

Dressed for Transport: Men and Women on the Move

Constance Korosec

In Europe Haute Couture houses dictated fashion to women. Fashionable dress was transported to America and the Western Reserve by way of magazines first brought over from London. In America, Ohio women received their first fashion news publications from such magazines as *Godeys Lady's Book*, *Graham's Magazine*, *Peterson's Magazine* and *Harper's Bazar*. Not only could one receive the latest fashion news but advice on morals, womanly behavior, etiquette and directions for clothing construction.

By 1850 the nation was on the move. The population was expanding, moving west and opening up the Western Reserve. Immigrants arrived hoping to find a better life in the young land. The Industrial Revolution swept the country with new technology. As America grew, so did its wealth and fashion. The Victorian age gave rise to moneyed classes whose opulent spending earned the period the name the Gilded Age. The life style of the Rockefellers, Astors, Carnegies, Morgans, Goulds and Vanderbilts rivaled European royalty.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a woman's place was still in the home, however, events of this century would change the lifestyle and how women dressed for transport forever. With the Industrial Revolution came the ready-made clothing industries. In 1850 the sewing machine was invented. By the end of the century women's life styles began to change and so did fashion. Sports, particularly canoeing and bicycling was a national fad and 1 million bicycles were in use by 1893. Women bicycled to work and it was difficult with yards and yards of fabric trailing her. Dress for transport began to change quickly for women.

“Does She Like It?”

She talked so well on woman's rights
That all the fellows got scared and flew,
And now, alas, she has her way,
And paddles her own canoe.
Harper's Bazar, Saturday, September 22, 1894

The Latest Question

“Shall woman ride the bicycle?” is the problem of the hour.
For women must have problems-'tis a part of woman's dower.
“Shall woman smoke?” has gone quite out; “Shall woman vote?” also.
But “ Shall she bike?” is the point 'bout which just now she wants to know.

“She shall,” is the answer I would give; because I would not like
To see the woman I admire perched high upon a bike;
From what I know of woman's will, of what she does and don't,
I'm certain if man says she “shall,” she'll tell him that she won't!
Harper's Bazar, Saturday, September 22, 1894

Proper dress for bicycling begins with comfortable underwear, as corsets should never be worn under any circumstances. As stated in *Harper's Bazar, Saturday, September 22, 1894*, “...neither is it desirable to ride without any support for the body, especially if the rider is inclined to stoutness. An equivoise waist from which the bones have been removed is the best substitute for the corset, as then the muscles are allowed to have full play, and are not constricted in any way.” Underwear made by the Union garment workers is recommended for riding on the wheel. Turkish trousers will substitute for a petticoat, or tights will be suitable. It is not recommended to wear leggings as they interfere with the movement of the ankle; especially if one wishes to ride gracefully. Low shoes and black stockings are recommended for comfort. The skirt should flare from the hip and clear the ground about four inches and must be lined with silk to prevent clinging. According to *Harper's Bazar, Saturday, September 22, 1894*, “given a wheel properly adjusted for her height and weight and a few general directions in regard to dress, any woman with ordinary intelligence and taste may rest assured that in riding a cycle she is doing nothing which detracts from her dignity or personal appearance, but, on the contrary, she can, by exercising her good taste and never losing sight of

the principle of appropriateness, soon find herself in the full enjoyment of a pastime not only unsurpassed for its life-giving qualities, but which will prove itself to be a veritable Fountain of Beauty.”

Women’s dress for transport often followed the styles worn by men. In riding a horse a woman would ride side saddle and was permitted to wear trousers under her skirt. Vest and jacket fit tight against the bodice. Her dress was complete with a boater hat. Riding dress for a lady suggests she is in very excellent health and rides for good horsemanship rather than style.

The shirtwaist costume was born out of necessity for transport. The shirtwaist costume had a high neck, long sleeve bodice and a full skirt. This transport dress was the most popular for all carriage rides in the afternoon. The same shirtwaist transport dress was very popular for yachting as well.

The motor car first owned by the wealthy, changed woman’s transport dress by adding a coat to cover the costume. The coat was called a duster which kept the transport dress underneath covered and clean from road hazards. Many common road hazards included dirt, mud, and road dust. A large hat tied with yards of fabric protected the woman from flying insects and provided cover from the sun. Women first rode and then also found the thrill of operating a motor car as enjoyable as did men.

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