

THE FIRST BICYCLE

Bob Forster

MIDDLE AGE MELLOWS into autumn and amnesia creeps in. Large chunks of the past seem forgotten and then something brings memories back to life.

That's what happened one Christmas morning as three children went racing around the cul-de-sac on fresh-from-the-wrapper bikes. Their grins were a mile wide, triggering reminders of my first venture on two wheels.

In all honesty I don't remember my very first bicycle. Mum saved in a Christmas club at the toy shop so that, as a toddler, I had a trike with pedals on the front wheel. As I don't remember it at all, it doesn't count as the first one.

No, I remember the real first one quite clearly. Perhaps six years old, I looked with total delight at the machine of my dreams. It was red with three wheels and pedals in the middle. The two back wheels had mudguards which rattled like electric dentures once speed was reached. There was no chain guard. Come to think of it, there was probably no back brake, just a single calliper brake on the front wheel. Even for the fifties it was dated, it was second-hand but, most important of all, it was mine. My world had started to enlarge.

I took it to the top of the road, bursting with pride, imagining that all the neighbours had eyes only for me and my tricycle.

My trusty steed, a model of engineering and stability, was ready to fly. And Biggles was ready too.

Then it was my grin that was a mile wide. Throwing both caution and training to the wind, and with legs like pistons, I hurtled down towards my waiting family, only to discover that a bike's stability is only confirmed by the stability of its rider. Squealing towards a halt, I promptly turned over right beneath my father's furrowed brow. No damage done, except to pride, and so there began a love affair with the bicycle which has never left me.

Seven, eight, nine, ten years old, and still the affair continued. I rode further and further afield, in reality, I suspect, rarely more than a quarter of a mile, but my tricycle never lost its appeal. Yet there was one shadow.

Hanging from the rafters in the garage was dad's old bike. "One day, my son, all this shall be yours". Yes, I knew that old dictum but when would that day arrive? My friends were graduating to two wheels and while my pleasure continued, my pride and joy waned. I could reach up and touch that bike but I had to wait. Having already broken my arm twice and leg once by this tender age, dad was in no rush to acquaint me further with the sterilised delights of the casualty department. "We'll wait 'til you're ready."

How could I prove my readiness?

No more accidents on the tricycle and surely my juvenile cocksureness was a thing of the past. "Not yet."

I fingered the twenty-six inch wheel rims, feeling their thick layer of Vaseline, the rust preventer of the fifties. Surely my legs were long enough by now? The saddle and the handlebars could be lowered. I had even learned how to do this as I prepared for the great day. How often I walked into the garage, eyes raised, hopes likewise. 'One day, my son.....'

"Are you ready?" Graduation day had arrived. The tricycle, for so long my pride and joy, was put aside like a teddy that's lost its fur, its eyes and, worst of all, its appeal. From three wheels to two was just moments away.

Standing on a table, dad reached up and untied his bike from the rafters. He handed it down to mum who propped it up against the wall. So there it was, finally at ground level, the object of my desires ever since wheels had first cast their spell on me.

It had no pretensions. I don't even remember its make. It was pale yellow, blotched by flaking enamel, had three derailleur gears, a rather bowed leather saddle and straight handlebars. Could life have anything better to offer?

Mum's ragbag was raided for old cloths with which to beautify the machine. Beneath the Vaseline and several layers of dust, it was in perfect condition.

I washed the frame and pumped up the tyres. No hiss of escaping air but my pressure was building by the second. Dad showed me how to oil it and where the key bearings and vital joints were located. Saddle and handlebars were adjusted for my height and we were all ready; the garage doors could soon be opened and the model of 1959 brought into the sun.

The doors were pulled back and I wheeled my new treasure outside. The Black Knight riding Desert Orchid could not have felt prouder.

(To be continued)

W.O.D.C. SKIPS FOR APRIL AND MAY

Ascott	23rd April	High Street near Playing Field
Fifield	23rd April	Bus Shelter
Lyneham	21st May	Priory Road
Milton	23rd April 21st May	Church Road lay-by, Jubilee Lane Church Road lay-by, Reade Close
Shipton	14th May	Ballards Close, Swinbrook Road