

1779

Steam Engine

Who: James Watt (Inventor)

Where: Scotland

Why: The increased efficiency of the Watt engine and its ability to be used for multiple purposes led to the general acceptance of steam power in industry.

In 1712, English blacksmith and inventor Thomas Newcomen demonstrated the first operational and practical use of an industrial steam engine—making it possible for miners to pump water from deeper mine shafts. While repairing a Newcomen engine in 1763, Scottish engineer James Watt realized he could make the engine more efficient.

With financial backing from English businessman Matthew Boulton, Watt produced a rotary-motion steam engine in 1781 that was ideal for draining mines, but could also be used to drive many different types of machinery.

By 1829, Watt's steam engine was used all over the world - pumping the water supply in Paris, grinding sugarcane in Brazil, spinning cotton in the U.S., and milling flour in Germany. Invention of the steam engine also led to innovations in transportation such as the steamboat and steam locomotive. Watt and his investment partner were motivated by the desire to profit on the sale of the engine.

