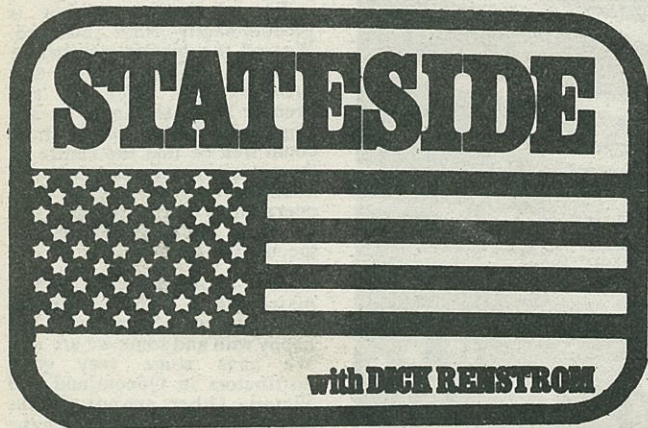


Far left; The 1909 Indian single still had pedals for starting and on hills. The single speed, chain drive thumper had the old inlet-over-exhaust type of engine.

Left; The 1918 Powerplus was, perhaps, the best motorcycle in the world then, Lights were optional, but the spring frame and side-valve engine were advanced for their day.

Below; This 1939 "Four" is now a prized collectors' item but was, in reality, a bad design. The 1260cc in-line four has Indian's plunger frame that was introduced in 1939.



The historic INDIANS

There have been many great pioneers of the motorcycle, but for pure technical perfection it would be hard to beat the early Indian.

Produced in Springfield, Massachusetts by a team of American and European designers and businessmen, the Indians of the 1900 to 1925 era could rightfully be claimed to have been the very best in the world then.

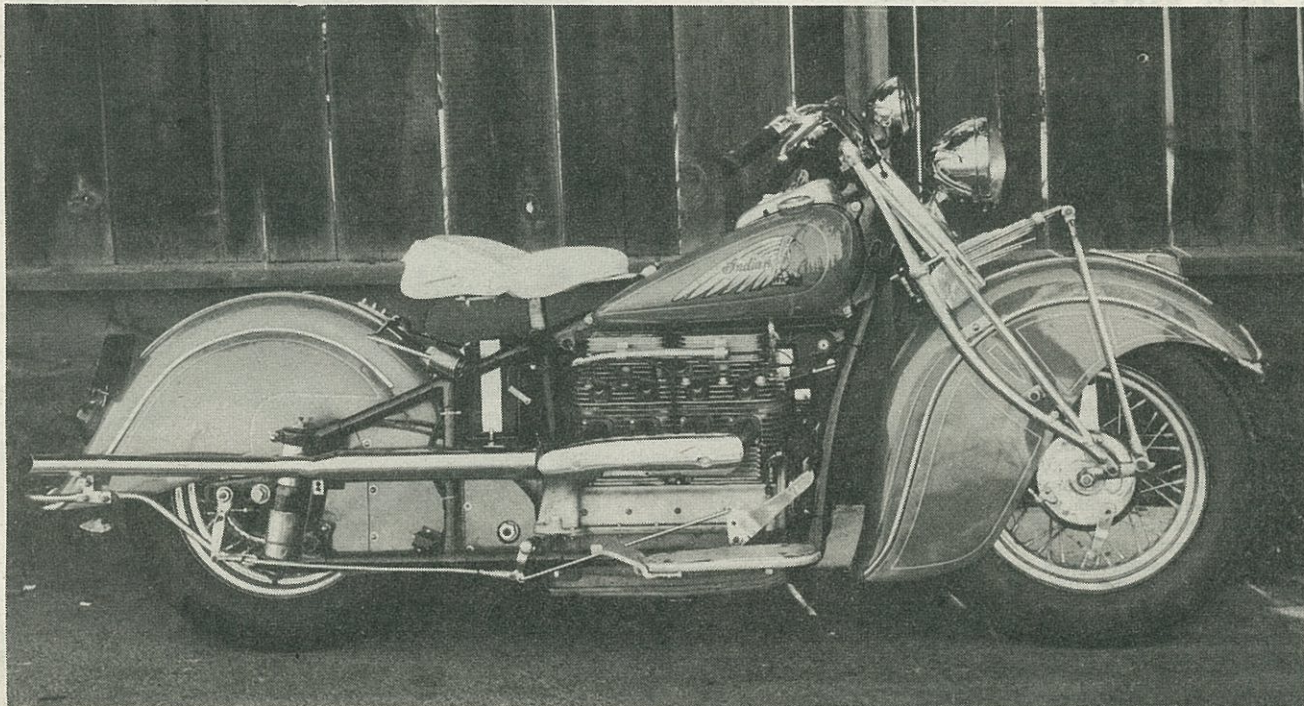
The story of this fascinating company began in 1900 when George Hendee of Springfield began production of his Indian bicycle. The bicycle acquired a motor in 1901 after Hendee had watched a motorcycle pace the start of a bicycle race. The motorbike was the work of a Swedish emigrant named Oscar Hedstrom, who subsequently proved to be one of the very great designers in those early days.

The 1 1/4 HP single had chain drive, which was a rarity in that era of belt drives, and it also became known for its reliability. In 1901 a total of three bikes were produced, which rose to 143 in 1902, 377 in 1903, and then to 546 in 1904. These early Indians sold like hotcakes and it was to be 18 years before the tiny factory would again catch up with the orders for its motorbike.

With Hedstrom doing the engineering work it was soon possible for Indian to produce its own engines, which occurred in 1907. In 1905 the Indian acquired a front fork with a coil spring for suspension, and in that year the factory also produced its first twin. In 1906 the fuel tank was moved from the rear fender to the centre of the frame, and in 1908 a reliable magneto replaced the troublesome battery setup. Other "firsts" included a mechanical oil pump (Harley-Davidson did not drop the hand pump until 1936!), electric lighting, an electric starter, and a twist-grip throttle control.

By 1910 the Hendee Manufacturing Company had over 1000 dealers scattered all over the world. One year later the reputation was enhanced even more with a stunning 1-2-3-win in the Isle of Man TT, which was due to the new two-speed gearbox with chain drive in an era when the belt drive bikes tried to match the Indian in climbing Mona's steep hills.

In 1910 the dark blue paint scheme was changed to the now famous bright red with gold striping, which was so pretty that today most restorers of pre-1910



Indians paint their bike in the brighter color.

In 1913 Indian's 2000 dealers suspension was provided by a swinging arm that worked on a pair of leaf springs. The new springer provided a much smoother ride over the rough roads, but surprisingly this visionary idea was dropped after 1920. Indian sold 35,000 springers in 1913, and then Hedstrom decided to retire after this burst of genius.

In 1915 the first 3-speed Indian was exported to dealers all over the world, and this beast had a rugged 1000cc engine, a kick starter, a leaf spring front fork, and a tough multi-disc clutch.

Oscar Hedstrom was coaxed out of retirement in 1916 to the joy of Indian fans around the world. Late that year Oscar's new brainchild appeared called the "Powerplus". Many historians now consider this model to be the very best motorcycle produced during the pre-World War I days.

The Powerplus had exceptionally advanced specifications that included a 1000cc side-valve engine that was reliable and oil tight, the spring frame, a good 3-speed box with disc clutch, a generator and lights, a dry sump lubrication system, an internal expanding rear brake, and a Bosch magneto. The gear ratios were 10.0, 6.0, and 4.0 to 1, and the

bike would run 70 MPH (112.7 kmh) at around 3000 rpm.

Then came the war and 41,000 olive drab painted twins were produced for the Army. Hedstrom retired again in 1919, and Englishman Charles Franklin was brought in to head up the design work. Franklin's first bike was the 596cc "Scout" . . . a side-valve twin with a rigid frame and leaf-spring front fork. Not so visionary as the Powerplus, the new breed of Indians gained a reputation for their speed and durability.

After the Scout came a new 1000cc "Chief", followed by an even larger 1250cc version. These beasts had great stamina for long distance riding, and their huge size was a trend that American machines were to take for the following 30 years.

In 1928 Franklin produced his famous 750cc Scout 101, which was later improved and called the Sport Scout. These trusty 45s were produced until 1940, and they continued to win our big flat track races well into the 1950s. Many collectors consider these 3-speed twins to be the best that Indian every produced.

During the early days Indian raced with great passion and won many races and set many speed records with its works bikes. Championships and even the 1923 Belgian GP were won all over the world, and Indian even became the first to clock 100 MPH (160.9 kmh) in the F.I.M. record book when Eugene Walker did 103.95 MPH (167.2 kmh) in 1920 at Daytona Beach.

In 1926 Johnny Seymour stunned the world with his 132.0 MPH (212.4 kmh) speed at Daytona on his 1000cc works OHV twin, followed by a 115.64 MPH (176 kmh) record with a 500cc single. These speeds were well beyond anything being clocked in Europe then.

Indian had a special racing department in the early days that produced some exotic specials such as the board track bike featured some time back in this paper. With such clockings as the 110.67 MPH (178 kmh) lap record in 1922 and the 100.36 MPH (161.3 kmh) speed for 100 miles (160.9 kmh) in 1925, the Indians would be almost as fast as our best speeds here today.

world. From 1926 to 1930 Indian produced a series of 350cc OHV dirt track racers, and in 1928 and 1929 they won every national championship race in the face of stiff opposition. These were followed by a small number of the 1000cc OHV models, one of which set the all-time board track lap record of 120.3 MPH (193.5 kmh) in 1928.

Next came the era of Indian "fours". Indian began its four-cylinder chapter by buying out the old Ace company in 1927.

The design was soon changed over to a pure Indian, and these smooth 1260cc in-line jobs were then produced until 1941. Today they are a great classic, but in reality the four was a poor design that gave lots of expensive trouble.

After World War II Indian came back with the massive 74 inch V-twin, which was rather advanced with its plunger rear suspension that had been added in 1939. In 1950 a telescopic front fork was used and the

engine was punched out to 80 inches. With 44 HP the 570 pound Chief would do 95 MPH (153 kmh), but a hotter "Bonneville" model was then produced that would run over 100 MPH on its 50 HP.

European bikes began entering America in goodly numbers after the war and were gaining in popularity due to their advanced OHV and OHC engines, light weight, and nimble handling. Indian fell in line with new 216cc single and 433cc twin cylinder models along British lines, but some bad engineering and workmanship earned them nothing but a rotten reputation. With a plunger rear suspension, telescopic front fork, OHV vertical twin engine, and a 4-speed box, the twins were an attractive bike.

The new Indians weighed only 240 pounds in the rigid frame single and 275 pounds (124.8 kg) for the plunger frame twin, but the twin rose to 300 pounds (136.2 kg) in 1950 when the two bikes were pushed up to 250 and 500cc. A hotter model called the Warrior TT was also produced, but few wins were ever racked up.

Indian thus staggered into the 1950s facing the foreign invasion with unreliable lightweights and its now obsolete side-valve Chief. With one foot in the financial grave the factory continued until 1953, but then the years of bad management dating back to the 1930s finally killed it off. The famous doors at the Springfield "wigwam" were closed forever. An era thus came to an end.

Today the Indians are highly treasured by collectors — especially the early models that were so far ahead of their time. The huge Chiefs are also prized collectors' items, well representing that era of huge highway chargers that were so regal travelling down the highways of America.

By failing to modernize its products, Indian went the way of many others so that today only the history books remain to remind us of the greatness that once was theirs to hold.

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