

The Interstate in Fifty-Eight

by Roger Hitchings

Growing up in the country on a farm, we did not have sidewalks or even paved roads to ride on. So I did a lot of tricycle and bike riding on gravel and dirt. Here is a picture of me on my tricycle around 1953.



Once I outgrew the tricycle, my parents brought my brother and me two coaster bikes. Mine was a red Schwinn Spitfire with the tank. I rode it everywhere.

Having spent most of my time riding on gravel and dirt, one of my favorite things was getting to ride on smooth pavement. I liked the easy pedaling, the fast downhill, and the smooth ride so much better than the gravel and dirt of the local farm roads. As I became a little older, I would head out from the farm to find the few roads paved with gravel and road tar. They were smooth but in the summer heat, they could become a little squishy providing a smooth ride but still hard pedaling.

The interstate highway system was being built in 1958 thanks to President Eisenhower. A new interstate highway was under construction near our farm. As a young boy, interested in all things mechanical and involving the movement of massive amounts of dirt, I spent hours watching the construction.

Finally, the pavement was poured and the long expanse of smooth pavement was foremost in my mind. One summer day, two buddies, my brother, and I decided to go riding on the newly built but not yet open Interstate 29 near our farm and head south from St. Joseph, Missouri. It was a great adventure and the new pavement was so smooth and the long straight down hills were so fast. We raced as fast as we could pedal up the long but gradual hills. We zigzagged on the wide pavement. It was all fun.

We rode and rode for mile after mile without understanding the concept of this being our first out and back ride. I think we rode about 15 miles out. As the day was getting late, it finally dawned on us that we had to ride back home. This interstate was built in very rural areas so there was no possibility of finding a nearby phone plus we probably did not have any money. My Mom was very worried as it was

getting dark when we finally returned home. We were exhausted, thirsty, and hungry. We could not stop smiling.

At the time, we were between 8 and ten years old. We were raised as what would be called free-range kids by people today. We were not punished because my mother was just so happy we made it home safe.

I still remember this as one of my most favorite bike riding adventure.



**Model J-26
20-inch**