

The "Biciclette dei Mestieri" (Working Bicycles)

Real itinerant shops, these "working bicycles" were modified and equipped with the tools of various trades. Dating from the early years of the 20th century to the 1950s, these bicycles show a vivid glimpse of working-class life and bear witness to the tradesmen of the past, such as the knife-grinder, the cobbler, and the puppet master. Some of these jobs no longer exist.

The bicycles on display are a selection from Marco Paoletti's collection.



CYCLING THROUGH THE PAST STORIES OF MEN AND TRADES

Museo Galileo, Piazza dei Giudici 1

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An exhibition conceived and organized by



With the collaboration of



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The exhibition shows some of the most significant stages in the development of two-wheeled vehicles. In the first section, antique bicycles from the Museo Galileo collections - which are usually kept in storage - are displayed. The second section is devoted to the so-called "*biciclette dei mestieri*" (working bicycles) from Marco Paoletti's collection. They are two-wheeled vehicles which were modified and fitted with tools to be used for different jobs.

The first two-wheeled vehicle for personal transportation was invented in 1816 by the German aristocrat Karl Christian Ludwig Drais von Sauerbrohn. It was named "draisine" after its inventor. One had to push feet against the ground; steering was possible by operating the front wheel. Drais believed that his "running machine" would replace horses as a more efficient and economic vehicle. However, the draisine became nothing more than a fashionable toy for young aristocrats, also called a "hobby horse."



In 1861 the French maker Ernest Michaux added a couple of pedals to the front wheel and, a few years later, also a pair of brakes: the bicycle was born. Because of the irritating vibrations produced by the wheel impact with the ground, the bicycle was also known as the "boneshaker." It was nonetheless a success, both for producers and riders.

The boneshaker's success stimulated makers to devise new solutions and produce new models. The most active inventors were English. In 1869 James Starley and William Hillman patented the "Ariel," a bicycle whose front wheel was considerably higher than the rear wheel. The impressive front wheel diameter increased the space covered with one complete turn of the pedals.



In 1879 Harry John Lawson patented a bicycle with a chain transmission and smaller wheels. He named it the "*bicyclette*". The model was not successful, but it paved the way for new devices to increase comfort and safety. In 1888, John Boyd Dunlop invented the pneumatic tyre while three years later Édouard Michelin invented the tyre casing, later perfected by Pirelli.

In 1884 the Turin maker Costantino Vianzone presented the "*bicicletto*" - a bicycle with a wooden frame and rope wheels. One year later, Edoardo Bianchi began industrial-scale production of bicycles..

Women and Bicycles

In Victorian Britain it was generally held to be unsuitable for women to be seen on bicycles. The position, the clothes' movements while mounting or dismounting and the easy falls, were all at odds with Victorian prudery. Makers proposed fanciful alternatives for lady cyclists, from bicycles with both pedals on one side, to tricycles, to "dicycles" with big parallel wheels. The clothing problem remained. Stylists launched the so-called "rational dress" for female cyclists. It consisted of trousers, wide above the knee and tight at the ankle, suitably covered by an overcoat.



Florence in the first half of the 20th century

In the first decades of the 20th century numerous artisanal and commercial enterprises were active, heirs to the arts and trades guilds of the 13th-14th century. Among these craftsmen were carpenters, farriers, mechanics, silversmiths, goldsmiths and many others. Florence at the time was quite small, easily covered on foot or by bicycle. Itinerant commerce and activities represented an important part of the city's economy. The streets were enlivened by the sound of everyday traffic mingled with the cries of peddlers and shopkeepers hawking their goods.

