

## ***Example of an evaluated bicycle – determining of the brand, origin***

*The new owner of an incomplete high-wheel bicycle sent a photograph and the following question:*

Good day,

I recently brought a high-wheel bicycle from abroad. Unfortunately, I don't know which brand name it is and would like to learn something about this bicycle. I would love to find out where it was made and how it should be renovated. I am interested in obtaining all possible information available on this bicycle.

I am enclosing a photograph of the bicycle in the condition in which I bought it.

Looking forward to any information you could provide,

Yours truly

Janek Slánský – Chomutov



*As the bicycle was in Bohemia and it was possible to provisionally put it together and transport it to Prague, the whole situation was simpler than if only photographs were available. We studied the bicycle and made several more photographs.*





## 1. Current condition:

The bicycle is in quite good technical condition, with original nickel on the handlebars. The black color is not original – this is probably the remainder of an older renovation. The seat spring is original and the proper one; however, the socket, front part and leather cover are missing. The entire back wheel is a replica – newly made, unfortunately with unsuitable hubs from a child's bike.

## 2. Determination of the brand:

This bicycle was manufactured by the American manufacturer Overman Wheel Co., which produced bicycles of the "VICTOR" brand. According to the production number on the fin, 6251, and the type of individual components, we estimate that it was produced in 1888/89. High-wheel bicycles had their production number stamped on the right-hand side of the fin. This information can be found on earlier types, while the diameter of the front wheel in inches is given on younger models. The Victor high-wheel bicycle was characterized by two separate series of production numbers. One was for the regular series of bicycles and the other for Victor Junior children's machines. According to the database of the America researcher Carey Williams, the lowest known production number is 885, and the highest is 8224. As number 8224 is a Rational from 1892, we can also consider that this number corresponds approximately to the total number of bicycles manufactured. Production numbers between 119 and 1307 are known for the Junior series.



### 3. Brief history of the brand:

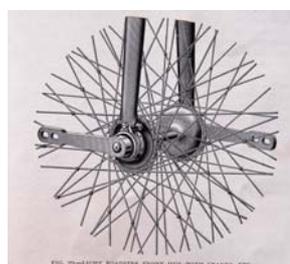
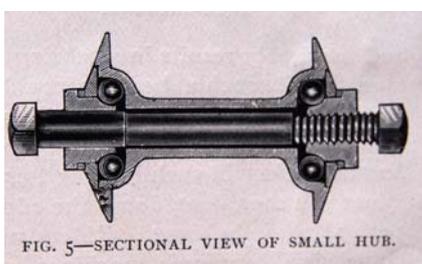
Up until 1882, all the series-produced tricycles in America came from England.

The opening of the new Overman Wheel Co. production factory in Chicopee Falls in Massachusetts was intended to change this. A. H. Overman (1850–1930) stood behind this venture; he was born in the city of Normal in the state of Illinois. Not long after he completed secondary school, he went to Chicago, where he began to work in the bicycle industry. Overman was originally an agent for a wholesale company. In 1880 he moved to western Massachusetts, where he spent the following 30 years and where he also established his only business in bicycles. The spring of 1883 was a key time for him; at this time, he manufactured and placed on the market his own and thus the first American tricycle under the name Victor Rotary. His company, Overman Wheel Co., first specialized in the production of tricycles, which competed successfully with high-wheel bicycles. During a single year they became very popular amongst everyday customers and also amongst competitors. Simultaneously, it is worth noting that riders on Victor bicycles won all the tricycle races in the U.S.A. in 1883. In fact, all thirteen world records (from 1 to 10 miles and 25, 20 and 100 miles) were won in the same year by amateur competitors on Victor tricycles.

Colonel A. Pope remained at the forefront of American cycling events at the beginning of the 1880's through his contributions to the development of cycling and the bicycle industry. When his patent rights for the Lalement patent expired at the end of 1883, the development of high-wheel bicycles began to expand in America. Pope could no longer block the production of high-wheel bicycles or collect licensing fees for use of the patent, which defined the bicycle in very general terms. He was forced to accept the fact that other manufacturers began to appear and gain a position on the market. Especially Gormully & Jeffery of Chicago and the Overman Wheel Company which, until that time, was unrestricted only in manufacturing tricycles. Now they could enjoy the blooming trade in high-wheel bicycles, which grew from the middle of the 1880's. Albert H. Overman, encouraged by success in the first few years, brought out the Victor Bicycle of his own design for the 1885 season. He was well aware that only a top-quality machine with global parameters could be successful. He sacrificed everything for this. He used the most modern technology, materials and experience gained in manufacturing tricycles. In addition, he sold them for introductory prices comparable with Pope's products. The Victor 52" cost USD 127.50, i.e. the same as a Columbia Expert with basic surface treatment. Let the customers decide for themselves without consideration for the price: Columbia or his Victor?

As a bonus, he added two technical improvements, supported by his own key license for the production of Bown Aeolus ball bearings. He also used hollow Warwick rims (this became one of 17 items in a prolonged court dispute in 1886 with Pope's lawyers about the use of the technology. It ended with an amicable settlement at enormous cost), which permitted deeper fitting of the tires and thus better stability in corners, transfer of force and suspension.

The construction of the seat was a fundamental feature – it was presented as the "Victor swing saddle". It had two advantages. It did not have a fixed metal support, but rather two springs which were attached to the frame separately – a smaller one in front and a larger one about 30 cm lower down. A sort of adjusting metal strip was fixed between them, very easily permitting adjustment of the hardness of the seat and thus the required comfort. This was also ensured by the lower large spring, connected to the rear part of the seat. Simultaneously, the upper part of the seat was practically lying on the frame, allowing the rider to ride a machine with a larger front wheel diameter than when using classical seat springs. The larger wheel meant a greater distance travelled for one turn of the pedals or a greater speed at the same pedaling rate. Overman attained the same effect as the constructors of racing specials. However, they installed a hard seat directly on the frame tube, while the Victor seat provided comfort.



#### 4. Classification of the individual types of Victor

A.H. Overman manufactured high-wheel bicycles for 7 years until they were finally replaced by low bicycles with a chain drive. The Victor high-wheel bicycles underwent development during this time. The basic characteristics in which the production differed in the individual years can be summarized in a short survey.

##### **1885 – Victor Bicycle:**

Two wedges fix the handlebars from the front, a fixed step, deep leather side pieces on the seat enabling lower sitting, oval side of the pedals, tangential spokes, the first type of bearings and front hub, complete black paint on the frame and fork, size from 48" to 58".

##### **1886 – Victor Bicycle (the same type was called Victor Roadster in 1887):**

The handlebars have a single socket fixed with a screw in front, the handlebars are less curved, the frame and fork are nickel-plated at the ends; a size of 60" was also supplied

##### **1887 – Victor Light Roadster:**

The fixing screw of the socket of the handlebars was moved from the front part of the head to the back, new handlebar shape with new type of ends and handles, the brake spoon had a simple and straighter shape, new type of bearings and front hub, cross sides of the pedals, smaller seat

##### **1888 – 1890 Victor Light Roadster:**

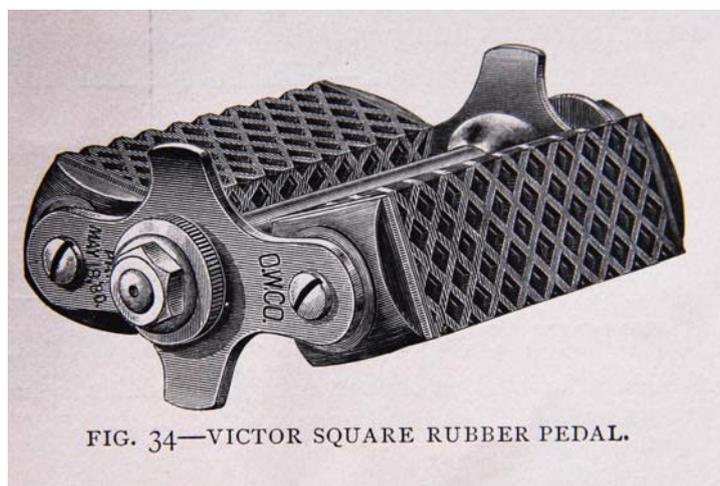
Practically no changes; only in 1890 the wheels were fitted with deeper rims and cranks of various lengths were available

##### **1891 – Victor Light Roadster Rational:**

Back wheel size of 22" or 24" according to the size of the machine, new shape of the frame adjusted for the larger back wheel, cushion tires with a diameter of 1 ½" in the front and 1 ¼" in the back.

##### **1892 – Victor Light Roadster Rational:**

New shape of the front and back forks, reversible brake with spiral spring.



**5. Copy of tables describing the distribution of differences in the individual types**  
 according to the book by the American historian G. Donald Adams – *Collecting & Restoring Antique Bicycles* – 1996

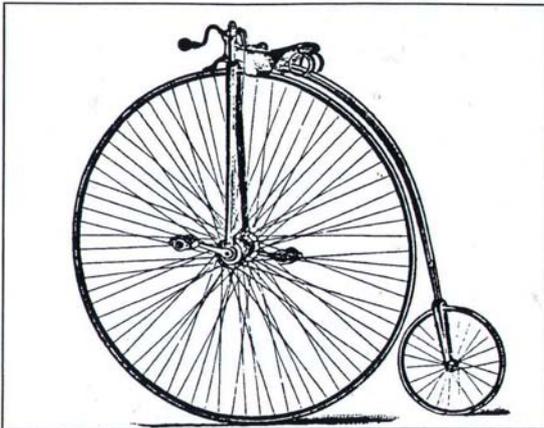


Fig. 4-38. 1885 Victor bicycle.

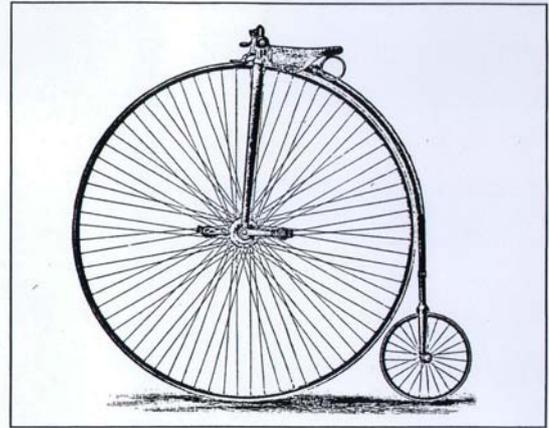


Fig. 4-39. 1886 Victor.

**VICTOR ORDINARY DATING GUIDE**

(based on catalogs and data compiled by Charles Wilson)

**1885 Victor Bicycle (Fig. 4-38)**

- Two bolts hold handlebar to head
- Pear shaped hollow grips
- Fixed mounting step
- Skirted saddle instead of pant guard
- Clip at front of saddle rather than pommel spring
- Oval plates on ends of pedals
- Tangential spokes with three crossings
- All backbones and forks painted black
- Domed nut for head adjustment
- Early bearing style
- Available 48" to 58"

**1886 Victor Bicycle (Fig. 4-39) (same bicycle in 1887 called Victor Roadster)**

- Less curve to handlebar
- Collar holds handlebar to head
- Grey rubber tires
- Solid black rubber pear grips
- Dust cover attached by screw
- Adjustable step

**1887 Victor Light Roadster (Fig. 4-40)**

- Handlebar curvature less pronounced, enters stem at angle
- Handlebar collar adjustable at rear
- Later type bearing and hub
- Spade handles on all models
- Conventional screw and hex nut head adjustment
- Cross shaped end plate on pedals

- Saddle pommel spring standard
- Pant guard replaces skirted saddle

**1888 and 1889 Victor Light Roadster**

- No change except long crank with 6 3/4" slot optional

**1890 Victor Light Roadster**

- Unchanged except for greater rim depth

**1891 Victor Light Roadster Rational**

- Rear wheel enlarged to 22" or 24" rims
- 1 1/2" front, 1 1/4" rear cushion tires

**1892 Rational**

- Square shouldered forks front and rear, full tubular rear fork, plunger actuated brake with a coil return spring

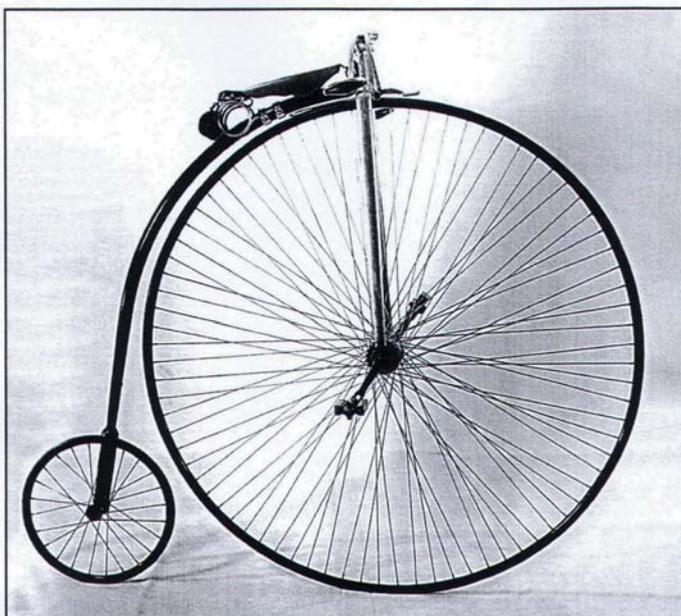
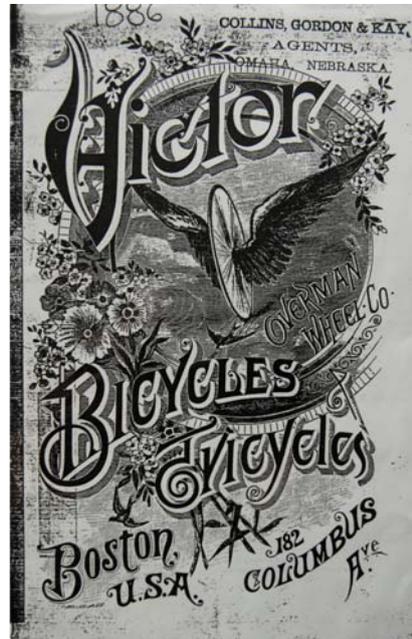


Fig. 4-40. 1887 Victor Light Roadster.

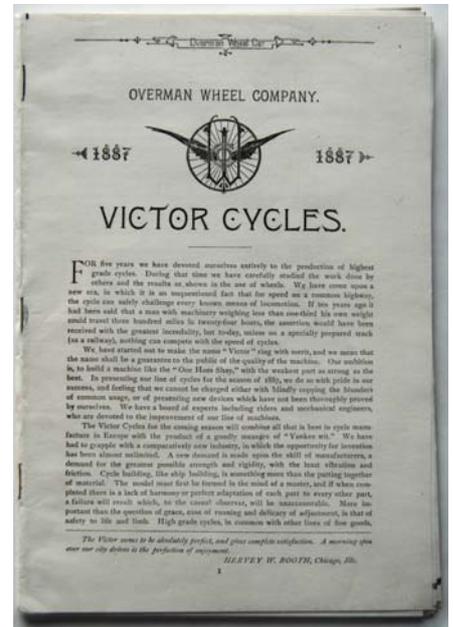
6. Copy of company catalogues from the period when the Overman Wheel Co. manufactured high-wheel bicycles.



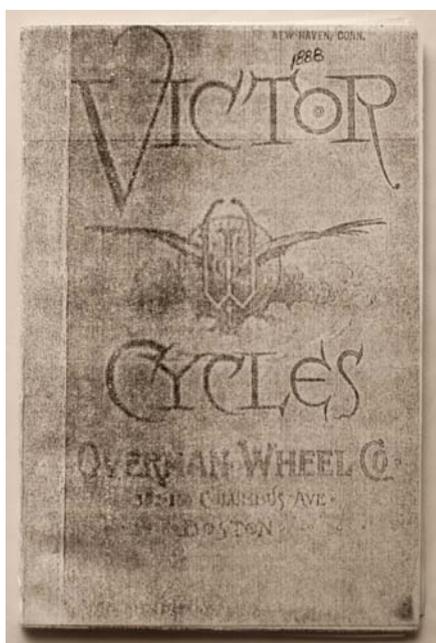
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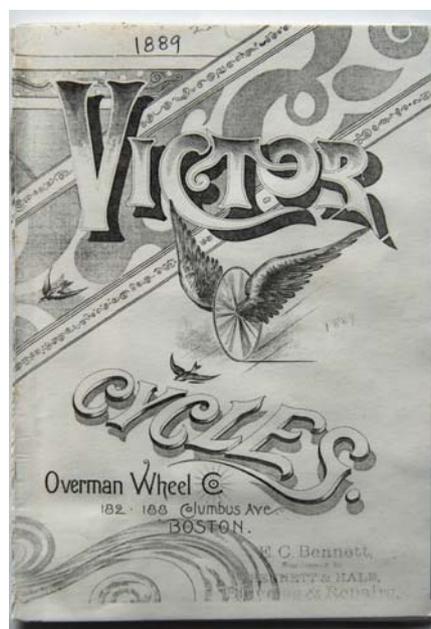
1886



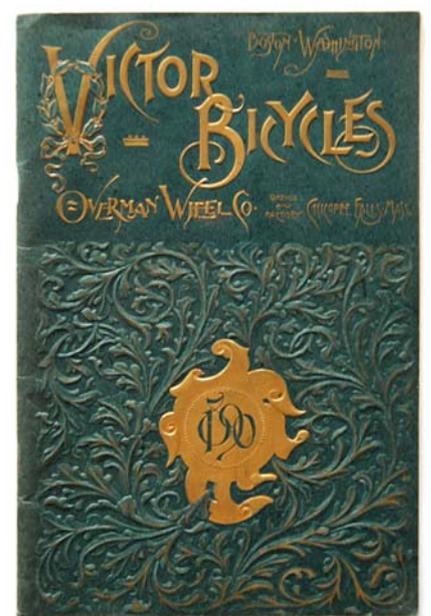
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1888



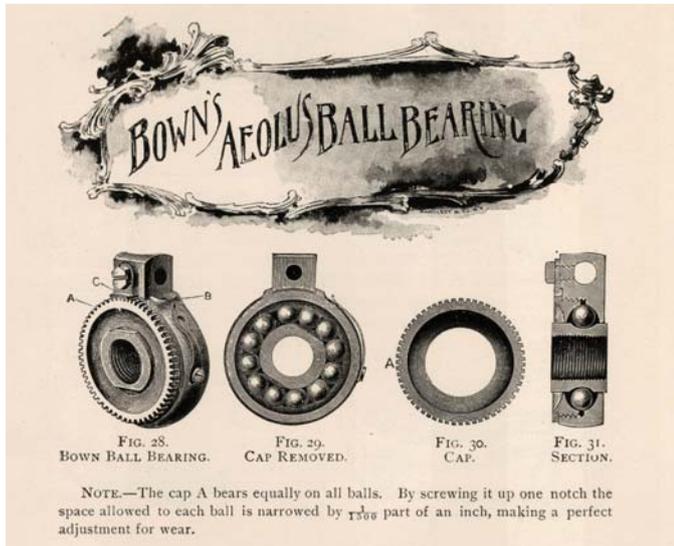
1889



1890

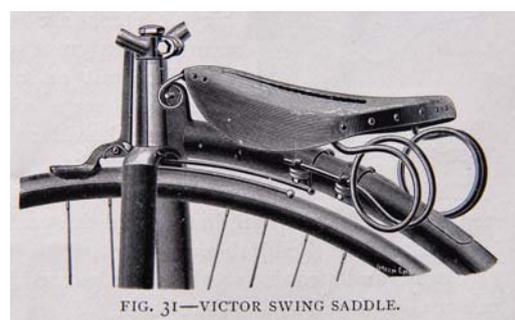
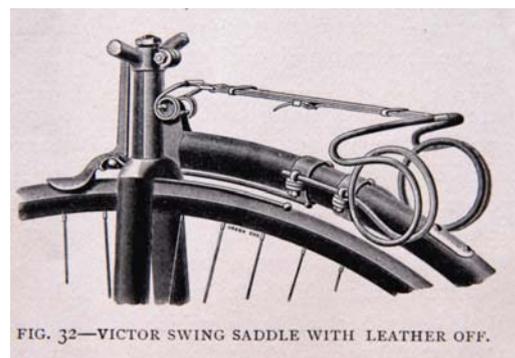
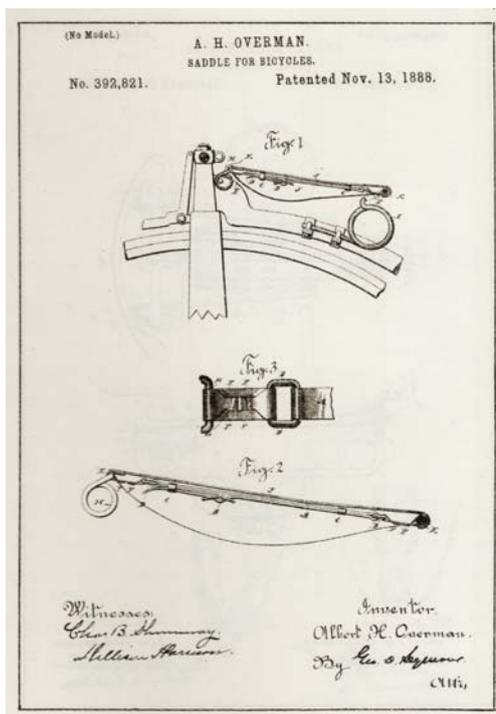
## 7. Bearings of the front hub

The Aeolus ball bearing was an important feature of the Overman design. It was first used in 1883 to fix the axle of the back wheel of the Victor Rotary tricycle. The fine thread on the bearing cups permitted very precise tuning. The outer bearing cup (in the pen-and-ink drawing from the company catalogue of 1889, designated as Fig. 30 – CAP) had 60 fine teeth around the edge so that the adjusted position could be fixed by a safety counterpart (Fig. 28 – C). The tuning was extremely accurate – turning the cup by a single tooth corresponded to adjusting the slackness by  $\frac{1}{1500}$  inch (0.017 mm). The bearings were manufactured under licence and designated Bown Aeolus Overman Wheel Co. Boston U.S.A.



## 8. Victor seat

The leather of the seat and the fixing system have been preserved in the original condition. The advantage of the design of the Victor seat consists in the easy fixing of the leather and thus the choice of varying hardness of the seat. Sports riders valued the low position of the seat on the frame and thus the possibility of riding a machine with a larger front wheel than would be possible for a machine with a classical seat spring. Sketch accompanying the Overman American patent of 13 November 1888, in which he improved his leather tightening system.



## 9. Photographs

An original period photograph can be included as a true rarity. Photograph of a Victor Light Roadster 1888/89. This was probably an important or successful sportsman, if the unusually large dimensions of the photograph for the time, 250 x 200 mm, are anything to go by.

Archive: Robert Štěrba



## 10. Victor Light Roadster 1888/89





## 11. Conclusion

Thanks to the information in our archive, it was possible to identify the bicycle with 100 percent certainty. The photographs and drawings in the catalogue provided the owner with sufficient information for producing the missing components. The expert report provides the owner with adequate information on the machine, its origin and the history of the brand.

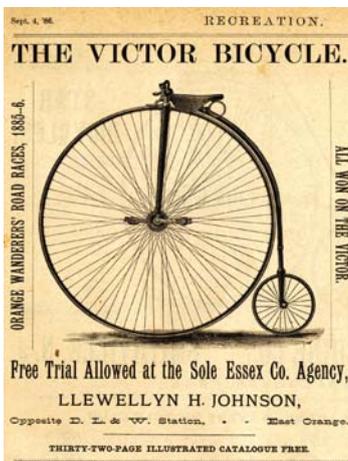
## 12. Suggested means of renovation

The machine is in very good technical condition and does not require any fundamental structural work. The renovation can be conceived so that the bicycle can be used for riding or, on the other hand, only for exhibition (for museum purposes).

In this case, we would recommend preservation of the original nickel plating, to nickel plate and professionally allow to “age” only the newly produced missing components. The paint should be renewed only in places where it is missing (do not paint the whole machine) and subsequently an attempt should be made to combine the two areas of renovation so that the original feeling of the machine is preserved (including scratches and signs of wear) and simultaneously so that it would be possible to occasionally ride the bicycle.

The result should be: An original American high-wheel bicycle with a slight patina. At first glance quality and working discernable from newly produced replicas of old high-wheel bicycles, which are increasingly appearing at meetings and gatherings. The ownership of an original machine that is also rideable is increasingly valuable and increases the owner’s healthy collecting self-confidence.

I would certainly not recommend complete renovation of a bicycle in this condition in the style of – new nickel (shiner than when the bicycle was new) and new shiny paint (without patina). The results would undoubtedly be the complete loss of the original feeling of the machine.



*A more detailed report on the renovation would be a separate part of an order for renovation. Where we were requested to determine the origin, these are only general instructions and our opinion.*

*The price of the expert report is based on the amount of information that the client requires and, understandably, on the other hand, on the amount of information that we are capable of providing.*

### **Price of identification of the bicycle and the expert report**

*The price of this report was CZK 6000 and, in this actual case, encompassed:*

- copies of 6 complete Victor catalogues (1885–1890)*
- a CD with approx. 30 high-quality photographs of a Victor Light Roadster prod. no. 6728 (the same type as the assessed bicycle)*
- a CD with all the other photographs and pictures in this example*
- printed text containing: identification of the brand and type, comparative tables, brief history and development of the company manufacturing the bicycle and a suggestion for renovation*