

FEATURE STORY

TWO-WHEELED WONDERS

Bicycles and the way we make
them have changed a lot.

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The earliest bicycles were just two wheels and handlebars. Riders pushed them along with their feet. They were invented in Europe but no one can say for sure who came up with the idea first.

Kids and a bike in Brandon, Man., 1954.

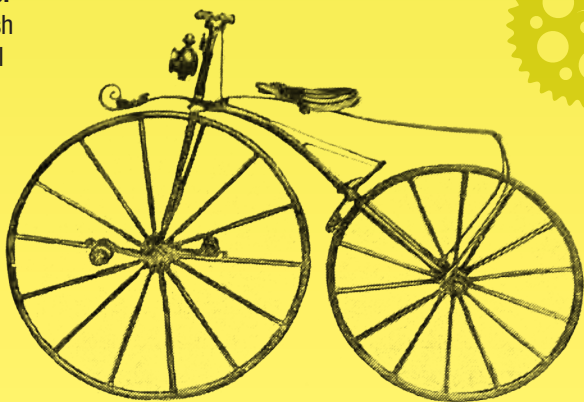
The word **velocipede** is used for a lot of different human-powered bike-like things. It might refer to a two-wheeled or three-wheeled contraption with pedals, or even one that travels on train tracks. There's an echo of this old term in the French word *vélo* for bicycle (Canadian francophones also say *bicyclette*).

THE ORDINARY

This cycle, popular in the 1870s and 1880s, had a giant front wheel and a much smaller one in back. It was often called the **high-wheeler** or **penny-farthing** after two British coins, the big penny and the small farthing. The high seat was tricky to get on and easy to fall off. With pedals on the front wheel, the ordinary wobbled back and forth as the rider pushed. It was only manageable for very fit young men — women's clothing made it impossible.



Made in Toronto, this 1887 Fane Comet had a 125-centimetre-tall front wheel. Riders could put their legs up on the handlebars to coast down hills.



THE BONESHAKER

Imagine riding a homemade bike with wooden wheels, sometimes with strips of metal on the rims. No surprise how this kind of bicycle got its name, right? Boneshakers came along in the 1860s. They were uncomfortable but better than earlier models. They had pedals and some later versions had simple tires.



Tricycles for adults were popular for a short time starting in the late 1870s. They were easier to ride than the ordinary.

The Rover, made by the English company Starley, is often called the first modern bicycle. You can see how much this 1888 model looks like today's bikes.



THE SAFETY

By 1885, something very similar to modern bicycles had taken shape in Great Britain. Known as the safety, its wheels were the same size and connected by a looped chain. The pedals were closer to the middle of the bike. The safety was easier to steer and pedal, making cycling possible for almost anyone who could afford one.

BUILDING BIKES

The first bicycles in Canada were brought in from the United States or Europe. By the 1880s, a few companies were starting to make bikes here. Most early manufacturers just put together parts made in other countries. In 1895, the Canadian government added extra taxes known as tariffs to bicycles and parts from elsewhere, making them more expensive. Canadian companies quickly started factories, mostly in southern Ontario, to meet the booming demand. Repair shops opened all over the country.



Although the basic design of the safety bicycle has stuck around, there have been lots of changes over time. The diamond-shaped frame — the part that connects the wheels — was stronger than earlier versions. A frame that slanted down (known as a step-through) allowed women in long skirts to ride more easily. Better brakes made cycling safer, and more gears made it easier and faster. The 1980s saw the creation of mountain bikes with tougher frames and bigger, knobbier tires to handle rough trails.

THE BIG ONE

In 1899, five Canadian bicycle manufacturers (Massey-Harris, H.A. Lozier, Gendron, Welland Vale and Goold) in the Toronto area joined to form the Canadian Cycle & Motor Company, better known as CCM. For a while, CCM turned out 85 per cent of bikes made in Canada. Among its most famous models were the 1921 Flyer and the sleek 1936 Flyte. During the Second World War, the Canadian government took over the company so it could make bikes and other things for the military. After the war, people started buying more bikes just for fun. CCM models like the Targa and Silver Ghost for adults and the Ranger and Mustang Marauder for kids helped the company sell millions of bicycles. But it couldn't compete with cheaper bikes made in foreign countries and CCM went bankrupt in 1982. CCM bikes are no longer made in Canada.



In the 1970s, some companies from other countries set up factories here for a time to avoid taxes that made their bikes more expensive. In 1973, Japanese manufacturer Sekine made a deal with an Indigenous training centre in Rivers, Manitoba. For about a decade, First Nations workers assembled thousands of bikes at the Oo-Za-We-Kwun Centre.

Other well-known Canadian bike brands include Devinci in Quebec and B.C.'s Norco and Rocky Mountain Bicycles. There are even places that build one bike at a time just for a particular customer.

CYCLING FOR ALL

Bikes haven't always been something people with disabilities could use. That started to change in the 1990s. Now there are many different kinds of cycles. With some models, the rider lies nearly flat. Others allow them to use their arms to pedal or to ride with another person.

