

collecting

antiques | what is it? what is it worth?

Classic Bikes

The J.C. Higgins's Colorflow deluxe model (1948) was among the most detailed of postwar bicycles—featuring a two-tone paint job, bat-wing lights, and a front-end spring shock. It's now worth \$3,000.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY WENDELL T. WEBBER

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Bicycles were often our first experience of freedom. As kids, when we mastered that moment of finding a balance on two wheels, we were suddenly able to pedal away into neighborhoods beyond our own. All we needed was a strong headlamp, clean reflectors, and a clear-sounding bell. "I think the reason most people buy a vintage bike," says Craig Morrow, owner of Bicycle Heaven, a Pittsburgh-based source for antique and collectible bicycles, "is that they want their old bike back—a way of regaining their youth. Or maybe a vintage bike lets people have the one they couldn't afford as a kid." Models from the 1940s to the '70s are the most coveted, and Morrow gets calls from as far away as Japan and Australia.



HEAD BADGES, or nameplates, made of brass are popular collectibles. These beveled badges, affixed with screws to a bike's front, range from \$10 to \$500.

1950s

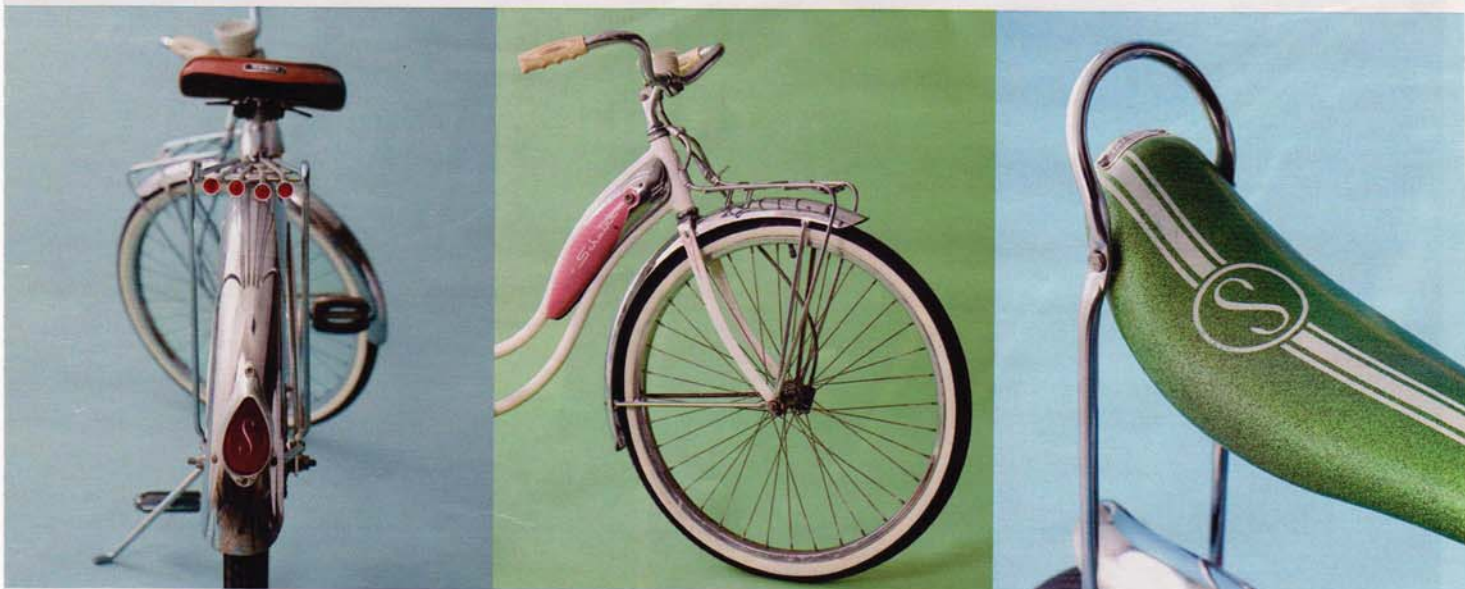
Just as cars of the 1950s sported two-tone shades, so did bikes—especially hues of red and cream, blue and white, black and white. Wide balloon tires (26" diam. by 2.125" thick) were standard and front suspension was common.

1960s

Revolution was in the air, even in bicycle design. The distinctive Stingray (a.k.a. muscle bike) debuted, harkening to the name-sake car. Tires became thinner, frames were lighter, technological advances made pedaling easier.

1970s

While kids of the '60s wanted to do wheelies, kids of the '70s wanted to jump over things, says Morrow. Bikes were leaner, frames more lightweight, and more gears were added—from typically 3 to 10 and even 12.



ON TWO WHEELS ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Details on vintage bikes reveal their era, as evidenced by the 1959 men's Schwinn (\$600) that features a teardrop reflector and four smaller ones on the back rack; pedals on early '50s bikes were block-shaped, while those of the late '50s to early '60s were bow-shaped. A c. 1960 girl's Schwinn (\$600) has a prominent horn tank and front rack. Then came the glittery banana seat in 1963; the rear "sissy bar" gave riders the green light to perform wheelies with ease (by leaning back on it) and to carry a friend, who could hold onto the bar for safety. Vintage Stingrays range in value from \$500 to \$10,000 (if in mint condition).

THE MOST SOUGHT-AFTER VINTAGE BIKES: 1950S CRUISERS, 1960S STINGRAYS



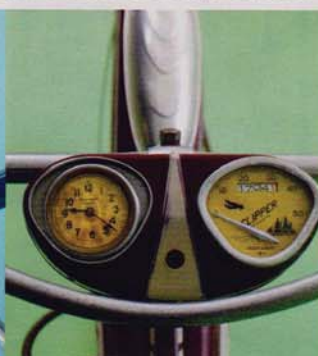
GLASS REFLECTORS
1951 J.C. Higgins-brand bike



HEAD BADGE
1938 Columbia model



SKIP-TOOTH SPROCKET
c. 1948 men's bike



SPEEDOMETER & CLOCK
1937 Columbia Westfield

STORAGE & BUYING Harv Trombley and Larry Busch, who own Memory Lane Classics, another source for vintage bikes, say that their hottest rollers are the five Schwinn models made from 1968 to 1973—the Orange Crate, Lemon Peeler, Apple Crate, Gray Ghost, and Cotton Picker. Trombley suggests storing bikes away from humidity and keeping tire pressure low, to 15 pounds, so that tires won't crack. **Memory Lane Classics:** 24516 Third St., Grand Rapids, Ohio 43522; (419) 832-3040; memorylane-classics.com. **Bicycle Heaven** (from which all bicycles shown were borrowed): 684½ Forest Ave., Pittsburgh; (412) 716-4956; e-mail: bikeheaven@verizon.net.

DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, there was a moratorium on American bicycle production; steel was needed for weaponry. Right after the war, bike production resumed, with most frames made by the Cleveland Welding Company.

BALLOON TIRES with white walls and a duck-tailed fender with mud guards were typical details of late-1940s bikes.

HORN TANKS were sounded with a button. The big-nosed springer forks were called Jimmy Durantes on Shelbys.

FRONT LIGHTS mounted on the fender were easily switched on. Rearview mirrors were optional.

