

Bike Bloke enjoying the ride of his life

By Merry Miller

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SINCE the dawn of time, man has wanted to fly.

We have watched the birds soar through the sky, and longed for wings of our own so we too could experience the incredible sense of freedom enjoyed by our feathered friends.

Well, it took a few thousand years, but man finally created the machine that would allow us to fly like the birds.

And no, it wasn't the plane. It was actually the bicycle.

Toowoomba's own "Bike Bloke" James Macdonald knows more than most people about the joy a two-wheeler can bring to us mere mortals.

"A bike is the closest we will ever get to flying," he said.

"It gives you the sense of freedom, the sense of flying through the air, the sheer fun.

"A bike serves you – it is nothing without a human. But if you give it a little, then it gives so much back. There is no better value than a bike."

Mr Macdonald is something of a legend in Toowoomba, sharing his house with around 200 bikes – "I'm not sure exactly how many I have, I keep losing count" – and a vast array of other eclectic items which are rare, unusual, or simply interesting.

He started collecting bikes a number of years ago, boosting his stock when he bought 90 from the Canberra Museum of Bicycles which was closing down.

"This museum had the biggest and oldest collection of bicycles in the world, and they all had to go," Mr Macdonald said.

"I went to local councillors, the Mayor, state and federal politicians asking them to help keep the collection together, but none were able to help.

"Go anywhere across Australia, and you will find car museums, truck museums, tractor museums, motor-bike museums – all these vehicles which came from the bicycle – but there was no funding available to keep this museum going.

"So I was lucky, I guess. I came across the Golden Hoard."

More bicycles have been bought

since then, some have been culled – but now Mr Macdonald thinks his collection gives a fair representation of the evolution of the "perfect machine".

He might not have every bike in the world that he would like (although in all likelihood he has the largest and widest variety of bikes in Australia) but he thinks he is on track to have a bike for each major change in the machine's development.

"My oldest bike is

from France and was made in 1869," Mr Macdonald said.

"But I even have a Dragster – those bikes did more to turn kids off riding bikes than anything else – a BMX bike, and a stunt bike, which are spectator bikes, not participatory bikes.

"I ride a lot of them too, but I can't name a favourite; that changes all the time."

Some of them, however, have enjoyed more time in the spotlight than others.

Fifty four of them were used in the Hollywood blockbuster Narnia movies, one had a starring role in the Empire Theatre's Wizard of Oz production, six appeared in the SBS

series "The Taking of Singapore", many were on display during the recent Tour of Toowoomba event, and Mr Macdonald himself featured on the television show Aussie Pickers.

But they must all be functional if they wish to remain living with their

collector.

Mr Macdonald is a common sight on Toowoomba streets, riding bikes old and new every day of the year to get to the shops, do his laundry, and just to have fun.

"I choose a different bike every day

– whichever one has its tyres pumped up and whichever one will best serve the purpose," he said.

"It's all about having fun, enjoying life and doing the simple things.

"That's what a bike can give you."



James Macdonald on one of his 200 bikes he has collected in recent years. Photo: NATHAN THOMAS.

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