The velocipede, the first machine that allowed humans to travel faster, was born in Europe. From the feats in the Tour de France to popular means of transport among the working classes, the bicycle became an integral part of our culture. Largely replaced by the car and motorised two-wheelers from the 1950s on, the second half of the 20th century saw it mainly used for sport and leisure, and cycle production gradually came to be dominated by the United States, Japan and Taiwan. But since the anti-dumping measures taken in 1993, then in 2013, we have seen a revival of production in Europe.

The return of the bicycle Made in France

Alongside players like Decathlon, which sells products partially assembled in France, or Cycleurope, which is perpetuating the adventure of Peugeot and Gitane bikes, the bicycle and its uses are in the process of reinventing themselves in France thanks to a multitude of innovative firms and craft bicycle builders who are pioneering new, sustainable, high-performance solutions. To mention just a few: the Manufacture du Cycle in Machecoul is relaunching pioneering mountain-bike brand Sunn; in Auvergne, Cycles Victoire is reinventing the high-end custom-made bike; 1886 in Saint-Etienne offers elegant bikes; legendary frame builder Cyfac has set a precedent that is being taken up by the younger generation; Maison Tamboite, a Paris-based manufacturer, offers its own singular, classic but technological vision of the bike as a luxury object.

A new culture of mobility

Whether it is to get from A to B day-to-day, commute to work, surpass oneself through sporting exertion or explore new horizons on a cycling holiday, with or without electric pedal assist, bikes are very definitely centre stage again. Representing a new way to tame the city, they are an essential part of the solution for making a more environmentally-friendly society. Beyond the ecological and practical considerations, there is also an element of desirability in the mix, the aesthetic allure of the bike, an opportunity for personal expression: “You are what you pedal”.

In France, as in all the neighbouring countries, this culture of the bicycle is being reinvented thanks to the work of firms, engineers and designers who are innovating to produce bikes fit for today’s world and tomorrow’s.
Bike design, design bike

This autumn will see the opening of the exhibition *Bicyclette(s), faire des vélos*, an invitation for bicycle lovers and the general public to come and discover at the Cité du design a selection of over 70 bikes that are revolutionising how we think of cycling and offer a glimpse of what the bikes of the future will look like. More than just a collection of objects, the exhibition explores the innovative manufacturing processes that underpin this new industry. Among the selection of bicycles on show, don’t miss: a bike designed specially for the exhibition by the Nodesign agency to demonstrate Europe’s manufacturing capacity, which is fitted with a maximum of parts and materials made in France or in Europe, the original bikes made by Vosges-based manufacturer Moustache, the Velo’v urban bike system by JCDecaux in Lyon, custom bikes built by Cycles Victoire in Clermont-Ferrand, a Jean Prouvé bicycle and the fabulous Nevi titanium bikes...

Not forgetting the creations of designer Matthieu Chollet, founder of PechTregon, the most stunning of the French bike designer-builders. You’ll also be able to see Saint-Etienne’s own legends, the innovative Vitus bikes, the high-performance MecaCycle machines and the iconic pink Mercier Raymond Poulidor bike.

Curatorship and scenography

Designer and architect Jean-Louis Frechin heads the multi-award-winning Nodesign agency which specialises in design, innovation and technological creation. Pioneers in digital design, the agency is renowned for its expertise in new product design.

Marc Chassaubéné, President of the Cité du design

The Tour de France will be passing through Saint-Etienne on 15 and 16 July, which provides us with the ideal opportunity to announce this major new exhibition specially curated by Jean-Louis Frechin. It is a masterfully staged demonstration of the capacity of the French and European players in the cycle industry to relaunch and revive cycling thanks to the inventiveness of our designers, engineers and companies. Cycling is deeply rooted in our culture and this rediscovery of the bicycle in the 21st century is an invitation to embark on a fascinating exploration, which is sure to have us all hankering to get back into the saddle!

Jean-Louis Frechin, curator, and Loïc Le Guen, co-curator

These new “spads”, “bicous”, “bécanes” (just a sample of the many slang terms we have for our bikes in France)... these two-wheeled conveyances are a selection of the latest inventions that we wanted to share with visitors. They are a fantastic reminder that without creativity, innovation and production, no new products and usages are possible. This exhibition presents some remarkable bikes, but also and most importantly the projects of men and women who, thanks to their passion, have succeeded in rekindling the culture of the bicycle. And who better than Saint-Etienne, home of design, the bike and manufacturing industry to chronicle the rebirth of this industry in France and in Europe?