

## Happy Bike Month

By Jill McWhinnie

When we see cyclists racing by on 20 speed bikes with carbon fibre frames and narrow tires, it's hard to believe their predecessor was a clunky, all-wood contraption pushed with the feet.

The 'Draisienne' was invented in 1817 by Karl Drais, a German aristocrat, after a volcanic eruption in Indonesia triggered weather that caused European crop failures. The lack of animal feed led to the massive slaughter of horses, the major form of transportation.

As Drais' invention was designed to replace the horse, it was nicknamed the 'dandy horse' or "hobby horse". It had no gears or pedals, but the front wheel was steerable. The deeply rutted roads and carriageways made balancing difficult, so riders used the sidewalks, but riding on them was prohibited by many cities in Europe, and the fad soon passed.

By the 1860s the velocipede (fast foot), had been developed. It had two steel wheels, with pedals on the front wheel and

a fixed gear system. Given the bumpy ride from steel wheels on cobblestone roads, it was nicknamed the "bone shaker".

By the 1870s it was replaced by the penny-farthing, a bike with a very large front wheel, which made for a smoother, faster ride. Since the rider sat up high over the front axle, he could be pitched off head first, leading to serious, if not fatal injuries. Nevertheless, penny-farthings were popular with young, affluent men, who formed clubs dedicated to bike racing.

A safer, more comfortable ride became possible with the introduction of the safety bicycle style. In 1885, J.K. Starley, a British inventor and industrialist, introduced the Rover, with nearly equal sized wheels, centre pivot steering and differential gears that operated with a chain drive. This is recognized as the prototype for the modern bicycle. Today, Mr. Starley would be surprised and probably delighted by the variety of styles, colours and performance applications available to cyclists.

I recently visited Canadian Tire on Hoover Park Drive where store manager Chris

Pieczko gave me a tour of the bicycle section. Kids as young as two can be put on balance or run bikes, learning to balance and use their feet to move the bike forward. From there they can adapt to pedal bikes more quickly and may not be as reliant on training wheels.

When I was young bikes were available in a range of basic colours. Now there is a staggering variety available; combos of lime green and black, fuchsia and purple, bright orange with black and white trim, camo bikes, pink and white Barbie bikes, NHL hockey themed bikes, Darth Vader bikes, and bikes with a hand gauge the kids rev to simulate the sound of a motorcycle. All have matching helmets.

"Helmets with 'lizard' spiking are very popular with kids this year," said Chris. "Doodle bikes with matching helmets are new - the bike is a combo of red, white and blue, and comes with a set of non-permanent markers so that kids can create their own markings on the bike and helmet."

He pointed out various categories of adult bikes; sturdy mountain bikes, sleek road bikes, hybrid bikes, comfort bikes, and BMX or trick bikes. "There really is a bike for everyone."



I spoke to Cameron Mitchinson, head bike tech at Stouffville's SportCheck Store on Hoover Park to find out about trends among cycling enthusiasts. "Because of Stouffville's location and proximity to Uxbridge, the trail capital of Canada, there's both a large road bike population, and lots of mountain bikes," he said.

"Many ski resort operators are offering mountain biking on cross country ski trails during the summer months. Winter biking is also a recent trend, with the increasing popularity of the 'fat bike' in the last couple of years. These were designed for riding on snow and sand. They have larger wheel bases and very wide tires. It's like having snowshoes on your bike.

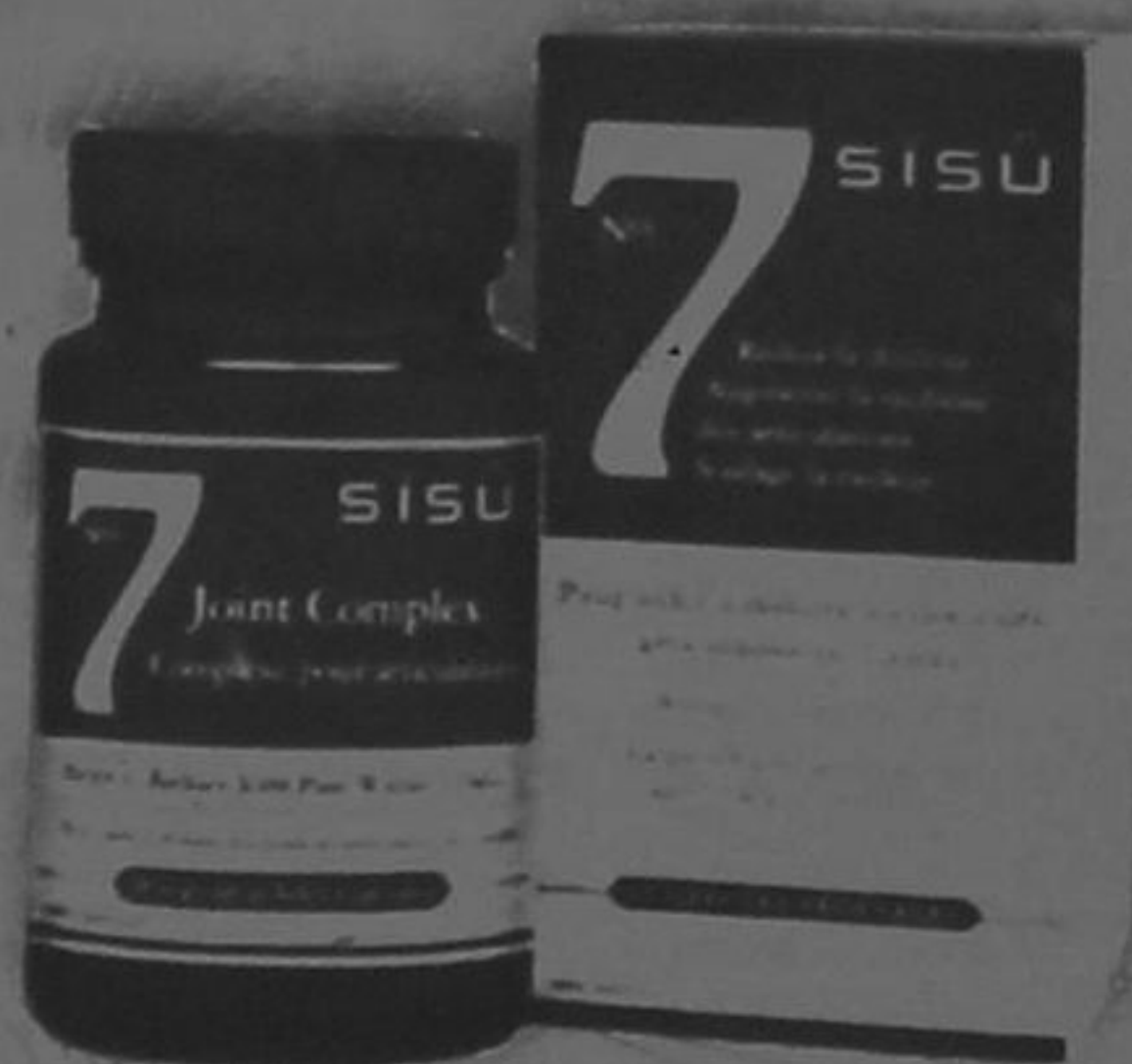
"With so many bike styles to choose from, biking is an easy sport to get into," said Cameron. "It's a great leisure activity for the entire family."

May 25 kicks off Bike Month and bike-themed events will take place locally and across the country between May 25 and June 25.

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This Doodle bike is one of many models available for young cyclists this year.

A Penny-Farthing in the 2011 Stouffville Santa Claus parade.



On April 15, Stouffville Toyota owner Kevin Baxter (left) and Dave McLellan (right), owner of Tim Hortons at Markham Rd. and Major Mackenzie Dr., presented the keys of a 2015 Toyota Camry XSL to Xiao Ying Wei, who won the car when she bought a coffee and 'rolled up the rim'. Kevin rolled up to the coffee shop and made this very special delivery to the lucky winner.

Bruce Stapley photo