

IS BIGGER BETTER?

ROAD TEST: KINGS MOUNTAIN 105 INCH "BOMBER"

Well its time to sample what those Good Ole, Boys down in North Carolina have cooked up with their new and possibly improved range of Chiefs. For those who are new to the ever-changing Indian story here is a potted history. Back in the Nineties a consortium spent Beaucoup Bucks obtaining full rights to the famous "Indian" trademark. Part of the court settlement required manufacture of a bike within two years. This necessitated the first models to be based mechanically on after market Harley components. It is understood that the aftermarket for Harley is bigger than the entire Australian car manufacturing industry so there is a huge range of bits to choose from. Those first bikes carry a lot of baggage [in the historical sense] and generally were received poorly by the buying public and road testers. Was this bad rap deserved? We will find out as Club member Noel Thornby has purchased a 1999 "Indian Spirit" and has generously offered it for test so watch this space.

In 2002 The Indian Motorcycle Company launched their own model. The frame layout was a new design but still looks like a bigger version of a Soft Tail Harley but let us remember that Harley were not the first to use pivoting frame rear suspension. The Draper spring frame as used by Brough Superior comes to mind, as does the Vincent HRD and in modern time the Yamaha V Twins. So H.D were not the first and they sure wont be the last to adopt this layout. The transmission was 100% hog however but with a Rev-Tec transmission. These Gilroy Chiefs as they are generally called only lasted a few years however as the financial rug was pulled from under the company at in early 2004. A venture capital company called Stellican who also own the rights to the famous boat company called Chris-Craft acquired the manufacturing and trademark rights. The new facility is based in Charlotte N.C. The revised model line up was released in 2008 and consisted of one basic platform with various types of styling and degree of fit out commensurate with price

There are a total of six models in the range starting with the non-skirted fender Classic right up to the full dress Chief Vintage

Pricing has proved to be an issue particularly in light of the financial turmoil that has gripped the world, particularly America. There have been several price reductions in an attempt to clear stock. Club

President John Smith has scored himself an Indian "Bomber" Which he had air freighted to Oz and this machine is the subject of this article.

The Bomber is a great looking bike. There is an air of a premium build quality to this machine that the earlier Gilroy's cant quite match. The engine looks a little more Indian dedicated with a remodeled Timing cover keying in to the Indian them and distancing the "Power Plus" mill a little further away from its Harley evolution origins. The engine has been bored out to 105 inches and now sports Marrelli port fuel injection. This bike is still the basic Gilroy design and John reckons the 02 and 03 accessories will fit these new models so eBay fanatics should be able to save a buck on what are to my mind, somewhat overpriced dress up bits. The base colour is a somewhat military looking light green with satin black headlight, wheels and trim. The retro artwork on the tank is hand painted with owner's choice of chick. In Johns case its a brunette, just like the lass he was chatting up on the Sitting Bull ride [see Events Gallery for photo] As always the leather work is first rate in a contrasting dark tan. Though it was noted that the saddlebag lids were starting to crease, more support here is needed. The whole bike exudes a slightly raffish, devil may care demeanor that promises big fun even if you're just going for a blast to the local chipper. I have a soft spot for the Military "Bobber" look as for years I putted around on a 344 With an 80 inch donk, big fun and fast with such a light chassis however I digress. The ergonomics are a step up from the earlier Gilroy's. The stylish but uncomfortable bow shaped bars usual to these machines has been replaced in this example with much more user friendly "sports" bars giving a much more conventional and ergonomically correct rider stance.

Thumbing the starter produced a very rapid fire up and the engine settled to a precise computer controlled idle. The exhaust note is subdued but beefy. I don't at all mind this as noisy pipes get on your wick after a few klm's. The muffler is has a big volumetric capacity which is what you need to produce the ponies and it is doubtful that there would be a significant power gain in noisier pipes. As many Harley owners have discovered small, loud mufflers don't add a thing to performance.

The very first good vibe is snicking the beastie into gear, gone is that Peter Built inspired crunch from the Rev-Tec tranny on the Gilroy. The Baker 6 speed is a dream, with perfect ratios and a knife through butter shift. The next impression is of a much-improved feel to the whole plot. The Charlottesville crew have certainly put the gloss on what is, lets face it, a pretty primitive set up by today's standards.

The bike imparts a general feeling of competency and good production engineering. The next major improvement is in the

handling department. This bike steers beautifully. Laying it over and gassing it in bends produces no unwanted wiggles throttle on, or of, counter steering or weight shift this is one fuss free handler. I was puzzled by the quantum leap in feel over the Gilroy's and John informed me that back in sunny California the bikes were welded up in the factory without proper Jigging and therefore there are good and bad chassis out there John imports Gilroy's and he insists that his US sources supply him known "goodies" The Carolinian bikes by contrast have frames manufactured in Italy to space shuttle tolerance by a firm called Verlicchie, who also make the frames for a little known brand called Ducati, enough said.

The vibration monster is still with us unfortunately. The solid mounted engine seems harmonically tuned for around 100 Kms per hour cruising, go much past this and one is rewarded with an increasingly violent vibrate in the left foot rest. Once again, the bike is better than the Gilroy in this matter and you would have no real problem touring on this bike; just don't expect to cover ground at much above our speed limits. But for what is sold as a premium product this surely has to be the end of the line for this design.

The next big deal is the brakes. These triple Brembo's are from another planet, readers may care to revisit an earlier article on the website titled "Gilroy Shoot out" Where it was noted that the single front disc none the less really could not be up-rated without major expense to improve the inadequate brake. These new models are quite simply the best brakes I have experienced on a large bike. This is a purely subjective view. As someone who spent most of the last 45 riding years in a world without brakes in any meaningful sense, I find a lot of modern bikes over braked. The M109 Suzuki mega cruiser I rode recently has brakes lifted of their top sports bike extremely savage with no real feel. The 1150 BMW, s boxer twins have ABS and the example I rode was ridiculously sensitive for real world riding. So there are certainly more sophisticated sets ups than on this Chief but nothing that feels so controllable and reassuring for a dedicated cruiser as this set up.

Oddly enough I was expecting big things from the up rated engine but it failed to deliver. The carbureted Gilroy is a rougher lump but imparts a gutsier long stroke feel. The engine on the test bike did everything very well and very unobtrusively but did not impart a sense of presence though it probably does put out more neddies and higher torque. Once again however I would suggest that what impresses on a blat around the block can be tedious in the long term. If the fuel

delivery system were all there was to it you would not trade a Gilroy in just for the engine on the Kings Mountain bike.

If you were in the market for a new Indian there is no question that the Kings Mountain product is far superior to the earlier Gilroy machine. It is probable that their arrival may soften the price of the earlier bikes. You should not have to pay top wack for a Kings Mountain machine, as there are deals out there in Cyberspace. It is understood that an Australian importer has been appointed so if a buyer wants to avoid the hassle of dealing overseas plus the six-month wait to take delivery I am sure there will be well-heeled local buyers.

STOP PRESS!

As this article was being edited word has arrived that Polaris Corporation, Manufacturer of the "Victory" Motorcycle Has Purchased the Indian Motorcycle Company From Stellican Corporation.

This puts a very large, determined and well heeled cat amongst the pigeons. There are a host of questions and ramifications attached to this event, all of them beyond the scope of this article.

Stand by for the follow up titled **“Not Just a T-shirt Company”**

Safe riding to all Indian Enthusiasts, wherever you are

Cheers

Phillip White