

Falling in love with America, on two wheels

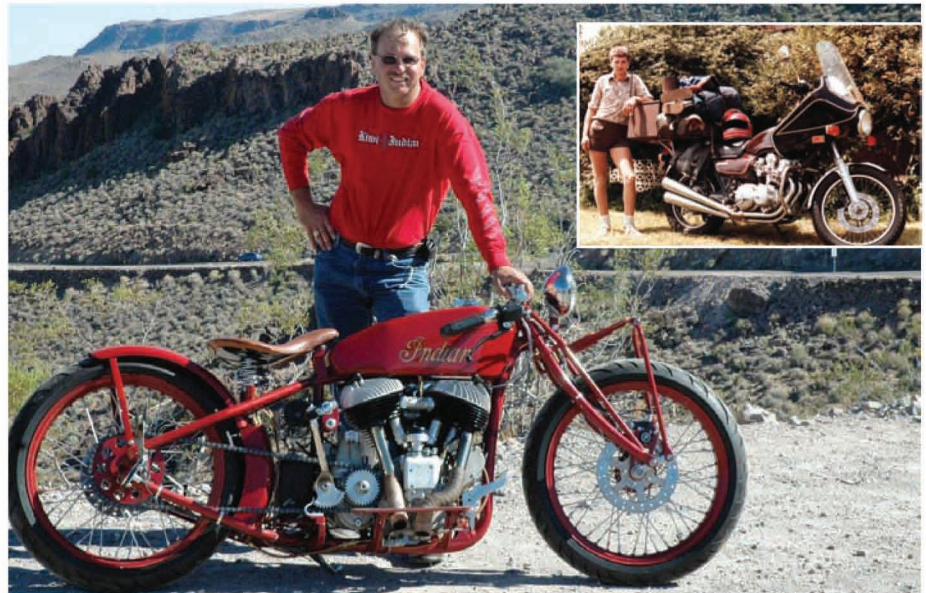
Way back in my youth I had a dream to leave New Zealand and visit the United States, buy a motorcycle, and just travel for six months.

While I lived in NZ my parents did not want me to own a motorcycle. But after landing my apprenticeship I needed cheap transportation and I eventually convinced them I needed a bike. It was a Honda CB 100, which I promptly boosted with a 125cc big bore kit. I didn't own four wheels then (and didn't until I was 28 and in the USA) so anywhere I had to go, no matter what the weather, had to be by motorcycle. I clearly remember it raining a lot in NZ so I got used to wearing wet weather gear. The rain itself never bothered me, it was more just the thought of it, and that's the same even to this day.

While away on a summer holiday with my mighty Honda, a bike caught my eye going the opposite way so I spun a u-ee, chased the fella down, and made him pull over. His bike was an old Indian which intrigued me to no end and that started my love affair with Indians. Up to that point all I knew was Japanese, Pommy bikes, and Harley-Davidsons. I always wanted an American bike but the old Harleys always looked like a plumber's nightmare and never turned my crank.

But oh, when I studied that old Indian I had stopped, I fell in love with an American motorcycle. The guy wanted 2,000 bucks for it and that was too much for me so I stuck an ad in the national newspaper. Soon I picked one up for 500 bucks and started restoring it. As it turned out the WWII Indian was not very powerful (and neither was my Honda by now) so I upgraded to a Honda 400/4 Super Sport and added a second Indian, a 1924 74" Big Chief. Indians just had clean lines to me; they were simple, mechanical, durable, and intriguing, which kept my inquisitive side alive. I was feeling pretty good about myself at age 21, having a few assets in classic bikes to my name. So I decided to stick them into storage and head to America.

It was 1982 and I had completed my engine rebuilding/automotive machining apprenticeship, working my way up to tradesman status, by the time I traveled to America. Once on American soil and traveling across this great nation I soon found myself in love



Alongside the brand new Kiwi Board Track racer, near Oatman, AZ on the Cannonball. Inset, 1983 California style via New Zealand.

with its people and America itself. It didn't matter what you rode; the cool thing was that I had an instant friend no matter where I went. "Wow, Americans are cool," I kept thinking. Well my six-month stay grew into 2-1/2 years and I racked up 75-80,000 miles, meeting many fine folks. When I finally went back to NZ it didn't take that long to figure out that America was the place for me.

After goofing off, working and traveling it was time to settle down a bit and have a go at my own business. In 1988 Carolyn and I married and I founded Kiwi Indian Parts in Riverside in SoCal. Our company specialized in manufacturing improved parts for classic Indian motorcycles for people who wanted to ride their bikes.

Reproduction parts to me are just copied parts, something that's pretty easy to do. But I always found myself studying each and every part, re-engineering/re-designing and modifying them to be better than the original. Sometimes the challenge was to keep the looks authentic while tucking all the good improved stuff underneath the surface.

Up to that point most guys who wanted to ride their Indians suffered from mechanical deficiencies. But Kiwi Indian changed that and riders soon learned that they could have a cool looking bike and one that could now go the distance. This did not go un-noticed by the

established guys in the business; the three main ones who controlled the Indian aftermarket business noticed this newcomer (me) upsetting the apple cart.

My take on it was that the consumer was the one who was the winner. Better quality parts that lead to a reliable bike where one could go for long trips and not break down? They were all positives in my book and since those established guys chose to ridicule and slander me rather than step up their game, I smoked 'em bad. Business kept growing as I found new areas to excite me, such as building complete new engines from our parts inventory, plus frames, forks, and then designing and manufacturing complete new retro-styled motorcycles.

Sometimes we get so engrossed in what we do that we forget to smell the roses along life's way. Me? I do stop and smell the roses. Jump on that motorcycle—no radio—enjoy the smells, and enjoy the people. It's people that make the difference; the motorcycle is just life's vehicle that allows us to take the trip. And America is *the* place to do it. **iw**

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