



# Not The Spoken Word

Bi-monthly newsletter of The Western Australian Historical Cycle Club Inc.

## Remembering John 'Smithy' Smith

02.04.1928 - 07.06.2022

John Smith was a character, the cheeky chap in shorts.

John told me his earliest bike memory was when he was four years old. His father - Herbert Harry Edward Smith, a timber worker from Dwellingup won the hotly contested 1932 Collie Donnybrook race. John was holding his mother's apron watching his father cross the line.

*"They had to hose him down to find out who he was because he was covered in mud"*

John got into cycle racing when he was 16, only after his father made him buy his own bike - he paid 2/6 for it. He soon started out at South Bunbury Cycling Club.

John trained at night with a battery torch, it lit up the road enough to see the kangaroos as they hopped across his path. The roads were pea gravel with little traffic and he trained every day. He called himself a bit of a "cart horse", or a domestique for much of his later years but in his late teens and early 20s he was a sure thing.

In 1948 the Collie Donnybrook race had only three miles (5km) of bitumen, the other 65 miles (104km) of was gravel. John was leading, but he punctured one mile from the finish line and his father lost a £1008 bet. A quiet ride home that night.

1949 was unlucky too. *"The group had just rode off the bitumen and it*

*turned to gravel."* The group bunched and slowed. A chap called Teddy Lewis went into a pothole. John went over the top and broke his collarbone. Ouch. *"I got up and rode one handed to Donnybrook and back"*

John's job on the railways was tough too. He started out as a coal shoveller and finished up a train driver.

*"I took a job on that coal stage actually to get fit for quite a few months. Me and another chap we used to shovel 70 ton of coal, every day, and after a day shovelling a coal I used to go for 100 mile rides"*

John kept a treasured telegram. It is dated 18 August 1951, the day before the 1951 Midland 100 Race - a few months after his 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday. It is addressed to Johnny Smith care of Eddie Barron, Flash Cycles, Midland Junction.

The telegram reads "Be cunning good luck, Dad".

He won the race, £100 and a handsome trophy.

Johnny was cunning and cheeky, but always making friends.

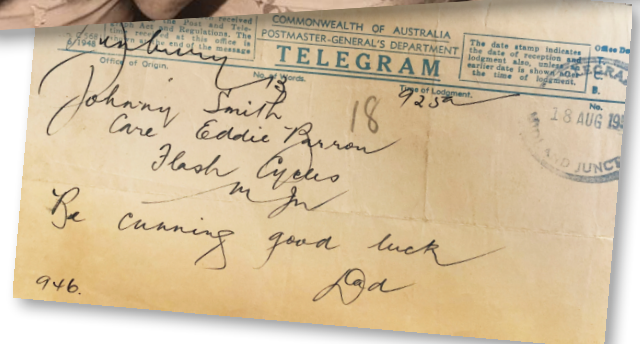
As a veteran John rode across Australia and competed strongly in the West Coast Vets and Gryphon Tour. He won the WA Apples & Pears Veteran Tour 1986, 55-59 age category.

John dropped into handicapping after volunteering one night when the lap scorer was off sick. As the handicapper and starter at WA races for over 20 years John took "constructive criticism" from every second rider about the handicap he'd given them.

He knew bike racing. He had lived it.

John said *"Back in the 1950s I used to ride off scratch on my own. Its funny nowadays they don't like riding on their own, or even with less than ten in a bunch. They don't like gravel either. Oh, they're soft!"*

**Toby Hodgson**



Photos clockwise from left; Midland Traders 100 poster; John wins the 1946 RSL Wheelrace at the Bunbury Track; WA Apples & Pears Veteran Tour 1986 left to right: Cecil Cripps winner 60 and over, John Smith winner 55-59, Brian Roberts winner 50-54; the telegram from H.E. To his son on the eve of the '51 Traders Road Race.

# Book Review

## Riding to History and Oblivion.

Recently browsing my little cycling library, my eyes settled on the fabulous account of 'The Lost Cyclist', written by David Herlihy and published in 2010 (Mainstream Publishing). Frank Lenz was a man with a passion for bicycle adventure who also sought notoriety (and financial support) as an early travel writer. His mission in 1892 was to make a name for himself by cycling from the US to Europe (the long way). In doing so Lenz helped to popularise cycling with the general public.

The type of bike ridden by Lenz, a Victor, was displayed at a US bicycle club meeting in 2010. Their meeting report states "To add to the ambiance of the evening, Glenn Eames of the Old Spokes Home provided an example of the type of bike that Lenz rode during his trip, a Victor Model 'C'". (see photos below right)

Cycling was already popular in the early 1890's. Herlihy's research for the book outlines a visit by Lenz to the Overman Wheel Company to order his Victor safety cycle in preparation for the trip.

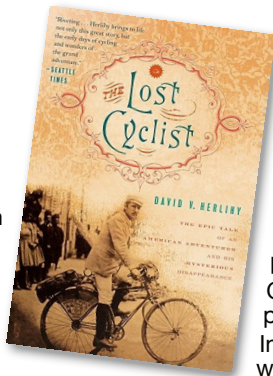
At this time the company's 1000 employees were busily trying to keep up with bicycle demand. Lenz ordered a robust nickel-plated frame fitted with a long, well-sprung saddle. Further suspension came in the form of massive springs acting on the front forks, see photo below. Two sprockets on the flip flop rear hub gave two gears. In a bold move for that time, he specified the latest in pneumatic tyres, much like Australia's own Arthur Richardson.

At 26 kg the bike was remarkably light, particularly compared to the all-up weight it supported (around 110kg comprising bicycle, rider, camera and gear). A stable bottom bracket is supported by a tall narrow A frame in place of the modern seat tube.

While the bike itself is fascinating, the Lenz story is even more so and not only for its poignantly tragic ending.

While Frank's own bike was lost along with him, he certainly qualified for a place in Iain Spragg's collection of short essays, 'Cycling's Strangest Tales' (Portico). You can also read more here; [tinyurl.com/2p95dmw5](http://tinyurl.com/2p95dmw5) and see his route in this short ebook; [tinyurl.com/ymlrvw9u7](http://tinyurl.com/ymlrvw9u7) But to enjoy a full account do track down a copy of Herlihy's well researched book, heartily recommended.

Robert Loughman



# Victor Cycles

Albert Overman started the Overman Wheel Company in 1882 in Chicopee Falls, Massachusetts, assisted by an investment of \$62,000 in part made by his former employer General Alexander McClurg, a notable Chicago bookseller and publisher. At its peak, the Overman factory employed about 1,400 men in five buildings and produced 80,000 bicycles per year.

Overman himself lived in a palatial home nearby. He was a patron of the arts and a lavish entertainer.

In the late 1800's the Overman and Pope cycle companies were the American market leaders, constantly litigating and counter-litigating, spying on each others' factories, and outdoing each other in production, quality, price and advertising.

Overman made much of their scientific studies into power outputs and materials. The flagship product of the Overman Company was the Victor Bicycle, the first US made safety bicycle. For its time it was lightweight and made extensive use of interchangeable parts, an innovation which allowed the owner to make minor repairs, without bringing the bicycle to a professional mechanic, and was the first US bicycle to employ pneumatic tyres.

Victors for a time undoubtedly had the highest standards of design and manufacture and such was Overman's confidence in his product that he steadfastly refused to compromise on price - the top model cost \$100 in the mid 1890's. At the time there were 300 bicycle manufacturers vying for slices of the booming US bicycle market. The market crash came in 1896. Compounding this was a falling out with established sporting goods manufacturer Spalding, with whom Overman had a nationwide distribution agreement. Spalding began making bicycle wheels and, seemingly out of spite, Overman began making baseball bats.

A creditors meeting was called by the National Hide and Leather Bank of Boston and F. A. Foulmer & Co. of Boston, (owed \$40,000 and \$10,000 respectively). Creditors representing \$500,000 of the company's \$648,000 debt were 'inclined to be lenient', and the President of the First National Bank of Boston stated that the bank was happy to increase its line of credit from \$50,000 to \$75,000. A doubtless relieved Albert Overman assured creditors they would be satisfied with the outcome.

Overman Wheel Company subsequently dropped prices of its bicycles to a more competitive \$40,

however just two years later in 1898, following a disastrous factory fire, the 16 year old business folded.

Initially launched by the Overman Wheel Co in 1887 as a cross-frame bicycle with open head, the Victor Spring-fork became America's leading bicycle design after its update the following year to a Rover style frame and ball bearing head. Overman cushion tyres were introduced in 1891. With its distinctive front fork, the Victor Spring-fork Safety, as ridden by Frank Lenz, remains one of the most sought after models of safety bicycle over 130 years later.

Robert Frith



# 2022 AGM

## Message from the Chair

With an average of 4.76 years served by each of your current committee members the club has endured the most stable period in its 23 year history.

Frankly we need to stir things up a bit!

I have been club Chair or President for the past nine years. While there are certainly things that I could have handled better, I think a bit of tension here and there helps us all think a bit harder, and harder thinking makes a better club.

I'm proud of what the club has achieved in that time - we have grown from an organisation that celebrated historic bicycles through preservation, restoration and riding into one that also embraces the importance and relevance of bikes to our society. The transformation is evidenced by the people, stories and artefacts uncovered in the research behind the four major exhibitions we've staged since 2016.

We have also grown from a membership of about 40 to 76.

The exhibitions have also served to raise the club's profile both locally and nationally and have resulted in significant donations of historical material.

I won't be standing for the position of Chairperson this year. I encourage anyone with even the slightest interest in taking on the role to throw their hat in the ring - it would be great to see a bit of a contest! The successful candidate can be assured of the support of the membership and the expert advice (haha) of past committee members.

There's a nomination form at the end of this newsletter. Please have a read and consider putting your name forward. If it's something you can't do then please consider offering your ongoing support to those members who can.

Only current financial members may stand for office and vote at the AGM. For those of you who are yet to renew your membership there is also information on the myriad ways you can get your \$25 to the club treasurer at the end of this missive.

**Robert Frith, Chairperson**

## July Auction

The July auction is live and will finish at 9:15pm on the night of the AGM - July 18<sup>th</sup>.

As always there's something for everyone -

- 1930's Aussie bike
- Mystery track bike
- 1970's Gordonson
- Milton Jones built Capo
- Collectible postcards
- parts, parts, parts
- A bike stand

There are still items being added so check back in to see what's new.

All items will be at the clubroom for the July 18<sup>th</sup> meeting and members will be able to bid on the night.

You can access the auction at the link below.

[www.biddingowl.com/Auction/](http://www.biddingowl.com/Auction/)

[index.cfm?auctionID=21151](http://index.cfm?auctionID=21151)



## Stuck in the Shed with Rob Loughman

### What are you currently working on?

It's not a historic bike, just a slightly beaten up, homeless tandem courtesy of the South Perth tip. If I can't find its proper owner, it's a basic fix then on Gumtree as a fundraiser for the blind and vision impaired tandem group that Juliann and I support.

### How many rideable bikes do you have?

The house is often littered with tandems, two of them being ours. One is an old double unisex with about 50 years of family history. The other is contemporary (but legendary at the same time). The rest are singles, another six tucked into various corners. This includes my every day road bike, a classic 8 speed Cannondale with Dura-Ace running gear in the form of Shimano's first integrated brake and gear levers, the 7400 series. It gives me joy every time I click in. Some would argue all eight bikes are more rideable than collectable!

### If push comes to shove what is your favourite bike?

Well it's very hard to go past my folding light tourer, a 24" Airmal Chameleon road bike from the UK. It got me into suitcase cycle touring, after a 35 year touring break, which has been life changing. It deserves a lot of respect for that.

Plus it's quirky, beautifully designed and artisan built. It's a bit of a head turner and great fun to ride.

### What was your first bike?

My brother got among the bike building scene in Sydney in the 70's and frequented a frame builder who had a tiny workshop in Alexandria, his name was Jim Lemon. After knocking around on my cousin's 26" hand-me-along in my teens, I had the rare privilege of a custom build chrome-moly frame at the age of about 16, thanks to bro'. It had a super tight wheelbase for a tall frame, which I valued later for its handling. I hand painted the frame. Easing the masking off the chrome stays and forks was like unwrapping a Christmas box.

I built it up from there. I learnt wheel building and laced the Weinmann rims with double butted spokes, 40 on the back to go with the lugs for pannier touring. It had classic randonneur drop bars, a sweet TA/Stronglight triple and a typically tight 5 speed cluster. The Brooks butt leather saddle taught my backside a thing or two. That bike went like a rocket and was indestructible. After an all-too-brief 10 years of faithful service it was stolen and likely ended up in pieces, as did I!

### Pick a bike any bike.. in your dreams what are you riding?

Easy. That would be our Santana Journey light touring tandem that Juliann and I ride as often as we can. It's another packable tourer that has a few adventures behind it and many more ahead we trust. Life is about turning dreams into reality, isn't it?

### Whistle while you work? Give us a tip on the sounds that fill your workspace.

I love live music but in the workshop it's the radio. I'm a Radio National devotee. Despite severe cuts and abrasions over the last 20 years, the ABC still manages to excel in public interest broadcasting. The ABC is turning 90 in July. Happy birthday Aunty!

Further reading: <https://cycling-passion.com/dura-ace-history/>

*Photo left: My bike garage, or as my wife Juliann prefers to think, somewhere she parks the car.*

# Club Calendar

**Mon 18<sup>th</sup> Jul 19:30**

## Annual General Meeting & Auction

In-person at 41 Britannia Road, Leederville

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 896 2070 3705

## Mon 15<sup>th</sup> Aug 19:30 General Meeting Speaker Rob Loughman

In-person at 41 Britannia Road, Leederville

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 896 2070 3705

## Mon 19<sup>th</sup> Sep 19:30 General Meeting

In-person at 41 Britannia Road, Leederville

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 896 2070 3705

## Mon 17<sup>th</sup> Oct 19:30 General Meeting

In-person at 41 Britannia Road, Leederville

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 896 2070 3705

## Sun 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct 11:00 Ride & Display

Let's Get Gibbical - City of Canning

Details in the Sep/Oct newsletter

## Wed 9<sup>th</sup> Nov 09:00 Display

Have a Go Day - Burswood

Details in the Sep/Oct newsletter

## Mon 21<sup>st</sup> Nov 19:30 General Meeting

In-person at 41 Britannia Road, Leederville

Online Zoom Meeting ID: 896 2070 3705

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# 50 year old Condor

On Monday the 6th of June my Condor celebrated its 50th birthday,

When I first started riding, I wanted to race. Dad bought me a Claud Butler bike. He thought it was great but actually it was a bit of a dog.

Anyway, over the years I replaced parts, first the wheels, then the crank and so on.

Over a number of years the bike completely changed; all I wanted for Christmas and birthday presents was money to upgrade the next component.

Eventually I purchased a new frame from Condor. So the 50th is really for the frame and today the Campag axles are the oldest component still in use.

The bike is a bit of a grandfather's axe and one of my favourite possessions.

The photos below are of me attacking on the front of the bunch on my Claud Butler. And crashing the Condor a year later - I broke my collar bone when a witches hat got knocked into the bunch.

James Cooper

INVOICE  
"Our claim to fame . . . is in the name" No 2012

**CONDOR CYCLES**

90 GRAYS INN ROAD, LONDON, W.C.1X 8AA Phone: 01-242 7896

MR. JAMES R. COOPER  
ABBEY Wood House  
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Bought of Condor Cycles one  
Condor of Italy frame No. 17124.

Cash Price	£31 50
Name on IT	2 40
K.H. Boss	50
Campag H/seat	5 00
	39 40
less deposit	5 00
	£34 40

Paid with thanks J.C.





# Annual General Meeting ~ July 18th 2022

## Membership Renewal

Thank you to those who have already renewed. Club membership fees are due on June 1st. Membership of the club remains at \$25 per annum. Please either;

- **pay via the club webshop** (+\$1 transaction fee) <https://historicalcycleclub.com.au/shop>
- **post a cheque** together with this completed form to;

WAHCC  
 PO Box 234  
 Leederville WA 6903

Family name \_\_\_\_\_ Given name \_\_\_\_\_

- **direct deposit**

use your surname as a reference and email a copy of the receipt to [treasurer.wahcc@gmail.com](mailto:treasurer.wahcc@gmail.com)

BSB: 806015  
 Account number: 03307010  
 Account name : Western Australian Historical Cycle

## Committee Nomination

All committee positions are up for renewal. You may nominate yourself. If you are nominating someone else please be sure to have their consent! You may nominate for multiple positions but can only be elected to one position. Elections for committee positions are held in the order they appear below.

Club rules allow for remote and proxy voting. If you can't attend the meeting in person or online you can still vote! Just appoint a proxy to vote for you. Nominations and proxy appointments must be received prior to the start of the AGM. Email them to [info.wahcc@gmail.com](mailto:info.wahcc@gmail.com) or post them to the club address.

Position	Name	Nominated by
Chairperson	_____	_____
Secretary	_____	_____
Treasurer	_____	_____
Vice Chair	_____	_____
Committee Member	_____	_____