

# Chain reaction!

## Cycling through time with help from poster cards

by Malcolm Luty, published in Picture Postcard Magazine, April 2020



**“One of the most important days of my life was when I learned to ride a bicycle,” comedian, actor, writer, television presenter and former Monty Python star Sir Michael Palin once said.**

Nearly all of us have ridden a bike and would agree that the invention has been a major benefit to mankind.

Like many aspects of transport history, cycling progress has depended on technology.

We have the 1815 eruption of the Indonesian volcano Tambora to thank for Baron Karl von Drais' efforts in Germany to find a replacement for horses.

Many had starved after the volcanic ash spread across the globe causing 1816 harvests to fail.

His invention, nick-named the hobby-horse, was a steerable frame on two wheels where the rider sat astride the cycle and pushed himself along.

The next leap forward was the 1860s velocipede, or bone-shaker, which incorporated pedals on the front wheel.

The following decade saw the penny-farthing whose large front wheel allowed faster speeds and smoother rides but was prone to pitch riders over its handlebars.

The bike which changed everything was the 'safety' cycle introduced in the 1880s. It employed chain drive, normal-size wheels and pneumatic tyres.

Whereas earlier bikes were the preserve of middle and upper-class males, the new bike had a frame which coped with Victorian skirts. Although bikes have been improved over the last century, their basic design remains the same.

Much more important than the technical breakthrough was its effect on society.

It was a real tool in transforming middle class women's lives at a time when they were reaching for their emancipation.

Cycling granted independence to women of moderate means - they could travel without a chaperone and could mix with male cyclists on equal terms in cycling clubs.

Family outings to the countryside became possible and the adoption of cycling bloomers helped to change rigid fashion styles.

Cycle racing became a mass participation sport which continues today. And sturdy bikes allowed workers more choice of employment.

Availability of affordable cars reduced demand for bikes after World War Two but in recent years cycling has been recognised as a way to keep fit through commuting or sports like mountain biking or road racing.

And pressure to reduce the environmental harm caused by roads and motor traffic is leading to more cycle lanes and tracks in urban areas. So the humble bike is probably here to stay.

In terms of the aesthetic appeal of cycling posters, it so happens that the cycling craze from the 1890s to World War One coincided with posters emerging as a major advertising medium.

Thus cycling posters cover all the main styles of poster art, though examples after the post-war decline in bike manufacture haven't so far been reproduced on card.

Most modern cycling poster cards feature the cycling craze period. For instance, top French artists like Cheret and Toulouse-Lautrec created cycling posters in 1891 and 1896 respectively (see PPM October 2015 for Lautrec's La Chaîne Simpson).

In fact French posters make up nearly half of the 250-odd cycling poster cards in my collection.

As you may expect, a similar proportion feature women. But what I found surprising is that over a third of all the posters show either dismounted cyclists or no cyclist at all. Yet only two posters fail to show a bike or the cycling accessory being promoted.

Finding cycling poster cards should not be hard. British publishers include Dalkeith (13 cards), Mayfair (11 including 8 Raleigh), Nottinghamshire County Council (6 Raleigh) and Mumbles (4).

French publishers which are available in Britain are Centenaire (7), Clouet (8) and Nugeron (19). Bibliotheque Forney (16) also appears in dealers' stocks occasionally.

Other significant publishers are Photoglob of Switzerland (15, available in UK) and Retro Art Gallery from Australia (18, on eBay).


I'll gladly supply more information if you email [malcolmluty@gmail.com](mailto:malcolmluty@gmail.com). Illustrated here is a representative selection of cycling poster cards from around the world. All are continental size except the Dalkeith card.



Riding her 'safety' cycle one-handed, a young woman in a fashionable skirt and jacket nonchalantly teases the train driver with her other, confident the train can't catch her. Freedom indeed! Artist Tamagno 1898, card Nugeron B1. Three other publishers offer the same poster.



# Ride into the countryside-by train



**Take your bike by train**

Pick up a leaflet at most British Rail stations and Appointed Travel Agents for full details of our 'Bikes go Free' scheme.

**This is the age of the train ➡**

A 1980 poster shows how a contemporary urban family can explore the countryside together, led by the mother. Card 10172034 by Star Editions.





A Spanish family enjoys an outing on 'the best bike' in the 1950s. Card 2907 by Ediciones AM.



*Howe Bicycles*

Perhaps the most-reproduced cycle poster promotes a tricycle c.1878. Queen Victoria bought three similar machines – they allowed women to ride in normal dress. Card 3047 by Beechwood but also by at least three other publishers.





Bibendum rides a bike in an Italian poster c1920. Card CPPOS-10 by Cavallini.





Older car posters were apt to claim their products were owned by the upper classes but cycling to the golf club in pre-war Britain is stretching credulity. Many readers will recall these bikes in the 1950s. Card by Nottinghamshire County Council.



Velodromes were popular for racing during the cycling craze. The first was at Brighton's Preston Park in 1877 but this poster by PAL (Jean de Paleologue) dates from around 1900. Notice the long-distance races also being promoted. Two identical Editions Thill cards, 820/41 and 211/146.





Spring is a time for romance as well as cycling, illustrated in this card by Centre de l’Affiche in Toulouse. The nurse rightly seems more concerned about her infant’s safety. Artist for the c1900 poster is Chapellier.





The course of true love, like Edwardian roads, never did run smooth – unless you'd fitted Aeolus tyres. Card 5 by Gemeentelijke archiefdienst Rotterdam.



**1 Mile**  
IN  
2 MINUTES  
43 SECONDS  
BY  
JOHN KEEN

**363 Miles**  
IN  
26 CONSECUTIVE  
HOURS BY  
C. TERRONT  
AT  
AGRICULTURAL HALL

# COLUMBIA BICYCLE

**1404 MILES**  
IN  
6 DAYS  
BY  
C. WALLER

**205 MILES**  
IN  
22 Hours  
TURNPIKE  
ROAD BY  
E. COSTEN  
AND  
E. SMYTHE.

**212 MILES**  
IN  
22 Hours  
55 Min.  
ON THE ROAD  
London  
TO BATH  
and return  
BY  
W. BRITTEN

**100 MILES**  
IN  
7 Hours  
18 Min.  
From BATH  
to LONDON  
BY  
E. APPLEBY

**AN  
EVER  
SADDLED  
HORSE  
WHICH  
EATS  
NOTHING**

**1/4 MILE**  
IN  
38 3/8  
SEC.  
Chestnut  
Hill Boston  
BY  
G. J. FRANCIS

SEND 3 CENT STAMP  
FOR  
CATALOGUE &  
PRICE LIST CONTAINING  
FULL INFORMATION

## THE POPE MFG. CO.

### BOSTON

MASS.

FORBES CO. BOSTON

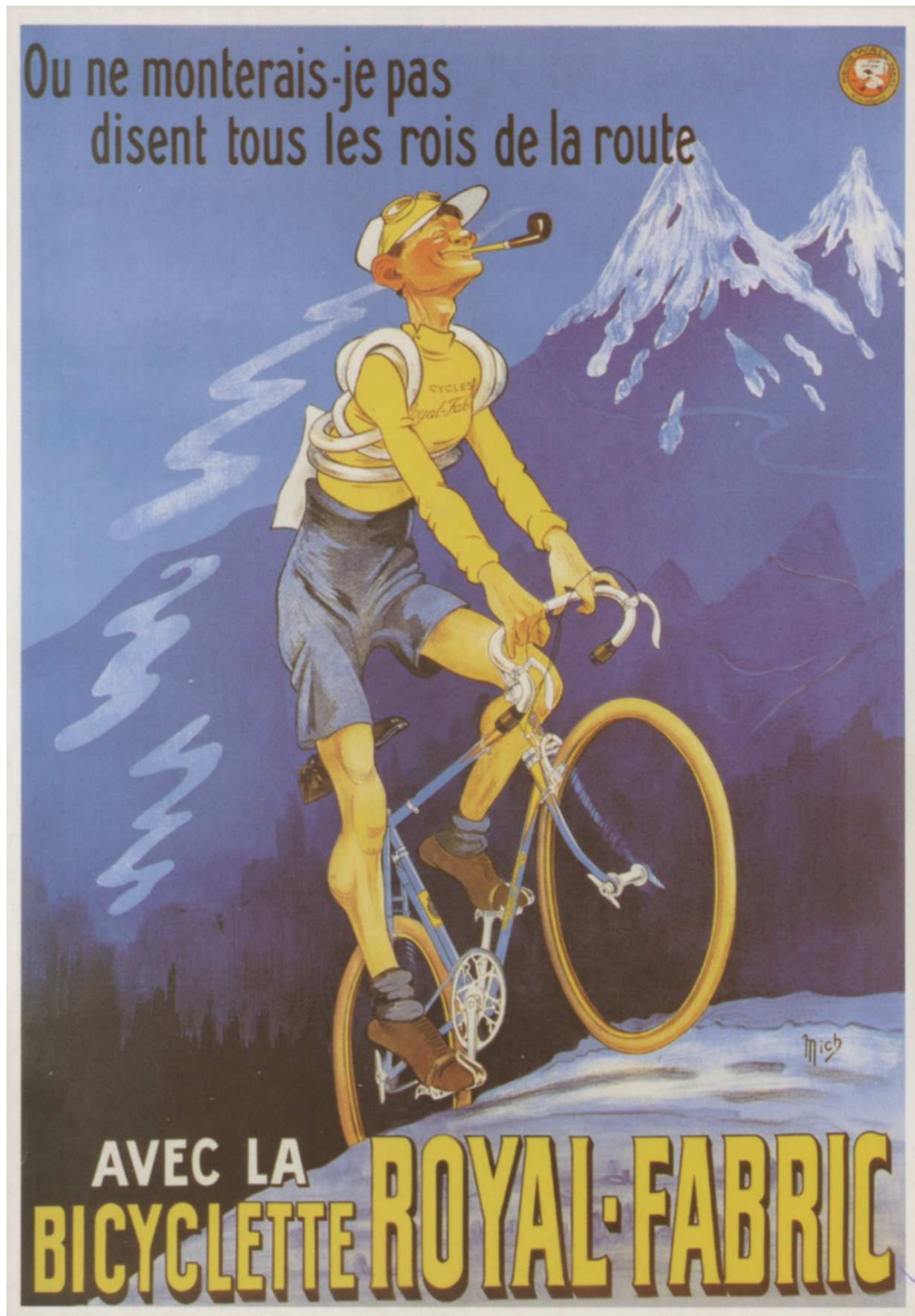
Penny-farthings were fast and dangerous. This American poster from the 1880s lists speed records in Britain and the USA but shows the risk of overbalancing forward and of thighs jamming against handlebars. Women's clothing precluded them from riding such bikes. Nugeron card C11.





One of a series of poster cards of Olympic sports highlights the peak of cycling achievement. Poster artists were Aicher, Joksch, Nagy and Wirthner; the card is No. 112 by the XX Games Official Committee, 1972.



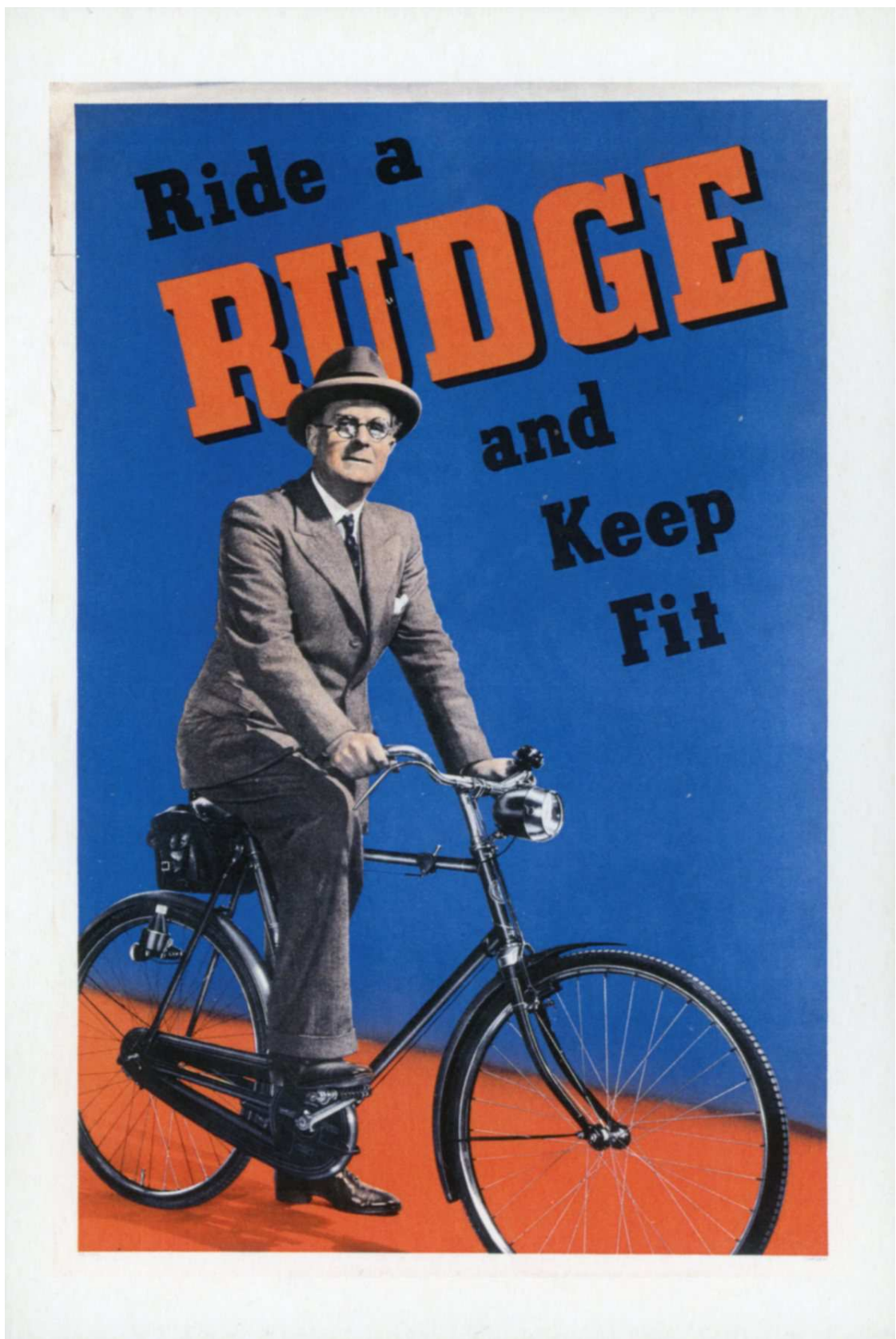


Judging by the snow, this could still be winter but it hasn't deterred this 'king of the road' competitor from smoking while conquering the hill. Undated poster by Mich, Clouet card 10835.

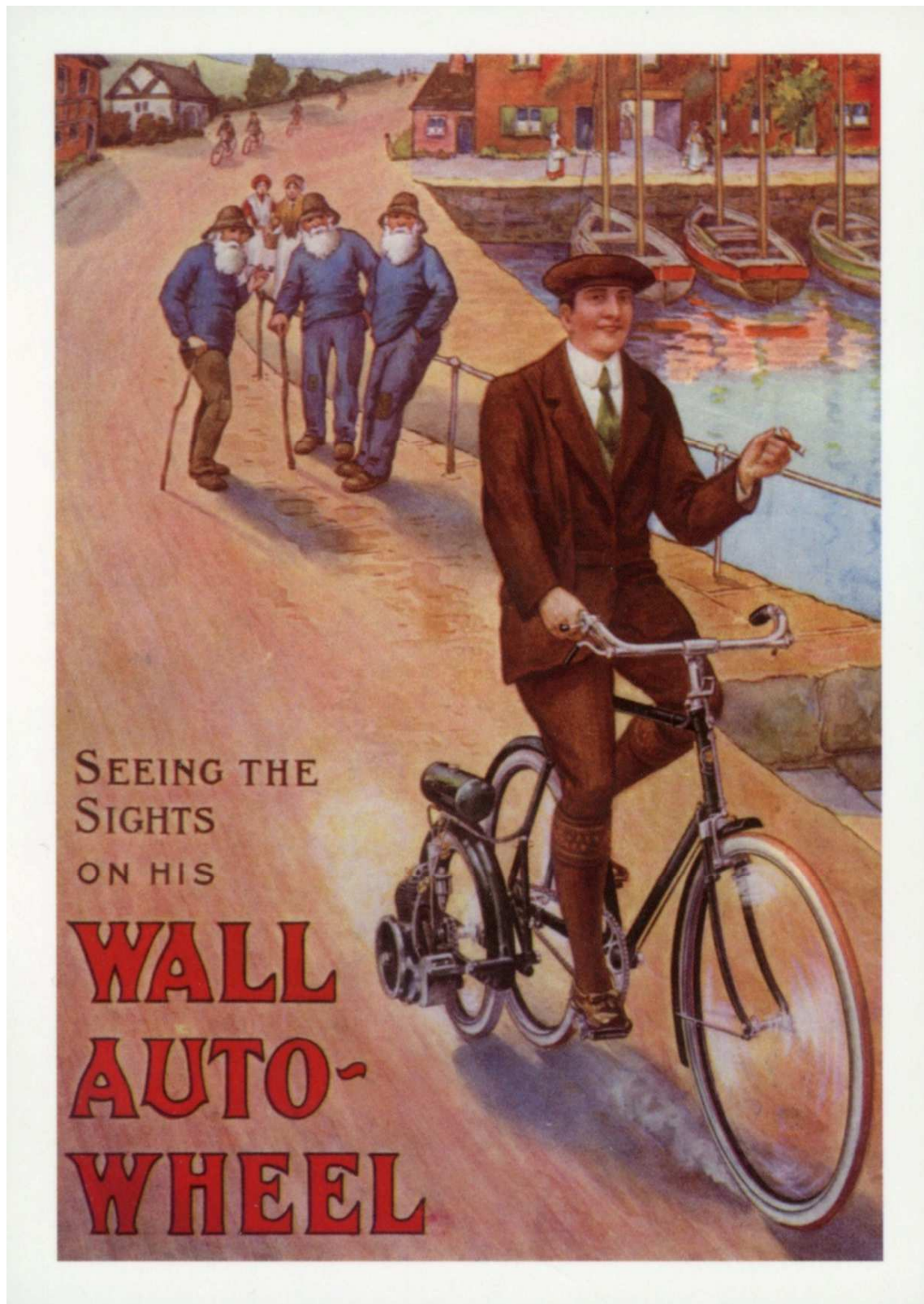


Strangely, all the tandem poster cards I have show a woman steering. A poster by PAL c1900 reproduced on an un-numbered card by Retro Art Gallery.



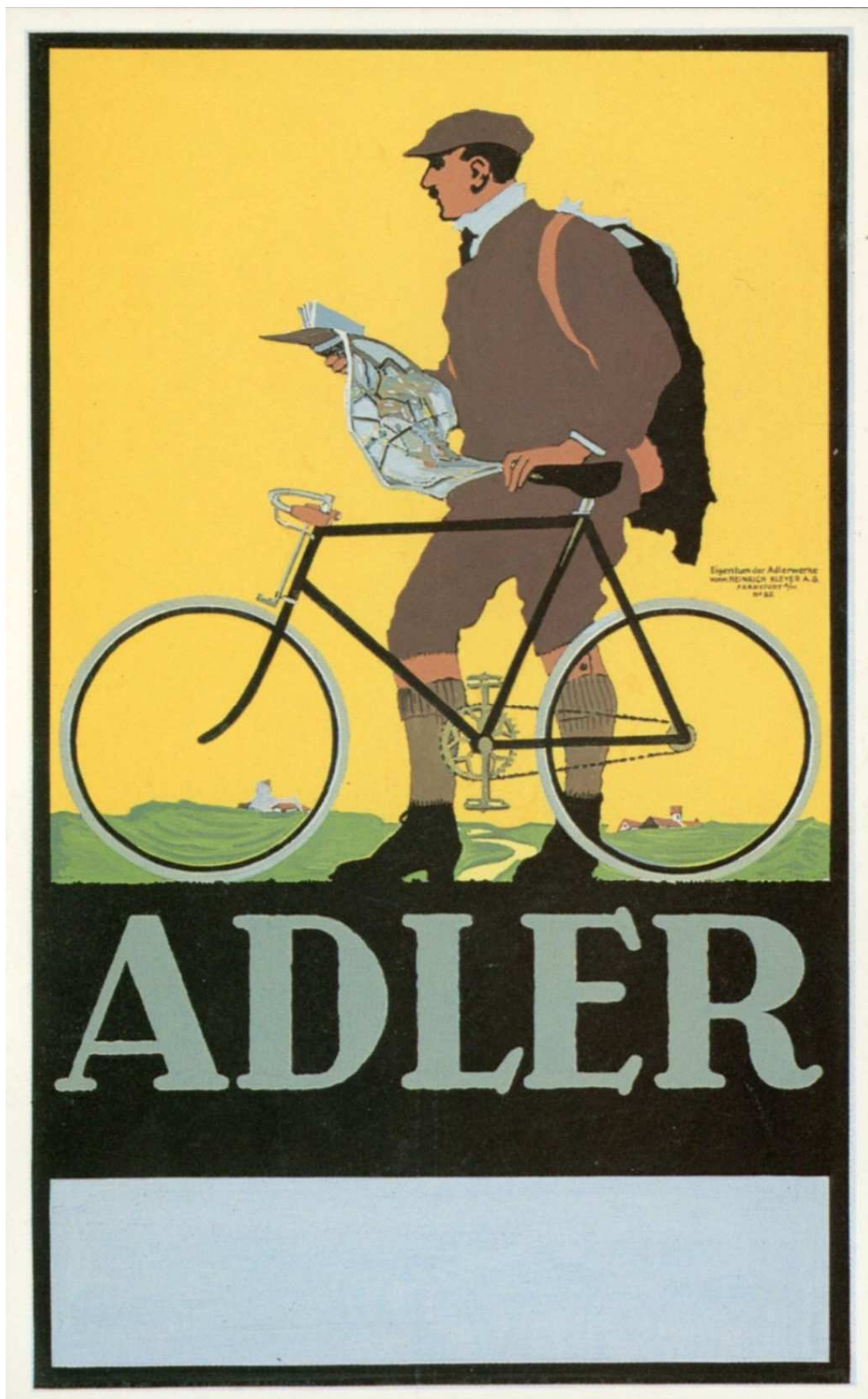


Does anyone remember crossbar gear levers and dynamos spun by the rear tyre? This must be a 1950s poster when advertisers could make sweeping promises. Star Editions card 10438027.



Wall Auto-wheels were made from 1909 to 1914 and sold for about £16. They clamped to a bicycle's rear forks and were controlled by cable from the handlebars. Card by Vintage Motor Cycle Club.





A touring cyclist is depicted on this German 1912 poster. Dalkeith card P77 in its Bicycles set 13.