

## CHRISTMAS BIKE NOSTALGIA

Darren Leroy Halford, Rileys Cycles

Who can forget the independence and thrill of their first bike? Feeling nostalgic, we look back on some classic kid's bikes from the past. Here are six iconic children's bikes you wished you had been given at Christmas.

### The Raleigh Chopper

We all remember the Chopper in its ridiculous glory. The Mark One was launched in 1969 and heralded a new dawn for bicycles, one that didn't feature dull, scaled-down versions of the treader Dad rode to work. Psychedelic pop culture on two wheels, this impracticably-shaped beast, with its high-backed padded seat, 'Easy Rider' bars and mismatched wheels belonged exclusively to the kids. With roll-resistant fat tyres and a groin-threatening gear stick, the Chopper was designed for looks not function - but who cares about getting from A to B when you're the coolest kid on the estate?

### The Balance Bike

Remember the stabiliser lean? Remember how it slowed your progress to a crawl but comfortingly forestalled the day your parent would tell you, 'it's time'? Remember your father detaching the small, rattly wheels and shoving you down a steep hill, barking orders of

'comfort' into a cold headwind? The Balance Bike made this terrifying rite of passage obsolete - an engineered-wood piece of retro genius that allowed a seamless transition from scooting to pedalling. The Hobby Horse of the early 19th century was its inspiration. Built in response to a lack of horses following the Napoleonic Wars, this was the proto-bike: a wooden, foot-propelled structure popularised by dandy gents until the advent of the bike chain consigned it to history. 200 years later, today's infants can scoot as soon as they can walk due to the Balance Bike. The stabiliser has had its day.

### The Cowhorn

Back when money was scarcer and the range of bikes available for children seemed to start and end at gimmicky Raleighs there was another option, the *Make Your Own*. The early 1980s saw the rise of the stark, stripped down, less-is-more approach, reminiscent of an early Human League single. Every extraneous piece of bike was removed, including mudguards, gears, brakes and decals. The frame was painted matte black before slotting the extra wide cowhorn handlebar into place. These bikes were strictly for the bigger kids for whom wheelies and not being able to actually brake held no fear. The Cowhorn said, 'I'm bold, I'm brave, I'm ready to

be enrolled onto a Youth Training Scheme.'

### The BMX

Before the BMX there was the Grifter. It weighed a ton and was, frankly, rubbish, with its quick-to-rust wheels, cheap, plastic grip shift and pointless foam cross-bar cover. The arrival of the BMX rendered this hulking mass of iron obsolete and changed the rules completely. Lightweight, colourful and achingly cool, the BMX sealed its mass appeal by featuring in Spielberg's smash film, *ET - The Extra Terrestrial*. It was even the star of its own movie, *The BMX Bandits*, featuring a teen Nicole Kidman. Children's ITV capitalised on the BMX craze with its own show, *BMX Beat*, which ran for four years in the mid-1980s and featured exotic brands, helmets, trick nuts, hip hop, and tricks we would fail to emulate in front of disinterested girls down at the local park.

### The Raleigh 18

A mini version of the massive-selling Raleigh 20, this step-thru cycle highlights just how poorly girls were catered for back in the 1970s and '80s. The 18 eschewed the wacky seats and crazy gear knobs boys were accustomed to in favour of sensible matching baskets front and rear. It came in two colours: pale blue and a

strikingly dull brown. All that being said, it was actually a decent, smooth ride with well-made components and a comfortable seat. The frame formed the basis of the ruggedly named Commando (yet another boy's bike). It took nearly 30 years for the cycling industry to wake up and realise girls don't require their bikes to be built around a predilection for long skirts.

### The Trike

For those whose memories stretch back further, there was the Triang trike. Some had a boot which was useful for transporting passengers like Teddy. I remember not watching where I was going on my trike and riding into the back of the milk float; that made quite a milkshake!

Thankfully the likes of lightweight Squish bikes, and other British brands now make excellent uni-sex bikes in a range of bright colours that appeal to all children. ●

*Rileys are offering Sherborne Times readers a half price helmet with any bike purchase. This well-loved independent cycle shop has traded in Sherborne for over 50 years and may have even supplied one of the bikes mentioned above to your parents!*

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