

BFI UNVEILS NEW FILMS CHARTING A CENTURY OF BRITISH CYCLING ON FILM – MARKING THE TOUR DE FRANCE’S VISIT TO THE UK

Highlights include the first competitive cycling race captured on film (Manchester Wheelers’ Annual Race Meet in 1901), and a look at British women cyclists from 1899

Now looking for the British public to help identify the cyclists on screen



From top left to right, Lady Cyclists (1899), Cyclists Special (1955), Cyclists Turning Right (1983), Skid Kids (1953)

As millions prepare to watch the English stages of this year’s Grand Depart, Tour de France the BFI is launching on 2nd July a major new cycling collection on its video-on-demand platform BFI Player.

<http://player.bfi.org.uk/collection/better-by-bike/w0eWZubjrjHWPCR-kogkHZCsOf0cvohI>

We celebrate the rich heritage of British cycling on film with rare archive footage showing cycling from 1899 to the present day. Newsreels, industrial films, public information films, travelogues and features offer a fascinating panorama of more than a century of cycling.

Britain’s love affair with cycling shows no signs of abating and now this long and fascinating history is available to view for the first time following a major programme of digital restoration and research by the BFI National Archive working with archives across the UK.

With British cycling victories at the Olympics still fresh in our minds and cycling heroes now nationally and internationally known household names there's never been a better time for a collection of cycling films, and never one quite like this.

These films are presented to you as three chapters in your cycling experience. A desire for a cycle of your own and the responsibilities that come with it, the great outdoors and the freedom of cycling and of course the competitive streak that pushes two wheels to the limit for awards, recognition and accolade.

Do you recognise anyone in these films? Do you know the places or the events?

Highlights include *Manchester Wheelers' Annual Race Meet* (1901) featuring motorised three-wheelers, novelty races with cycling soldiers and a gruelling competition watched by 18,000 spectators or *Lady Cyclists* (1899).

There are 75 to choose from. Here's our cycling fans' favourites to get you started. See them for yourself from 2nd July on www.bfi.org.uk/player

Cyclists Abroad [1957]

A party of cyclists set out for an Austrian tour in this colourful and evocative but lesser-known British Transport Film. On the boat-train from Victoria to Calais their bicycles are carried in a specially-equipped van. In Buchs the party start their tour of the land of Haydn, Mozart and Schubert, pausing on the way to enjoy the local sights and sounds - and tuck into some hearty Austrian food.

Following the popularity of BTF's *Cyclists Special* (1955, also on BFI Player), which championed the special railway vans adapted to carry bicycles on cycling excursions, the unit was invited to travel further afield to make a film about the railway's continental tours. The film unit didn't have the resources to accompany the riders on the trip, so members of the cycling club were equipped with 16mm cameras and BTF's editors assembled the resulting footage later. Which makes this an unusual hybrid - an amateur film cut by professionals.

Informal Cycle Race in a Village Road (1902)

Bicycles made for one, two and three people go head to head in this brief glimpse of informal Edwardian leisure. Everyone in this slightly out of focus early film looks to be having a good time, as spectators move about the race line and cheer as the dust flies behind the lead riders. Stragglers soldier on, perplexed at the sight of our photographer and his camera.

Lady Cyclists (1899)

There's more than a little mystery to this charming film. It's been attributed to pioneer filmmaker James Williamson, on the basis that he lists a 'Military Ride' by lady cyclists in one of his early catalogues. It's hard to account for the word 'military', but it is an unusually good film for the year, taken from a vantage point in a large park and capturing the riders in all their elegance.

Even the date is uncertain - *Lady Cyclists* has been dated to 1899, but 'Military Ride' actually appeared in Williamson's 1898 catalogue. Is the date wrong, or the title, or both? For now, at least, the truth is elusive.

Rudge-Whitworth - Britain's Best Bicycle [1902]

Motion picture advertising was barely five years old when this Edwardian promo was made. Our gentleman cyclist looks rather worse for wear. If only he had a new Rudge-Whitworth bicycle he'd be a happier man! With its short, 30-second duration and simple, humorous message, this entertaining commercial shows that the wheel of screen advertising has turned full circle.

Rudge-Whitworth, formed in 1894 from the merger of the Rudge Cycle Co. and the Whitworth Cycle Co., was one of Britain's leading manufacturers of bicycles and motorcycles. The company reached its peak in the early 1930s, but suffered in the Depression. The bicycle business was ultimately sold to Raleigh, which kept the name alive for many years.

Skid Kids [1953]

There's shades of classic Ealing comedy *Hue and Cry* in this breezy, Bermondsey-shot Children's Film Foundation adventure from a long-gone London. 'Swanky' and his chums take on a gang of bike thieves with barely a thought for their own safety. There's oodles of fascinating social detail, while the thieves - all pencil moustaches, zoot suits and loud ties - resemble wartime spivs.

Watch out for character actor A.E. Matthews, who briefly appears as a bowler-hatted taxi passenger. Matthews was known for his portrayals of slightly dotty upper-class gents, and for the sheer length of his acting career, which spanned more than half a century. Also seen here is the New Caledonian Market, relocated to Bermondsey Square after the war. An ancient law meant that stolen goods could be legally sold here to market traders - an unusual legislation that the spivs are seen taking full advantage of in *Skid Kids*.

The Racing Cyclist (1966)

A fascinating insight into lightweight racing cycle manufacture, through the eyes of a black female artist from the Caribbean. Made to introduce overseas audiences to British life, the film features 'Harry', a rising star in amateur cycle racing - actually cycle legend Barry Witcomb. 'Harry' introduces the machines he rides, explains how they are constructed and gives an inside take on the sport.

Barry Witcomb was the son of Ernie Witcomb, who founded Witcomb Lightweight Racing Cycles in Deptford in 1949. The Witcomb family are renowned for their contribution to British cycle racing.

Tony Buys a Bike [1942]

A lucky schoolboy gets a brand new bike for Christmas in this charming, playful film from the Cyclists' Touring Club. promoting the joys of club cycling and good road sense - especially on a Claud Butler bike! In one delightful sequence, toy cars and model streets come to life; in another, simple animated diagrams demonstrate the importance of a correct riding position and a personalised fitting.

The shop shown in the film was almost certainly located at 71 Grand Parade, Harringay, one of the original bicycle retail shops established in London by dealer and frame-builder Claud Butler during the late 1920s and early 30s. Claud Butler remains one of the UK's leading cycle brands.

We've divided the films into three sections.

Setting Off

Do you remember your first bike?

This collection of films illustrate those first assisted steps in your cycling journey, the aspirational journey of owning your own wheels, the rite of passage that was the Cycling Proficiency test and the ability to keep up with the other kids in your street.

Re-discover not only the highs of childhood cycling with friends but some of the terrifying warnings screened under the auspices of safety and the shame that can come from neglecting your cycle.

Freewheeling

The Open Road is calling.

A peek into the duffle bag of British cycling films on the theme of leisure. An appraisal of the once mighty British cycle manufacturing industry and of the popularity of cycling for business or pleasure. These films present an overview of a century where one fifth of the British population cycled.

Raleigh, Hercules, Phillips, Moulton, Humber, Rudge, BSA and Witcomb are all represented at the peak of their production with many manufacturers boasting huge overseas sales too. Freewheeling makes the case, even today, to get on your bike and see the world!

Pedal Power

Competition, Endurance and Record Breakers.

In this section we take a look at some of the cyclists that were not content with the leisure of A to B travelling, for these riders are seeking to be the best, to be the fastest or to be the first.

Through the magic of motion picture, share with us, the grit and determination that makes a cyclist go all out against the odds to reach their goals. Witness also some of the more unusual feats accomplished on two wheels as ladies attempt to cycle the English Channel and competitors give it their all at Herne Hill. From a simple informal race in the street to the bright lights of the velodrome, ready...., steady....., GO!

Press contacts:

Brian Robinson, Communications Manager, Archive & Heritage, BFI

[Tel:020 7957 8940](tel:02079578940) brian.robinson@bfi.org.uk

Emma Hewitt, Head of Press (Acting), BFI

[Tel:020 7957 3256](tel:02079573256) emma.hewitt@bfi.org.uk

About the BFI

The BFI is the lead body for film in the UK with the ambition to create a flourishing film environment in which innovation, opportunity and creativity can thrive by:

- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world

- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

The BFI is now a Government arm's-length body and distributor of Lottery funds for film. The BFI serves a public role which covers the cultural, creative and economic aspects of film in the UK. It delivers this role:

- As the UK-wide organisation for film, a charity core funded by Government
- By providing Lottery and Government funds for film across the UK
- By working with partners to advance the position of film in the UK.

Founded in 1933, the BFI is a registered charity governed by Royal Charter.

The BFI Board of Governors is chaired by Greg Dyke.

