

Selbach The Man

A brief history of the life of M.G.Selbach

By Peter Stray & Richard Collar (the grandson of Maurice Selbach).

Maurice Gaetan Selbach was born at his parents home, 4 Rue Laugier in the 17th district of Paris, at 8.25pm on 12th August 1889. His father, Oscar Carl Selbach, is listed as an engineer and his mother, Marguerite Kossakowska, no profession, married. Their ages are recorded as 25 and 17 years respectively. Oscar Carl Selbach was an American citizen of German descent, and was born in the state of Ohio. His father, Emil (born Prussia, 1841) had emigrated to the U.S. and his mother, Caroline (born Ohio, 1844), was also of German emigrant stock.



On the open road, c. 1910

Below is listed some of his successes:

- Fastest in 8 x 50 miles Time Trials.
- Fastest in 5 x 100 mile T/T.
- 1st. in 5 x 12 hour T/T.
- 1st. in 3 x 24 hour T/T
- Competition record in a 24 hour.
- Best on record in 100 miles Tandem - 4hrs. 27mins. 50secs. (1920).
- London to Bath and Back - 11hrs. 55mins. 30secs. (1921).
- Land's End to London - 17hrs. 47mins. (1923).
- 24 hour Unpaced - 337.5 miles (1922)
- Successfully completed the Paris-Roubaix Road Race (1923).



1902. A young Maurice with his family.

Little is known of the young life of Maurice, the next earliest reference we can find is in the 1901 England and Wales Census, when Oscar C Selbach is listed as living at 21 Southampton Row, Holborn, District of Finsbury, London. His occupation is listed as Managing Director, Autocar Supplier. Besides Oscar, two other persons are listed, the first, Louise E Selbach, wife, aged 28 years of American origin, but born in Bengal, India, and Maurice G Selbach, aged 11 years, of American citizenship.

Maurice's cycle racing career is believed to have started in 1908/09. His connection with the Unity C.C. is well known and he was to spend a total of 14 years at the sport.



England Expects 1914/18.

During the First World War Maurice served in the London (Cyclist) O.C.A., but was home at some stage during 1917 when he married Adele Nabarro (born 23th. February 1890 in Amsterdam, Holland) at Edmonton, North London. (This marriage was dissolved at some point during the next 10 years and Adele was to marry twice more).

In 1924 Maurice G Selbach first appears as a cycle maker at 337, Kennington Road, London, SE11. The business must have expanded rapidly because by 1926 the business directory shows two addresses: 312 and 337 Kennington Road. 1927 must have been an important year for Maurice as two major events took place. Firstly he married Florence Rose Whiting at St. George's House Square, London, and secondly on the 23rd December he became a naturalised U.K. citizen, having previously been a citizen of the U.S.A. (Another eye-catching connection with the U.S. was the large Buick Princess Sports motorcar he drove!!). By 1934 the world depression seems to have made a difference to the business as it is now only listed at 316 Kennington Road. At this time the Selbachs were living at 10, Cavendish Gardens, Trauville Road, Clapham SW4.



The present day premises which was the Kennington Road shop.

1935 - Death of M G Selbach.

On Thursday 26th September 1935 Maurice G Selbach left Leander Road, Thornton Heath on one of his own cycles for the relatively short journey to his business premises in Kennington Road SE11. He was not due to go to work on this day but, being the conscientious sort, wanted to make sure all was ok. At around 10.30, just under 4 miles into his journey, he made a manoeuvre past a truck and whilst returning to the near side of the road encountered some particularly badly laid tram rails that caused him to fall from the cycle under the wheel of the truck. He died en route to hospital. His funeral was attended by over 150 well-known cyclists and representatives of cycle manufacturing firms together with family and friends. The service was held at Streatham Park Cemetery and the body of Maurice Selbach was laid

to rest. At the inquest the coroner recorded accidental death but the cycling press felt the poor state of installation and repair of the tram lines had played a big part in the accident. In addition to the normal hazards these tram lines presented, at the point where Maurice had fallen the rails were 2- 3 inches below the road surface. Mrs Selbach had a special headstone made which showed a photograph of Maurice edged in gold. Below the picture was a sculpted bicycle leaning against a mile stone. Above this were the words "He died as he lived. A cyclist". In order to preserve it, the headstone was moved in 2004 to the National Cycle Museum in Powys where it is now on display.



Gravestone of Maurice Selbach.

By 1938 the business is listed as Selbach F.R. (Mrs.), cycle maker, 316 Kennington Road. In 1939 the move was made to Gillingham Street, Victoria, but closure followed during the same year.



The present day premises which was the Gillingham Street shop.

Foot Note: Maurice Selbach evolved many ideas relating to modern lightweight bicycle design, but as far as we are aware only patented one. A patent specification exists for "Improvements relating to Tyre Valves" no.263,992 - Accepted January 13th. 1927.