



READERS' LETTERS

Readers' letters are always welcome. The Editor does not necessarily agree with views expressed

Birth of ball-bearings

To the Editor of the TRADER

I HESITATED to write on this topic, feeling that others more informed could give details of the first application of ball-bearings to bicycles, but the letter of F.J. in a recent issue of the *Motor Cycle and Cycle Trader* prompts me to act in the interests of cycle history.

In 1914, the late Joseph Hughes, of Fentham Road, Birchfields, Birmingham, was entrusted by my late father with the task of purchasing "a good bicycle for the boy". During this amicable transaction, Mr. Hughes told me in some detail the story — well known to my father — of his early attempts and subsequent success of making and applying ball-bearing races to a bicycle. An employee (at the time of first manufacture) of Bown of Birmingham, Mr. Hughes expressed regret that he could not for this reason patent the idea, and added, *Bown's will always get the credit.*

He had a daughter who would be living today, and it should not be difficult to trace her through the Birmingham Post, a newspaper always helpful in such directions. Mr. Hughes had close links with members of Buffalo Bill Cody's Circus and, I believe, travelled Europe with it in his younger days; he was a fascinating man to talk to, and a keen engineer.

Can the Parkes family help in research? Mr. Hughes knew Sun well, and it was a Sun that he obtained for me.

Over to you, Birmingham!

I. FRAZER-ALLEN.

Norwood Green,
Middlesex.

More about ball-bearings

I WAS interested to read the letter on ball-bearings on page 194 of the *Trader* of December 6 last. Although this occurred approximately 70 years ago, and I was a schoolboy at the time and not specially interested, I remember my father talking about the law action, that was brought by William

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Bown, to enforce his claim to the rights of ball-bearings as applied to bicycles.

A syndicate was then formed to defend this action, which consisted of several well-known members of the cycle trade at that time, and my father was one of this syndicate, and I well remember his pleasure when the verdict was awarded to the syndicate, and, in fact, he was so pleased that he purchased a dress for each of the five ladies of our household. These dresses were always referred to afterwards by the ladies as Bown's dresses.

I regret that I cannot give any fuller particulars, but I feel sure that Mr. Bown then relinquished his claim.

At that time, my father was a manu-

facturer of steel balls of up to 2 in., and substantial quantities of the larger ones were supplied to the War Office, but, eventually, my father realised that he could not compete in price with the German manufacturers; at all events, so far as balls for bicycles were concerned, and he therefore placed large contracts with Fischer for these.

Fischer, however, failed to execute one of these contracts, and I personally made a visit to Fischer's works in Schweinfurt in the year 1897, in company with E. W.

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Bohle, who was then a partner in the firm of J. A. Phillips and Co.

C. B. HARRISON,
Director, J. Harrison
& Sons Ltd.,

Birmingham, 27.

Personal relationships in