

## **A45-12 Indian OHV Hillclimber**

It was around 1980 when I noticed an advert in the AMCA (Antique Motorcycle Club of America) For Sale section for a twenties Hillclimber at a price of \$5,000.00. I called the seller by the name of Carlton Palmer, who lived somewhere near New York, and asked him all the relevant information on the bike (which was very little) as I knew SFA about Hillclimbers. However, it sounded like the sort of bike I would like to collect as I had a few Indian road models but nothing like this. I asked him to send the photos he had of the bike and to give me ten days to make up my mind and get back to him. As soon as they arrived, I immediately made that decision, called him then sent the money.

It took around six weeks or so before the bike arrived at the docks. It was in the days when the Sydney customs sheds were situated at the northeast end of Darling Harbour before it was replaced with Kings Wharf and the bars and restaurants.

I remember the time well, as all the customs staff gathered around looking at the weird looking motorcycle inside the wooden crate. After paying the relevant duty, I eagerly drove home to look at my new possession and was absolutely over the moon when I discovered an old, promotional poster inside the crate with Orrie Steel belting up a hill on the newly advertised 45 inch OHV Indian Scout. It was a little bonus that wasn't in the deal.

It found its place in my home in a very short time, taking pride of place upstairs in the poolroom. This bike had such unique and different parts, like a one-speed gearbox and a big fat clutch with extra plates to give it the quick torque when gunned towards the hill climb. Not forgetting the OHV motor, which the Indian Motorcycle Company only made few of. All other motors from the twenties were side valves.

It stayed there for some years and was a great talking piece for those who appreciated what the bike represented, as so many people were unaware that these hill climb events ever occurred.

While looking at it one day, I decided to sell it, so I put the word around and an Indian collector came up from Melbourne with the amount I was asking but decided against the purchase as the engine numbers A45 -? A number between 1 and 31 had been buffed off for some unknown reason. (As far as I can make out, 26 Hillclimbers were made and an extra 5 dry sump motors were produced for flat track racing, as I once owned the left side crankcase of A45-31. Historically, these motors were used in Australia for speedway and flat track racing.) In a way, I was relieved that the bike didn't sell but my nose was slightly out of joint as my gem wasn't quite what it was supposed to have been.

Curiosity got the better of me so I set out to find out what it was that I had. I called a mate of mine, Mick Atkins, and told him what I was trying to do. He said that another friend of ours, Les Forgacs, knew where to get chemical analyses of the metal, which would expose the original numbers. This was done and the engine cases revealed A61-63. Not the numbers I wanted to see.

Some months earlier, I had gone to the US to visit Rick Abbott, a well known collector and restorer to take him the patterns Mick and I owned for the OHV Indian 101 cylinder conversions. While I was there, Rick's dad, now deceased, drove me to Dale Walksler's Museum, Wheels Through Time, at Mt Vernon to see the A61-1 Indian Hillclimber he once owned. What a fantastic machine. Still in its original condition, sitting proudly in the middle of the museum. It was the first 61 inch ever built. I got to know Dale on that visit, even though he was bobbing around everywhere taking calls and trying to organize to move the museum to North Carolina.

I realized that if I wanted my Hillclimber to be anything worthwhile, I would have to find an OHV engine so decided to make a few calls around the United States. Strangely enough, when I called Dale Walksler to discuss another issue, he happened to ask me if there was anyone down under looking for an OHV engine. He told me his price and I said I would get back to him.

I immediately called Mick and he assured me of its value and offered me the same money for the A61-38 inch motor I had. I accepted and bought the OHV motor from Dale. While it was in transit, I asked Mick to come over to get the Hillclimber, take it to his place and get the 61 inch motor out of it as I was short of time at that point of my life.

A short time after the motor arrived, Mick called and asked me what the engine number was. I asked why and he said that when he took the 61-inch motor out of the frame, he noticed that the four engine plates were stamped with the number 12. At that time I had never taken much notice, as I was only interested in it having a number and couldn't recall which one it was. After hearing this, I quickly walked out to my shed to look at the number stamped on the motor and there it was... A45-12. I nearly jumped over the moon with excitement. The motor must have been separated from the frame many years before, for whatever reason, and it is now back where it belongs.

I have just completed having the transmission changed back to the hanging position as they were turned upside down in the fifties to do off road scrambling. The tank was also incorrect and has now been replaced with the right one, just as it was when it came out of the factory. While we were cleaning up the frame before the change back, we also found the number 12 stamped on the frame at the top of the steering head. The bike's original unique seat logo of the Phoenix had to be copied and reproduced, as it was a Messenger logo I have never seen before. It is a very English looking type seat but made of leather throughout. These features make this particular machine so unique and rare. I then contacted my old mate, Frank Craw who makes nearly all the leather seats in the country and gave him challenge of making it.

The bike is now restored to its former glory. The engine has been overhauled and all but the rear engine plates renickeled.

I feel really privileged to have owned such a rare machine. Coming from an engineering background, and being involved in restoration myself, I recognize the exceptional engineering talent of Mick Atkins, assisted by his son Luke and Les Forgacs who undertook the very intricate work of its restoration in his Kenthurst workshop.

Owned by John MacDonald