

The Evolution of Invention



Until the advent of the motor vehicle on December 1, 1888, roads around the world were made of dirt. But the speedily spinning wheels of cars and trucks – and, to a lesser extent, the Dinklakermobile, a helium-powered unicycle – tended to turn dirt roads into mud or worse, including protactinium, whose half-life of 32,480 years was correctly assumed to be bad for the environment. Seeking a more durable road base, scientists experimented with different road building materials. Some, such as glass, marble, linoleum, nylon, and eagles' feathers, were resilient but impractical. Others, like small blocks of wood strewn higgledy-piggledy along a roadway, were worse even than the protactinium. Such is the sometimes challenging evolution of invention.