

## Two wheels » Indian cruisers

# Icon puts on the warpaint

Indian, the famed US brand, has a battle plan for Australia

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JUST as Lexus is the luxury brand of Toyota, so will Indian be the luxury brand of Victory motorcycles. But fans of the 110-year-old iconic American brand might have a bit of a wait for the heavyweight cruisers to hit Australia.

Major ATV maker Polaris, from Minneapolis, Minnesota, bought the Indian brand last year to supplement its 14-year-old motorcycle brand Victory, which launched three years ago in Australia.

Victory Australia spokesman Peter Harvey says "only the best dealers will be Indian dealers".

"Indian will be like our Lexus, our premium brand," he says.

Polaris is making Indian Chief Classic, Dark Horse and Vintage models at a new plant a couple of hundred kilometres south of Minneapolis, just over the border in Spirit Lake, Iowa.

The elaborate chrome and leather-tassled bikes are being built by hand at a rate of just 15 a week, all of which are for the American market.

Polaris global sales vice-president Mike Dougherty says Australia may not get Indians until new models are out, in three years.

However, Harvey is keener for Australia to get them as soon as next year but is cautious about rushing into it.

"We are the guardian of a traditional brand and we

only get one go at it," he says.

Dougherty believes the Indian brand will add to sales, rather than take sales off Victory.

"Victory is about performance and Indian is a cruiser and very traditional. Cannibalism between the two brands will be minimal," he says.

"Our research shows 75 per cent of Harley-Davidson owners would buy an Indian."

Polaris is enjoying huge growth in Australia, up 42 per cent last year to be a close third in ATV sales behind Honda and Yamaha.

Dougherty says Australia and NZ account for 13 per cent of his international business and represent the company's largest volume subsidiary in the world.

"Australia will grow

tenfold in next five years," he says. "The bike business is one of the key drivers."

Surpassing Polaris's ATV sales, up 13 per cent in Australia last year, the new Victory motorcycle brand grew 50 per cent.

Victory owns dealerships in Sydney and Melbourne, and has dealers in Brisbane and Perth.

Harvey says that in the next year it will open its own dealership in Brisbane and have eight more dealers nationally.

Polaris established the Victory brand in 1998 with the critically panned 1500cc V9SC model. It has not made a smaller-capacity motorcycle.

The brand launched in Australia almost four years ago. The current line-up features 1731cc V-twin engines.

Hand built: Dark Horse (main), Chief Classic and Vintage models come from Indian's Spirit Lake factory

