were applied directly to the front wheel, and the "velocipede" was born, which translates to "fast feet." This riding machine was referred to as a "bone shaker." While this machine was still made of all wood, in 1870 the first all metal machine appeared. It was created by James Starley, and required a lot of skill to ride. This featured an extremely oversized front wheel, because the makers knew that the larger the wheel, the farther one could travel with one rotation of the pedals. This was the first machine to be called a "bicycle," and since they were very expensive, wealthy young men mostly enjoyed them. These bicycles were actually quite dangerous, because they were quite unbalanced with a very high center of gravity.

Next in the progression towards today's modern bicycle was the tricycle, much preferred by women with their cumbersome skirts. These adult tricycles were popular in the late 1800s, but were only

really suitable for a ride around the park – not as a real means of transportation.

Between 1885 and 1900, the prototype of today's bicycle arrived on the scene. It featured a saddle and handlebar grips. It became known as a "Safety bicycle." Solid rubber tires were used until a man named John Boyd Dunlop, of Ireland, developed air filled tires. These tires made the ride much smoother. Mass production of bicycles began, and men began to use them for both transportation and recreation.

Women, who did not have many rights at the time, viewed bicycles as a ticket to freedom. Susan B. Anthony, a women's rights activist and suffragist, said that the bicycle has "done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world."

Bicycles continued to rise in popularity. In the 1940s, the kickstand was developed, and bike racers began to ride special bikes with various speeds (such as a five-speed or a ten-speed). Bicycles became very popular for children in the 1950s. In the 1960s, it became very common for bikes to feature a 10-speed gearshift. Throughout the 1970s and 80s, mountain bikes became popular.

Today, many people ride bikes for many different reasons. Bicycling is an excellent way of exercising, as it promotes cardiovascular health and burns calories. It is also an environmentally friendly choice, as bicycles do not burn fuel, like cars. Also, riding a bicycle is less costly than driving a car, because they do not require fuel or as much upkeep.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Multiple Choice Questions

Circle the correct answer.

1. The bicycle-like machine that Baron von Drais created was built entirely of _____?
 - a. Metal
 - b. Wood
 - c. Iron
 - d. Plastic

2. The word *velocipede* translates to:
 - a. Speedy Bicycle
 - b. Fast Feet
 - c. Velocity Mobile
 - d. Foot Car

3. Why did women prefer to ride tricycles in the late 1800s?
 - a. Tricycles were more fashionable
 - b. Women are not as naturally balanced as men, and therefore could not ride the uneven bicycles
 - c. Because of women's rights, it was illegal to sell a bicycle to a woman – only tricycles could be sold to females.
 - d. Tricycles were easier ride with their cumbersome skirts

4. John Boyd Dunlop was from what country?
 - a. England
 - b. Canada
 - c. Ireland
 - d. Scotland

5. Fill in the blanks: Bicycles are used for _____ and _____.
 - a. Migration and Evolution
 - b. Literacy and Arithmetic Skills
 - c. Recreation and Transportation
 - d. Texting and Emailing

6. What part of the bicycle was developed in the 1940s?
 - a. The bicycle spokes
 - b. The handlebars
 - c. The seat
 - d. The kickstand

Name: _____ Date: _____

Short Answer Questions

1. What did Baron von Drais want to do with his "Walking machine"?
2. Explain why early bicycle-makers wanted to make the wheels as large as possible.
3. Why were some of the first bicycles so dangerous?
4. Before John Boyd Dunlop developed air filled tires, what were tires made of?
5. Why do you think women's rights activists at the time felt that bicycles were a woman's "ticket to freedom"?
6. What sort of bike became popular in the 1970s and 1980s?
7. "I must start riding my bike to work!" announced Susan. Give three reasons why she might say something like this.
8. Do you enjoy riding a bike?

ANSWER KEY:

Multiple Choice:

- 7. B
- 8. B
- 9. D
- 10. C
- 11. C
- 12. D

Short Answer:

1. Baron von Drais wanted to develop a "walking machine" that would help him travel the royal gardens faster.
2. They wanted to make the wheels as large as possible because they understood that the larger the wheel, the farther the rider could travel with one rotation of the wheel.
3. Because they were unbalanced and they had a high level of gravity.
4. Tires were made of rubber.
5. Individual Response.
6. The mountain bike became popular in the 1970s and 1980s.
7. Bicycles are good for the environment, good for exercise, and inexpensive
8. Individual Response.