

Sounds of cycling

Every so often cycling surfaces in popular music. Dave Horton lists his top 10 bicycle-related tracks

There's more to cycling music than 'Daisy, Daisy' and Queen's 'Bicycle Races', with its rather inane refrain, 'I want to ride my bicycle, I want to ride my bike, I want to ride my bicycle, I want to ride it where I like'.

I'm unhappy that those two tracks remain the most famous cycling songs.

Here goes then, pop pickers: ten top alternative songs that include references to cycling in the lyrics.



10 Kraftwerk, 'Tour de France'
(from 'Tour de France Soundtracks', 2003, EMI)
"L'enfer du Nord, Paris-Roubaix, La Côte d'Azur et San Tropez, Les Alpes et Les Pyrénées, Dernière étape Champs-Élysées"

'Tour de France' was a 1983 single that eventually found its way onto a whole album of cycling tracks, released in 2003 to commemorate the Tour's centenary. Even though they first found fame with 'Autobahn', which was about motorway driving, Kraftwerk have always been huge fans of cycling. From the short opening 'Prologue', each track on Tour de France ('Aéro Dynamik', 'Elektro Kardiogramm') attempts to capture a different facet of the great race. But it's the sounds of laboured breathing and whirring chains, and the reciting of place-names legendary to the Tour, such as 'Galibier et Tourmalet', which makes the title track the most cyclist-friendly. See www.kraftwerk.com



9 Pink Floyd, 'Bike'
(from 'Piper at the Gates of Dawn', 1967, Columbia/EMI)

"I've got a bike, You can ride it if you like, It's got a basket, a bell that rings, And things to make it look good, I'd give it to you if I could, But I borrowed it"

Psychedelic, definitely.

Funny, perhaps. Whether, as a cycling song, Pink Floyd's 'Bike' is any

good is open to question. Certainly, if you're on your bike, it's all downhill from these opening lines. But it comes from one of the greatest and most successful rock bands ever, so it'd be churlish not to include it. 'Bike' forms the final track on Floyd's debut album, 1967's 'Piper at the Gates of Dawn', generally now regarded as one of the most important and influential rock records of all time. Hard to believe it's 40 years old. See www.pinkfloyd.com



8 The Mixtures, 'The Pushbike Song'
(1970, Polydor)
"Riding along on my pushbike, honey, When I noticed you Riding downtown in a hurry, honey, Down South Avenue"

One to fill the dance floor of any wedding reception! The song's protagonists start out on solo bicycles and finish on a tandem. Very romantic,

and quite possibly preferable to a rip-roaring chorus of 'Daisy, Daisy'! Australian band The Mixtures scored a big hit with this song in 1971. On one level, it's a throwaway pop song (which was covered by singing piglet puppet TV stars Pinky and Perky!) that's indebted to the dominant musical styles of the early 1970s (think T.Rex), but on another, its universal appeal means it's probably the best contender for displacing Queen's 'Bicycle Races' or 'Daisy, Daisy' as the cycling song for phone-on-hold music.

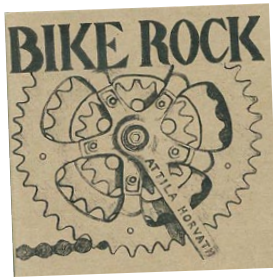


7 Red Hot Chili Peppers, 'The Bicycle Song'
(iTunes bonus track from 'By The Way', 2002, Warner Bros)

"How could I forget to mention, The bicycle is a good invention"

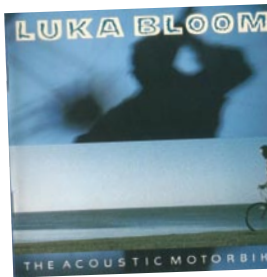
Yes, it's inane. Yes, although it's a bit more of a ballad, a bit less of a punk-funk-rap mélange, it sounds remarkably like all the band's other

songs. And the song's moment of velophilia appears a bit flippant, forming a minor part of a confused story that seems to be about a relationship gone wrong. But it is a genuine rock supergroup saying something positive about the bicycle, so it gets included here on that basis alone. One mention of bicycles at this level of listenership is worth the whole of a great, but much more obscure, cycling song.



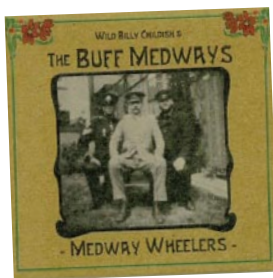
6 Attila Horvath, 'Ride On'
(from 'Bike Rock', 2006, self-release, available at www.bikerockmusic.com)
"Yes I get a little weary, gears turnin' wheels spinnin' round, But I feel like a king sometimes, albeit with a plastic crown, Freedom and speed and balance, if somebody asks me why, Deep down inside there's a feeling, it's one you can't quantify"

Forget Bob Dylan, Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen, here's cycling's very own rock legend (well, perhaps one day...). Attila Horvath is a singer songwriter, musician and cyclist. 'Ride On', an acoustic guitar-driven tune about the pleasures to be found out on the road, is the gentle, melodic last track of a whole album of songs based around his love of riding bikes, 'Bike Rock' is full of pro-cycling sentiment and, uniquely I think, there's even a tune for mountain bikers, 'Singletrack Seduction'.



5 Luka Bloom, 'The Acoustic Motorbike'
(from 'The Acoustic Motorbike', 1992, Reprise Records)
"I never thought I could have come this far, Through miles of mountains, valleys, streams This is the right stuff, filling my dreams So come on, get up on your bike Ah go on, get up on your bike"

Wonderfully titled, 'The Acoustic Motorbike' is taken from Bloom's 1992 album of the same name. The Irish folk-rock musician's songs are always warm, tender, humane and poetic, and these characteristics are epitomised on this track, which describes the pleasure Bloom finds in riding his bike through the Irish countryside. 'The Acoustic Motorbike' is a cycling song that will appeal to everyone. As Luka himself says, 'pedal on'. See www.lukabloom.com



4 Wild Billy Childish & the Buff Medways, 'Bike'
(from 'Medway Wheelers', 2005, Damaged Goods, DAMGOOD239CD)
"She joined the Medway Wheelers In June 1944 She grew up in Wigmore Wanting to see the big outdoors"

If it's some good, raucous garage punk you're after, look no further. England's answer to The White Stripes, 'Medway Wheelers' is the Buff Medways at their finest – up-front lyrics and a simple but powerful riff pedalling you along. It makes you yearn to be on a CTC ride back in cycling's 'golden age' – quiet lanes, warm beer and youth hostels, when Billy's mum was having fun with the Medway Wheelers. If you love The Who, the spirit and the localist sympathies of The Jam, and the punk rock attitude of The Buzzcocks, the Buff Medways will be right up your street. See www.damagedgoods.co.uk/buffmedways



3 Tom Waits, 'Broken Bicycles'
(from Tom Waits and Crystal Gayle, soundtrack to One from the Heart, 1982, CBS)
"Broken bicycles, Old busted chains, With rusted handle bars Out in the rain."

One for fans of off-beat jazz-blues-folk, this is a gorgeous song, written and sung by Waits in his typical, gravely-voiced delivery, accompanied only by his superb piano playing. It's taken from the soundtrack that Waits wrote for the Francis Ford Coppola film, 'One From the Heart'. It feels hugely appropriate that it's Waits, with his concern for the abandoned, who sings this paean (or is it lament?) to discarded old bicycles. This song could be the theme tune to every recycled bicycle project – or a splendid, slow, romantic last dance at your next cycling party.



2 David Rovics, 'The Bicycle Song'
(from David Rovics, 'Make It So', 1998, self-release)
"They're doing it in Eugene, Havana and Shanghai, Even folks in Boston-town are giving it a try,

Throwing out their gastanks, the clean air by their side, Get on that bicycle and ride"

Its tremendous spirit gets this song close to the top spot. Everyone will love singing along to its rousing chorus, 'Just get on that bicycle and ride, 'Neath the sunny skies or along the ocean side, Just ride, ride, ride, ride'. If you like political folk music (think Phil Ochs and Pete Seeger, Steve Earle and Billy Bragg), you'll love David Rovics. 'The Bicycle Song' is both personal and political – it'll make you feel a whole lot better to get out on your bike, and it's good for the planet too. The song is available for free download via his website, www.davidrovics.com



1 Tomorrow, 'My White Bicycle'
(from 'Tomorrow', 1968, Parlophone)
"Riding all around the street Four o'clock and they're all asleep I'm not tired and it's so late Moving fast everything looks great."

This song is a classic of late 1960s British psychedelia. Tomorrow were championed by the late, great John Peel. The band recorded the first ever Peel session – which included 'My White Bicycle' – on BBC Radio 1, on 21st September

1967. Yet while their contemporaries Pink Floyd and Soft Machine went on, respectively, to massive mainstream and underground success, Tomorrow, and with them their best song, were around only briefly, and have been largely forgotten. Their lead guitarist, Steve Howe, did achieve greater fame with the 1970s prog-rock band Yes. 'My White Bicycle' is a classic song, and with the recent high-profile launch of Velib in Paris, the time of Amsterdam's white bicycle scheme, which inspired the song, has finally come.