

INTRODUCTION

Humans have raced for as long as recorded history exists, on land, on water and, in more recent history, in the air. They have used their bodies, animals and technology in the pursuit of speed. It is an extension of one of the two basic survival instincts, flight. When the motorcycle was first invented it was inevitable that motorcycle races would soon follow.

The oldest image of a two wheeled vehicle is 34 centuries old. It was found in the grave of the Egyptian Pharaoh Tutankhamen, who reigned in the 14th century BC. On the image two wheels are connected to a beam. The earliest bicycle was a wooden scooter like scooter like device called a celerifere, invented by the Frenchman Count Mede de Sivrac in about 1790. In 1816 Karl von Drais de Sauerbrun, from Germany, invented a machine with a steering bar attached to the front wheel, the Draisienne, but there were no pedals. The rider had to propel the machine forward using his feet.

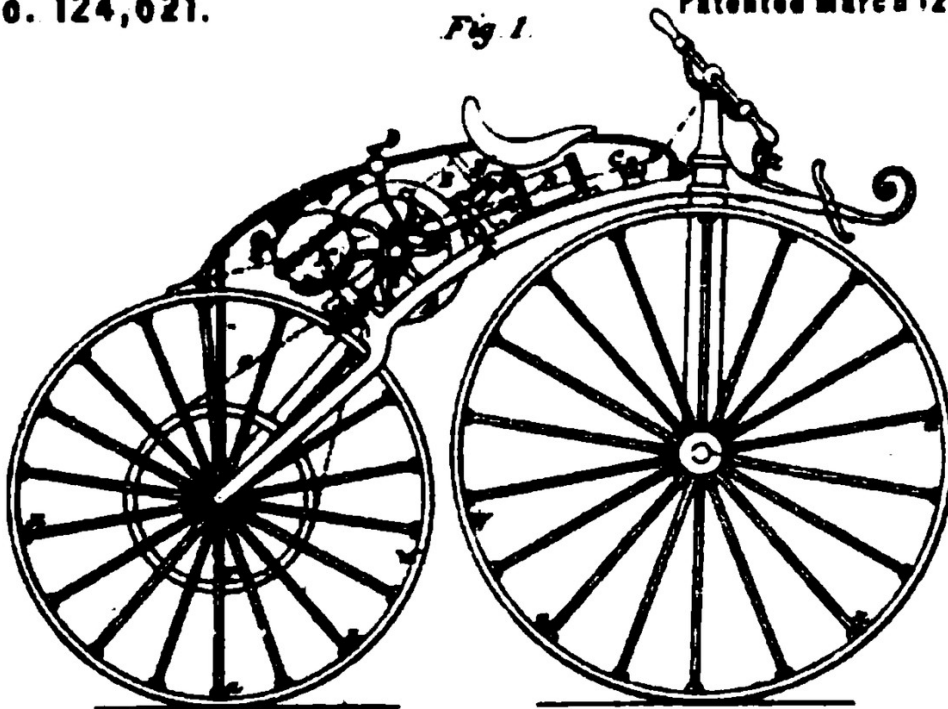
In 1839 Kirkpatrick MacMillan invented a bicycle with a working pedalling system, but he did not patent it. An improved version of the bicycle was invented by the French father and son Pierre and Ernest Michaux in the 1860s. With the invention of the improved bicycle the sport of cycle racing developed, with races run on roads or on purpose built speed tracks, known as velodromes. But it was a difficult task to ride a bicycle with wooden or iron wheels on bad roads. There was a need for a mechanically driven bicycle.

The first attempts to construct an internal combustion engine were made around 1800, but these were unsuccessful. The first engines fitted to bicycles were steam engines, notably the Michaux-Perreaux velocipede built in 1869, but they were heavy and difficult to control.

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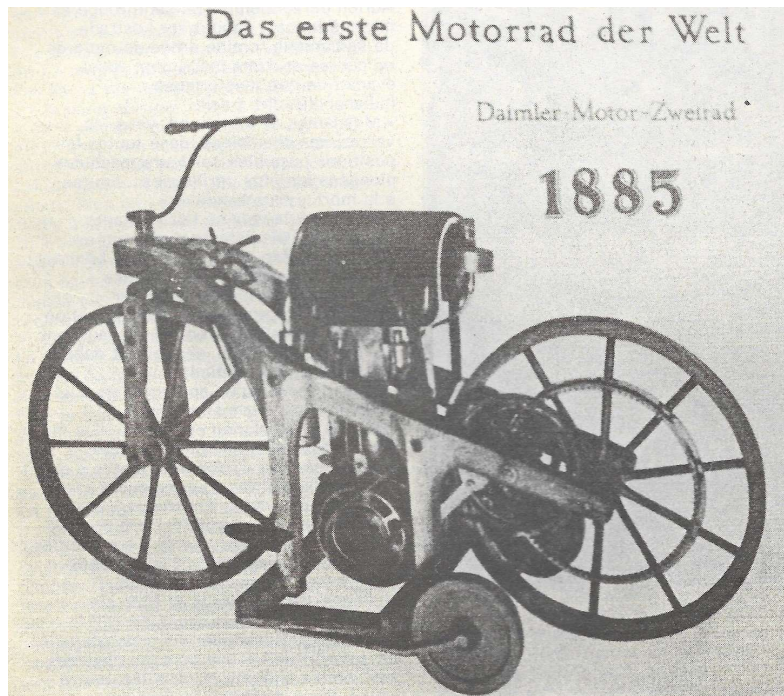
Fig. 1.

Patented March 12, 1872.



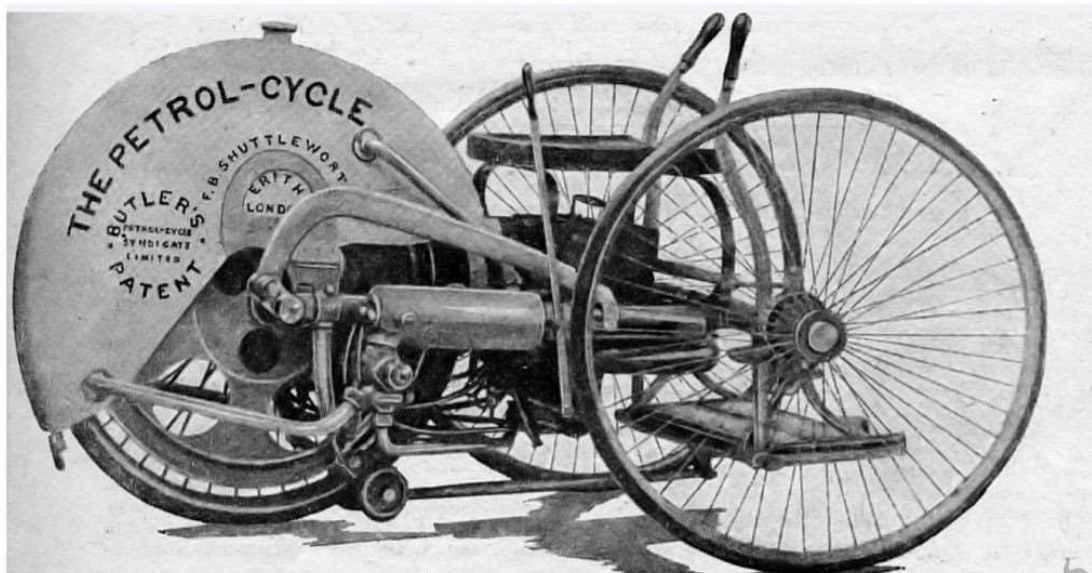
Michaux-Perrier steam velocipede, 1872 patent diagram. (Wikipedia)

It was Gottlieb Daimler who first successfully built an internal combustion engine, which he fitted in a two wheeled vehicle called the Einspur. In 1885 his son Paul made a successful test ride. The 264cc Daimler Einspur was the first motorcycle.



Daimler 264cc, 1885. (Moto-Revue)

Edward Butler manufactured the first British petrol powered vehicle. The Butler Petrolcycle was a tricycle powered by a 600cc flat twin four-stroke engine. He first produced plans for the vehicle in 1884, one year before Daimler manufactured his machine, but the first machine was not manufactured until 1888. It never went into mass production because the draconian speed restrictions which existed in Britain at the time restricted the market. It was not until 1896 that the requirement for a man displaying a red flag to walk in front of motor vehicles on the road was lifted.



Butler Petrolcycle, 600cc, 1888. (Cybermotorcycle.com)

In 1894 Alois Wolfmüller, Heinrich Hildebrand and Hans Geisenhof built the first motorcycle suitable for daily use. The Hildebrand & Wolfmüller had a 1,488cc engine which delivered 2 hp. The low slung engine provided direct drive to the rear wheel; gearing had yet to be invented. It was the first motorcycle fitted with pneumatic tyres and it went into production in 1895.



Hildebrand & Wolfmüller 1,488cc, 1894. (Silodrome.com)

The first known tricycle races took place in Paris in 1891. The first of the famous town to town races was the 1894 Paris to Rouen race. These races were run on open roads and were open to cars, tricycles and motorcycles. At this time motorcycle racing was considered to be a minor subdivision of motor racing rather than a sport in its own right, but subsequently the two motor sports developed independently of each other.

Races have results and the main purpose of this e-book is to collate the results of important races throughout the history of motorcycle road racing in a single source. Completeness is impossible because of the inadequacy of some of the source material but we believe this is the most comprehensive database produced to date.