



Phantom mountainbike?

DESPITE ITS rich-red paint job, this gleaming thoroughbred monster was known to a generation of Americans as the Black Phantom.

Manufactured 36 years ago, this di-

tant ancestor of the mountainbike is now a valuable collector's item. Due mainly to the propagandist work of Californian collector Leon Dixon, Americans are being encouraged to re-evaluate and

lovingly preserve the more gross and outrageous heaps of twisted chrome that passed for bikes in the post-war era.

King among them was the Schwinn Black Phantom. Designed when bikes directly aped the gas-guzzling shark-finned efforts of the Detroit motor industry, the Phantom was a Cadillac among bikes—full of style, totally flash and at 76lbs so overweight that it was inevitably high on the personal energy consumption of its owners.

Nonetheless the Phantom quickly became the pride of the Schwinn stable and the definitive status symbol of a whole generation.

The Phantom series was eventually discontinued in 1959. After the lightweight revolution, antique hunters could pick one up for next to nothing. Many Phantoms were still in remarkably good condition. But then the Phantom was never in danger of being ridden to destruction.

That was to come later: in the late 70s, Californians stripped down the frames, fitted lightweight components and turned them into the forerunners of today's mountainbikes. For others, like Dixon, this is heresy. Childhood memories, they reckon, deserve better than being shattered on mountainsides.

BELOW: The 'petrol tank's' only purpose was to house the horn button and allow the designers to use even more chrome.



ABOVE: When Ignatius Schwinn emigrated from Germany he brought the prototype of the cantilever loop frame with him. His son Frank patented it in 1938 and the frame quickly became the hallmark of the Schwinn range.

