

Velocipedomania

By Anne Skelton

A phenomenon, an avalanche, or a swarm of locusts, the influx of thousands of student bicycles has become a real problem on Campus.

On crisp, cloudless September days in years gone by a few unconventional students could be seen riding their bicycles. They rode for fun — alone or in pairs — leisurely watching the first orange leaves drifting down along the city's shady side streets. But even those students would not have been "caught dead" riding bikes to class or admitting they did not have a car.

This year bicycles are a major mode of transportation for thousands of Ol' Mizzou students. What had been a quiet pleasure became a minor fad and now has turned into "a phenomenon," "an avalanche," "a boom," "an influx," or "a swarm of locusts." City and University police do not know what to call it, but they agree that bike riders and their infernal machines are a full-fledged problem on Campus and crowded city streets.

Campus police estimated that students have brought 6,000 bicycles into Columbia. A spokesman for the city's Committee on Bicycle Safety set the figure for this fall at 7,000, however. Last year, he said, there were only about 700 student bicycles.

Before school began, new racks for parking a total of 200 bicycles were installed outside Jesse Hall, Brady Commons, Student Health, and the Library. Police thought that the fire-engine-red racks fabricated in UMC's workshops would be adequate for the fall demand.

Impromptu parking lots have sprung up, however, alongside nearly every University building. Bikes are chained and locked to the buildings themselves, fences, trees, statues, bushes, fire hydrants, no-parking signs and parking meters—to anything that can be used as a hitching post.

"Our physical plant is working almost around the clock constructing bike racks around the Campus," Lt. Tom Stark, University Traffic Control Officer, said. "We're trying to cope with the bikes. They're not just a nuisance — they're a real factor in our traffic situation."

In the first five days of the semester, 10 accidents involving bicycles, including one fatality,

were reported. The accidents, most ranging in severity from bent fenders to broken bones, leveled off at an average of three a day among persons 8 to 25. The police said, however, that many accidents were unreported.

Anna Jean Barchus, a sophomore from St. Louis, died at the Medical Center August 31 after suffering head injuries in a fall from her bicycle. Miss Barchus's death, however, did not involve a motorized vehicle and did not take place in traffic.

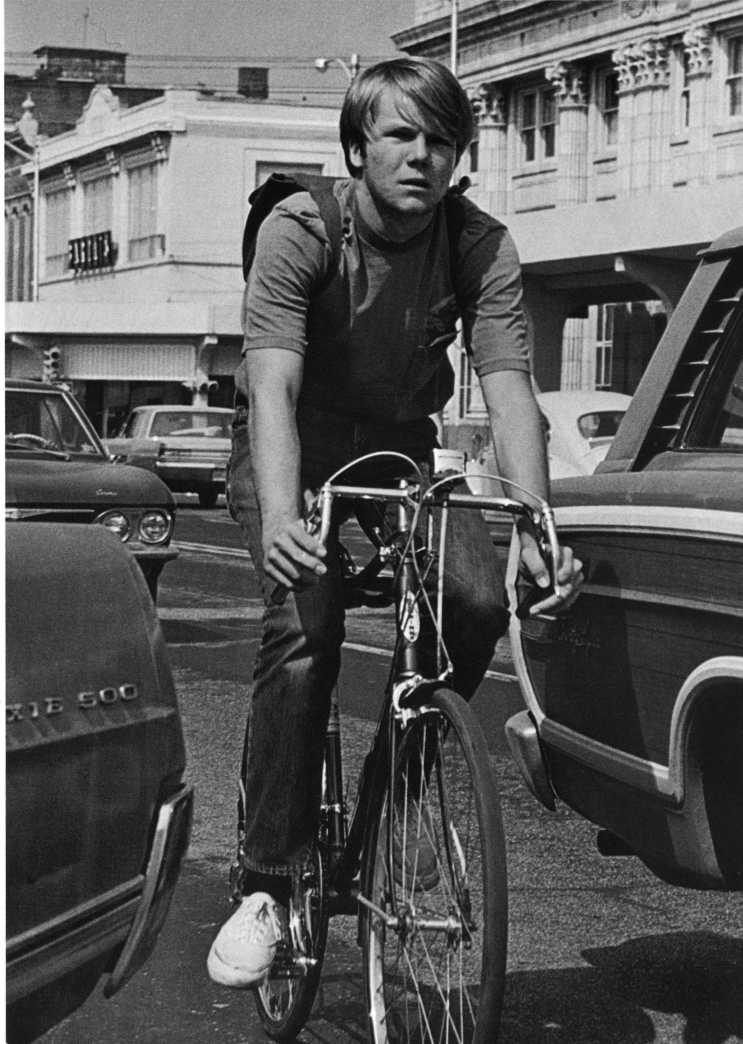
Town and University police are cracking down. They dusted off a 1938 city ordinance and began ticketing cyclists for improper and unsafe driving. On September 3, four students had the distinction of being the first ever to receive tickets under the 33-year-old ordinance. Police reported a dramatic decrease in accidents and thefts as a result of the get-tough policy.

"Bicyclists do have rights to the road, too. But the ordinance has to be enforced now. In the past we ignored it because of the small numbers. Many bicyclists either show complete disregard for traffic laws or just don't realize that they apply to them," Stark said.

Motorists' and pedestrians' complaints led Columbia Mayor Orville Hobart to appoint a special bicycle advisory committee including townspeople, law enforcement officials, and one University student, Mike Ogden, representing the Missouri Student Association. The committee is charged with making a study and then recommendations to the city council on establishing city bike routes, providing parking areas for bikes, regulating inspection and licensing of bikes, and strengthening rules on bike riding.

The University is trying to educate students about bicycle rules of the road and plans eventually to forbid riders on Francis Quadrangle and other Campus walks. The city ordinance prohibits sidewalk riding, and students are confused about whether they are allowed to ride on Campus walks.

Merrill Perlman's complaints in a *Maneater* editorial illustrated the confusion.





Whether
for economy,
ecology,
or exercise,
Americans now own
67 million
bicycles, 17 times
as many as
during the
two-wheeler
craze of the
Gay 90s.



“Most people bring bicycles to Columbia for three reasons: convenience, speed in getting to classes, and economy. With the new bicycle rules, we cannot take any of the shortcuts we take while walking, so we must take the long way around on the streets. End result: a longer, more tiring, and more dangerous trip. Ever wonder if the people who make the rules have ever tried riding a bicycle in Columbia traffic? Especially between classes?!”

“How about keeping the four-wheelers off the streets and leaving the thoroughfares on Campus open to our two-wheeled, non-motorized friends? I’m sure if an answer, and a good one, isn’t found soon, a lot of racers will strip their gears.”

Everyone agrees that some solutions must be found soon, and the committee, University officials and police hoped that, before the leaves fell, they could find some.

The first great bicycle craze was nothing like this. Pierre Lallemand was issued the first patent for a bicycle in France in 1866. During the Gay 90s, only 4 million Americans were on wheels.



Quickly the velocipedes were pushed off the main roads by trolleys and Fords, and bikes began to be considered children's toys.

Now there are 67 million two-wheelers in America. One out of every three Americans has a bike.

Cycleries expect to sell 8 million more this year. Stripped down foreign models vie with kiddie models that sport banana seats, backrests, and high rise handlebars in the store displays. Adult riders seem to prefer the three or ten-speed French or British models, however.

Velocipediacs praise bike riding because it is good exercise. Most riders are unaware, though, that pedaling at 10 miles an hour takes only a fifth of a horsepower, little more than one uses walking.

While agreeing that riding is good exercise, and that bicycles are economical transportation, most students here say they ride because parking cars near Campus is almost impossible. Freshmen were allowed to register cars on Campus for the first time this year, raising the number of student

operated automobiles to over 9,600. Only 365 Campus and 1,000 dormitory spaces are available.

Other students frankly admit that they cannot afford cars, and others say that riding a bike is part of their personal crusade against air pollution. Whether based on practical or philosophical considerations, some observers see the bicycle boom as evidence of a distinctive student life style.

Certainly bike riding has had an effect on student fashions. Briefcases have given way to book bags and back packs. Bell-bottom trousers are tied or clipped to prevent their getting caught in the bicycle chain. Hot pants, jeans, culottes, slacks, and occasionally knickers are worn by female riders. And bicycle locks and keys hanging around the riders' necks on brightly colored loops of plastic look like pop art jewelry.

Winter's rain, snow and ice may solve some of the bicycle traffic problems. Students may be summer cyclists and sunshine pedalers who will, as the first snowflake falls, reach for their car keys. □