

Iron Indian Riders Association



Powering Out of the Past - Cruising Into the Future

Smouldering Embers On the road



Club member Phillip White has been gallivanting around the world and managed to stop in at the recent Sturgis launch for Indian. Yep, he even got his scone-grabbers on a new Chiefan, while his mate grabbed

a Vintage for the run. Overall he loves some aspects, but has some reservations. See the full feature from page 3 of this extra large edition of *Smouldering Embers*.

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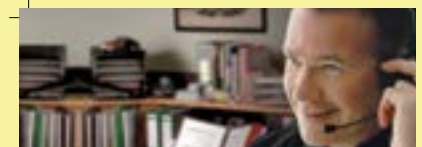
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Rally reminder



Just another quick reminder that the next Crazy Horse Rally, based in sunny Corryong, is looming near, so you might want to get your entry in to Peter Kime ASAP.

Young Gary Hogg, our man on the spot in Corryong, says he's already working on the rides and promises some pearlys.

Also, memberships are now overdue and this is particularly important for anyone who has a club permit (club reg) through the IIRA. Again, make Mr Kime happy and send him the appropriate loot.

See ironindian.com.au for contacts and details.

The big 300

Congratulations primarily to webmaster Phil Pilgrim, and thanks to web hosts Monti Media, our site at ironindian.com.au has hit the 300,000 visit mark.

It could be in your favourites list as it's updated frequently and always has the latest gossip about Indian and the club.



Events

Sept 1: Monthly ride in Melb
 Sept 7: Monthly breakfast run, Indian store Melb.
 Sept 24: general meeting, Melb.
 Sept 28-29: Crazy Horse Rally.
 Sept: Gypsie Tour along the Murray ([see this link](#)).
 There is also talk of a new rally at Swan Hill in Oct--Nov. See website.



IronIndian.com.au

member-only password for September:

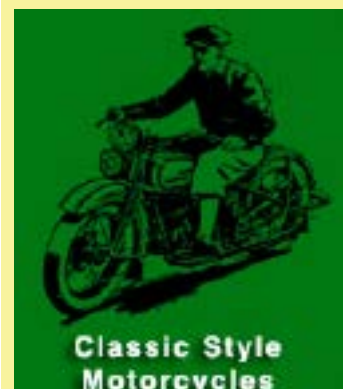
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Indian ride - first impressions

by Phillip White
August 2013



Greetings all Indian buffs. IIRA members will have read on our website of my attendance at the Sturgis South Dakota launch of the new Polaris Indian range.

My old mate Stan from Denver had kindly lent me his FLH Harley for a four-day trip through the Rockies with Dorothy and friends Rob and Marilyn on their 1300 Star Cruiser. When Stan learned that I was going to Sturgis, he insisted I keep using the Hog since he did not have time to make the annual pilgrimage this year.

Stan bought this bike second-hand as a one-owner machine, unfortunately that one owner was the Colorado Highway patrol so the bike has about a million miles on it. At the time of purchase he was a serving fireman, and was eligible to attend an auction open to police and fire personnel only.

I won't say what he paid for the scooter but, trust me, it wasn't much. The bikes have all the radio gear ripped out with the aerial co-axes left dangling, but retain all the siren and pursuit light switch gear which is coloured bright red. The bikes are sold without tyres as the police skins have special thickened side walls to allow the Officer to maintain control in the event that the tyres have stopped a bullet or two, but they are not approved for civilian use.

Our man on the spot - young Mr White.

The other odd thing is an pneumatically-sprung riders seat. This complicated device has controls that take up half the right saddlebag with air bottle, gauges and plumbing. Stan fitted a pillion seat and had the bike repainted a tasteful metal flake red with silver flames. It may seem a little odd for me to be rabbiting on about Harleys in an Indian club mag, but this bike delivered the goods as a tourer and gave me a base to compare the new Polaris bike against.

Rob also wanted to attend the launch and we set out from Denver around 7.00am. Sturgis is a day's ride and the road is packed with bikes. This particular route is not an Interstate but a two lane blacktop. The speed limit is 65mph, but apparently the patrol won't bother you at high seventies – a lot of bikes were doing more than that.

The blue and red lights came on behind me just as I slowed from 95mph. The officer was a nice young fellow but of course his on board computers could not make head nor tail of my Australian licence especially as Vic Licences do not say car and motorcycle specifically. He talked with head office from his car for an extraordinary

amount of time but in the end asked me if I would be prepared to pay a \$90 fine? You bet. In Oz I would be walking for a year.

We rolled into Sturgis around four-ish. I had been lucky enough to pre-book a motel room for a very reasonable \$350 per night, paid in advance and non refundable, thank you and #\$\$%^ you! It was a run-down joint just off the freeway exit and right next to a 100-foot tall cross complete with a huge flashing glare panel informing the world that "SATAN SUCKS" every few seconds. The manageress gave us our keys with the admonition, "No parking yer damn bikes on the porch and don't use our towels for cleaning." This was obviously going to be first class all the way.

Every person and business in town has just a few weeks to make their dosh for the year so, every time you turn around, someone has their hand in your pocket. After dropping our kit we saddled up and headed for main street. I presume most club members have not attended Bike Week in these parts. You have to do it just once to believe it.

Sturgis is a small town of less than seven thousand people that swells to over 600,000 visitors during Bike Week. They were projecting that a third of a million bikes would be in town. This is an inconceivable number of machines. I walked the 10 blocks or so from our motel to main street one morning and it took 20 minutes. On my bike it took 35 minutes.

Lane splitting is highly illegal everywhere in America, except California which has just introduced it. If you do it, not only will car and truck drivers yell at you but so will other bikers. I know this from previous trips to the land of the free so I just sat there blatting away in a hellish mix of Harleys and RVs.

Lining the roads is every girl in town over twelve packed into teensy bikinis and advertising bikini bike washes with signs like "We like 'em, big and dirty". The townspeople not only rent out their homes, they rent out their front and back yards for camping as well. Though how anyone could sleep with literally thousands of bikes per hour every hour of the day and night going past 10 feet from your head is beyond me.

The experience in town was total sensory overload. There was a light sprinkling of sports bikes and Jap cruisers but 98 per cent of the bikes were Harleys, and of those nearly all were some species of Electra Glide. Sporties, Soft Tails and Dynas were hardly visible. The unmistakable bat wing fairings clogged the streets. I did not think there were that many Glides on planet Earth!

There were plenty of extreme custom machines parading at walking pace but they had mostly been trailered in.

I spent a pleasant day just experiencing the vibe, checking out the vendor displays (including America's only legal moonshine distillery, possibly a mistake) and gawking. I like the way that Americans will dress any way they damn well please. There were hordes of guys that appeared to be well the wrong side of seventy on their Glides with their equally elderly wives done up to the nines in everything from leather chaps right up to see through mesh outfits.

I spent quite a bit of time hanging around the Indian display and talking to the engineers. They had their display engine running and I thought it had a noticeable transmission whine, and was assured that this engine was only



a preproduction proto type and the problem had been solved. More on this later. I was very impressed with the sophistication of the cut away engine on display.

The heads feature conical progressive valve springs, slim valve stems with sophisticated porting and the combustion chamber shape is based on current NasCar technology. Interestingly, the only reason the engine is a three-cam design is because the styling department insisted that the pushrod tubes had to be parallel to mimic the original side-valve set up.

The crankshaft could not be clearly seen but apparently is a massive one piece forging. There is a light ring gear evident which triggers the ignition sensor. The cases split vertically at the engine with one case half having the gearbox shell which is a horizontal component, like the Japanese have used for ever. Interestingly the gear shafts all run on plain shell bearings which share the same pressurised oil feed as the crank and big ends. Engine, transmission and primary drive all share the same oil so there is but a single oil and filter change every 5000 miles – neat.

The primary drive is by meshed gear, just like the original Scout. On the original Scouts Indian was forced to abandon this otherwise excellent set up because of the noise. The joke was that Police Scouts did not need sirens because of the transmission howl. The timing side is kept in order by a chain and sprocket set up which has a sophisticated self-adjusting ratchet mechanism for constant and correct chain tension. This should avoid all the problems that Harley's Twin Cams have suffered in this area. All in all it is a stunning engine. It is beautifully compact and proportioned just like the original post-war Chief and genuinely looks like the true descendent of our beloved Springfield bikes.

As mentioned on the website, I attended the unveiling that night but now let's fast forward to next morning and a Chevy dealership a mile or so out of town where test rides were on offer. There was a partially stripped Chief parked in the registration tent. The frame is a thing of beauty, with the compact engine forming a stressed member. The rear suspension is by what appears to be a forged swing arm controlled under the seat by a near-vertical monoshock. This set up is bang up to date and should offer comfort and handling way beyond any of the Harley platforms.

There were around sixty new bikes lined up in columns of twenty, when you registered you got a bracelet with a time on it. I was in the second batch for a 9.15 am departure. The ride was only around 15 to 20 minutes but it did take in some curves and freeway riding. As soon as the

briefing was over you got to grab whichever of the twenty bikes you could get to first. I sprinted to the new Chieftain and Rob scored a Chief Vintage with screen and bags.

RIDE IMPRESSIONS

Firstly a couple of caveats. On such a short acquaintance it is not possible to provide an exhaustive analysis of a new design, I would have needed at least a day. Secondly, some of the faults I found with the bike I rode may well be specific to that particular machine (although with modern production techniques that seems unlikely). Nonetheless, this was what I found.

When lifting the bike off its side stand it felt noticeably lighter than the H-D equivalent, which is a good thing. The ignition is keyless and a prod on the starter had the mill spinning instantly. The exhaust is very quiet and the engine very smooth so it's all a bit anti-climactic. It certainly does not feel like 111 cubic inches.

The weight is carried very low and Indian staffers had praised the new bike's low speed stability. This might well be so, but the fuel injection at walking pace was useless. The off and on of the electronic injector nozzles made low speed trickling difficult and annoying. I have experienced this before back in the day when Harley released its first injected bikes, which were fitted with the next to useless Marelli system. Walking around the transport trucks I noticed a couple of bikes with their seats off and lap top computers plugged into the wiring harnesses – is this an indication of a systemic problem?

Problem number two appeared as soon as I tried to heel-shift up to second gear, there is no rear lever, you have to hook the shifter up with your toe. This is patently absurd on a bike with footboards and a touring orientation. A heel lever is not even offered as an accessory at the time of writing. What were those Polaris engineers thinking?

Problem three started to impinge on my consciousness almost immediately, There is a constant whine coming from the primary drive. This is copying the original Springfield design a little too closely. I knocked the bike into neutral and coasted to be sure and the screeching went up and down with engine revs. My mate Rob on the Vintage experienced no such noise, so was it the bike I was riding or common to this particular model? Time will tell.

Next there is the box itself. It has a very clunky change. There is no excuse for this in this day and age. Even H-D on its upscale CVO bikes uses a Baker 6-speed which shifts like a knife through hot butter. Back to the drawing Board lads.

Problem four announced itself as soon as the speed picked up. The handlebar-mounted fairing is very flat. As such its drag co-efficient has to be questioned. It has an electric screen but I could not find any position that gave even remotely still air. On a Glide I can ride with my visor up and just wearing sunglasses and be in a bubble of relatively still air. More wind tunnel time required I reckon.

Once settled on the freeway I was able to assess the riding position. I did not like it. Back to Glides again I am afraid. When you ride an old Brit bike, you are experiencing a seating position based on the 19th century British Army Cavalry Manual which is ergonomically correct for a relatively low speed bike. Harley solved the problem of a longer frame by reversing the triple tree to place the fork legs behind the steering head. Thus bringing the forks



and therefore the bars up close to the rider. The rider's triangle of seat, bars and footboards allows an upright seating position very suitable for long distance riding. On the Chieftain the bars have to come back a long way to reach the rider and this gives an odd tiller-like effect to the low speed steering. I felt slightly stretched out on the Indian and felt I would get a backache within a short space of time. A longer ride could well prove me wrong on this one, but I am flagging the issue.

Returning to base I attempted to initiate a discussion about what I had found. I was astonished to find that the very sales oriented staffers could not seem to comprehend how anyone could have any criticisms of their wonderful new bike and there really was no interested or qualified person to talk to.

On the plus side the engine is fabulous. It goes from strangled kitten to fire breathing monster with a twist of the throttle and is characterful with it. The designers have done a great job of virtually eliminating induction roar under large throttle openings. The relatively short stroke engine feels like it would rev out much more than a Harley Twin Cam. The engine pumps out a claimed 119ft/lbs of torque, which is huge and more than Harley's 110 cubic inch CVO bikes. However the Indian engineers would not quote a horse power rating on the power-plant.

The chassis feels like it would stick to the road come what may and the suspension is very supple and compliant. The whole bike feels like there is a lot of fun to be had. As an aside, the Chieftain does not correspond precisely to either the street Glide or the 'one with the lot' Ultra. It is priced much cheaper than the Ultra but has no top box or leg shields, though I suspect Indian will be pleased to sell these items to Chieftain purchasers.

Comparing notes at the end of the ride, with Rob, he reported that he really liked the Vintage and the only gripe he had was that the various chrome bits on top of the bike reflected into the screen. An easy fix I would think. And, by the way, I sat on the Vintage and of course it felt even lighter than the Chieftain and I wish I had ridden that model. I suspect I would have liked it.

Now readers may think I am being too picky about my very brief experience of the new top of the line Indian tourer but consider this: the Gilroy and Kings Mountain bikes were not particularly good motorcycles but they

cut a fine figure and their owners liked the road presence they projected. They did not have to be great bikes because they were aimed at a small market segment that was prepared to pay a lot for the Indian name. I think that the total production of both the Gilroy and Kings Mountain bikes collectively number well under 20,000 units – hardly big time.

Polaris, by its own admission, is going after that huge slice of the touring/cruising market that is pretty much owned by the Motor Company. This is a very, very, tough nut to crack. This market segment is littered with designs that never quite made it. In the Sturgis Motorcycle museum there are a number of Excelsior/Henderson motorcycles. The four cylinder versions of these fine pioneer bikes are the ancestors of the Indian Four and highly prized collector bikes today. There is also a brand new Henderson in a crate.

Back in the Nineties the Hanlon brothers raised \$90 million from investors in a doomed attempt to resurrect the brand. They built their first revenue-producing bike in January 1999 and filed for bankruptcy less than a year later. So after spending these many millions of dollars two things became apparent: 1. The new bike was crap and, 2, There are no Henderson enthusiasts left outside of collector land, so the branding had lost its relevance.

Now the Indian Brand is incredibly strong, so no problem there, but consider this: the vast majority of potential purchasers only know Indian as a really cool and historic brand. They know zilch about, and could not care less anyway, regarding the realities of owning, riding and maintaining the original bikes. Nor will they have the unswerving loyalty to the brand that Indian enthusiasts have. These modern riders expect to jump on a bike that is more prestigious than a Harley, very keenly priced, and which rides and performs better in every respect than the Motor Company's products.

In my humble opinion, the new Chieftain can't quite cut the mustard in its present form. It is a shame, because in many ways the Chieftain is a superior bike to the equivalent Harley tourers were it were not for these fixable rough edges. I sent an email to Indian outlining my concerns and I was pleased to receive a reply from Mr Peter Harvey, the manager of Indian Motorcycles Australia. With his permission his letter is attached and readers may draw their own conclusions, but in my opinion it contains no comment or response on these technical issues.

POST SCRIPT:

My wife Dorothy and I have spent a pleasant few weeks in the southern states of America including riding the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Tail of the Dragon in Tennessee. This morning (27 August) we set sail for Washington DC and, whilst passing through Charlotte, North Carolina, I noticed an Indian Dealership just off the freeway.

I decided to drop in to show Dorothy the new Indians. She thought they looked great, but here is the kicker: whilst talking to the sales staff concerning my criticisms of the Chieftain, they told me that the Polaris engineers originally had a finish date on the new bikes of December 2013, however the marketing people insisted that the release had to be in early August in Sturgis. Bingo! That would explain the puzzlingly unfinished state of the bike I rode.

They also told me that the Polaris is working on the heel-change issue and will offer it as an extra. I sure hope



they don't, because that would just scream "cheap". On the plus side I sat on a Chieftain they had in stock which was fitted with an accessory rider back rest that positioned me in what I believe is the correct riding position, so another problem gone.

As for the rest of the bugs, they should all be fixable but I do question the wisdom of releasing these bikes without the vital refining touches. This is the third serious attempt at relaunching the famous Indian brand. I don't think the market place will allow a fourth, so fingers crossed.

PETER HARVEY'S RESPONSE

I trust you enjoyed Sturgis and appreciate the time taken to express your opinion.

As I am sure you are aware, this latest Indian is one of the most researched, tested and ridden motorcycles in today's market. Our engineers in my opinion are the best in the world, full stop.

I have also ridden all of the bikes and whilst probably biased, also have many years and miles under my belt on many types and brands of motorcycles and think this is one of the best-sorted bikes straight from the crate that I have ever had the privilege of riding.

It is not just me. Many of the most respected motorcycle journalists in the world have now ridden these bikes (Alan Cathcart from the UK, Cyril Hughes – USA, and Doc Robinson – Aus, to name a few) and all have come away with reviews that are overwhelmingly, and I mean really overwhelmingly, positive. If you have not seen these reviews I encourage you to do so.

Of course not all of us agree and you don't seem to see it the same way - so be it, we know we can't please every single rider but it seems the majority are more than happy with the outcome of a ride.

If you are interested, I invite you to have another ride on production motorcycles here in Australia when they are available which should be late Oct or early Nov. Please contact me directly and I will arrange it.

Again, thanks for your support and taking the time to contact us.

