



Professor Monster – Tarefa 25

The story of the Bicycle

As people try to use less energy, and find alternatives to cars, more and more people are buying, and riding, bicycles. But where did the bicycle come from? Who invented this "velocipede"?

You may be surprised to learn that the humble bicycle was invented several years later than the railway locomotive! But the two-wheeler has come a long way since the day it was invented by a Scottish blacksmith, Kirkpatrick MacMillan, back (it is said) in 1839.

MacMillan developed his bike from an older wheeled vehicle, called a "hobby horse". This was a wooden horse with two wheels. The rider sat on the horse, and pushed the vehicle along with his feet. It was not a very fast or safe vehicle, since it had no steering and no brakes.

MacMillan, nicknamed Mad Pate, modified the hobby horse, by adding a system of articulated bars. The rider could push the bars back and forwards with his feet, and make the back wheel go round. He could also steer the bike, as the front wheel could be turned.

To demonstrate his invention, he cycled 60 miles to Glasgow! It must have been a terrible journey, on the roads of the day! Pate's bike did not have rubber tyres or springs.

Mad Pate was not recognised in his time, but other people became interested in bicycles. Twenty-five years later, a Frenchman called Pierre Lallemand designed and patented the first bicycle with rotary pedals; and in 1876, H.J.Lawson added another basic feature, "chain-drive".

Other features, such as rubber tyres and gears, have appeared since then; but the basic bicycle has not changed.

Since then the bicycle has had a magnificent fortune. Today, it is probably the most common form of transport in the world, especially in developing countries; and non-polluting and easy to ride, it has a big future as the town vehicle of tomorrow. Thanks Pate!

WORDS :

blacksmith: a blacksmith makes things out of iron - steering: means of direction - brakes: brakes help a vehicle to stop - nicknamed: known familiarly as - articulated: with joints - steer : direct - - rubber: a slightly soft material used on the outside of car wheels - springs: springs make a vehicle more comfortable - to patent: to officially register an invention - drive: traction - features: aspects - gears: most modern bicycles have at least 10 gears

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Read the article and say whether these statements are true or false: .

1. The railway locomotive was invented before the bicycle.
2. The first bicycle was built in Scotland.
3. The bicycle was developed from a wooden horse.
4. The first bicycle was very difficult to steer.
5. Pate preferred not to have rubber tyres for his bike.
6. The pedals on Pate's bike went round and round.
7. A Frenchman designed the first bike with rotary pedals.
8. Bicycles are very useful in developing countries.
9. The bicycle has little future in Europe.