



Buck's *Indian* MOTORCYCLES Romney, WV

A privately-owned collection — may be seen by appointment.

“Our family’s interest in Indian motorcycles goes back to Dad who rode one. Later on, I began riding an Indian motorcycle, and then I taught my sons how to ride. Now we have three generations of Rinker’s who are Indian enthusiasts.”

Steve Rinker’s enthusiasm for Indian motorcycles has resulted in a spectacular collection of 32 models and accessories dating from 1922 to 1952. Each of the vintage models displayed at Buck’s Indian Motorcycle and Outdoors Sporting Goods Shop has a compelling story that makes it special. To the Rinker family, the value of motorcycles is not measured by dollars, horsepower, or gear ratios but rather in the enjoyment bikes have brought to them over the years.

Steve Rinker explained the genesis of his family’s tradition and fascination with Indian motorcycles. “My dad, Charles “Buck” Rinker, began riding an Indian motorcycle in the late 1950s after the company went out of business; that was all he could afford. About 18 years ago, I became interested in motorcycles and Dad bought me a 1949 Indian ‘Junker.’ I couldn’t find anyone to fix it up, so I decided to restore it myself. Later on, my sons Justin and Jared became interested in motorcycles, so we all worked together on them.”

Indians have a devoted following among motorcycle enthusiasts like the Rinker’s. The company’s reputation

Written by **Dan Whetzel**
New Photography by **Lance C. Bell**

is well deserved because in 1901 it rolled out the first American motorcycle. The inaugural model was little more than a bicycle with a small motor attached, but by 1907, the company debuted a twin V, 5 horse power “pacer bicycle” that could be found racing on dirt tracks all over the country. Indian Motorcycle Company (the “r” in motorcycle would be added at a later date) went on to capture 40% of all motorcycle sales in the United States. An enthusiastic sales force and devoted customer base created unusual emotional ties between men and the two wheel machines they rode. Corporate leadership fostered warm relations by welcoming customers to their factory and special events. Indian personalized the Native American theme by referring to its factory in Springfield, Massachusetts, as the “wigwam” and corporate officers, George Hendee and Carl Oscar Hedstrom, as “chiefs.”

Justin Rinker feels the same way about Indian motorcycles as his father and grandfather. “Working on motorcycles is something that I and my brother could do with Dad. When I look at the collection, it reminds me of those times when we worked together. That is what means the most to me—working with dad on the motorcycles. Even though Jared and I have moved away, we always feel like we are at home in West Virginia when working on motorcycles.”



Buck, Justin and Steve Rinker with Justin's first Indian, a 1941 Scout.

Skirted fenders were a typical trademark of the 1940-53 Indian Motorcycles as well as the indian fender light.

Jared recalls, "Working on Indian motorcycles was a major part of growing up. Getting organized for the swap meets was fun. Justin and I really looked forward to the travel time and participating in the shows."

Riding and working on Indian motorcycles created preferences for certain models. Justin's favorite bike? "A 1941 Scout that Dad bought. The 1941 Scout is the first bike that I rode on the highway and the one I used to get a license when I was 16 years old." Jared favors the Model 101 that was first produced in 1928 and had connections to hill climbing events. "The 101 is lightweight and easy to start. Being easy to start was important when I was young and just starting to ride. After growing older, I appreciated the 101's smooth ride and ease of handling."

Family connections combine with local sports history in one of the Rinker's most collectible Indians, a 1928 Model 101 Scout hill climber that was modified by the Cosgrove family of Cumberland, Maryland. The Model 101 was only manufactured until 1931. Hill climbing motorcycles are designed and engineered to compete against the clock while ascending steep inclines. Charles Cosgrove purchased the hill climber and modified it with assistance from his son Edward. The Cosgroves were well known hill climbers who competed in regional events.



Steve recalls that after the passing of Edward Cosgrove, “the family wanted to keep the bike and accessories together, and we agreed to do that. It means a lot to the Cosgroves and us to have the bike on display. People really relate to the stories about it.” Included with the Cosgrove’s Scout are a helmet, racing goggles, leather racing jacket and pants, a pit box, and photographs.

The oldest Indian in the Rinker’s collection is a 1922 factory board track racer. According to Steve, “Indian made racing bikes that competed on wooden tracks against Harley Davidson (and other manufacturers) and were not sold to the public. The fastest speed ever recorded was 122 mph on an Indian just like ours. The racing bike is a rare model.”

And Steve’s favorite bike? “A 1938 Chief is my favorite because it had a lot of upgrades and graceful styling. E. Paul DuPont who was president of the company at that time designed a motorcycle that was streamlined. That’s why the 1938 always appealed to me.”

Motorcycles are not the only items on display at the private museum. Indian marketed an amazing variety of products that are sought by collectors. A 1909 bicycle with wooden rims, a lawn mower, an outboard boat motor, alarm clocks, belts, spark plugs, shock absorbers, automobile window visors, pins, signs, and match boxes are among the displayed items. Also displayed are achievement awards presented exclusively to Indian salespersons. But the most unusual artifact is a wooden door that was removed from the president’s office during the mid 1970s. Steve noted, “This is the door that Mr. DuPont and the other corporate officers walked through every day. It is my favorite artifact.”

Removal of the door is symbolic of the Indian Motorcycle Company’s fate. Despite a devoted customer base and strong sales in the early years, the firm fell into hard times after World War II. Competitor Harley Davidson benefitted more from war time production than Indian and was poised to control the market following the end of fighting. An additional contributing factor to Indian’s demise occurred in 1945 when E. Paul DuPont turned over

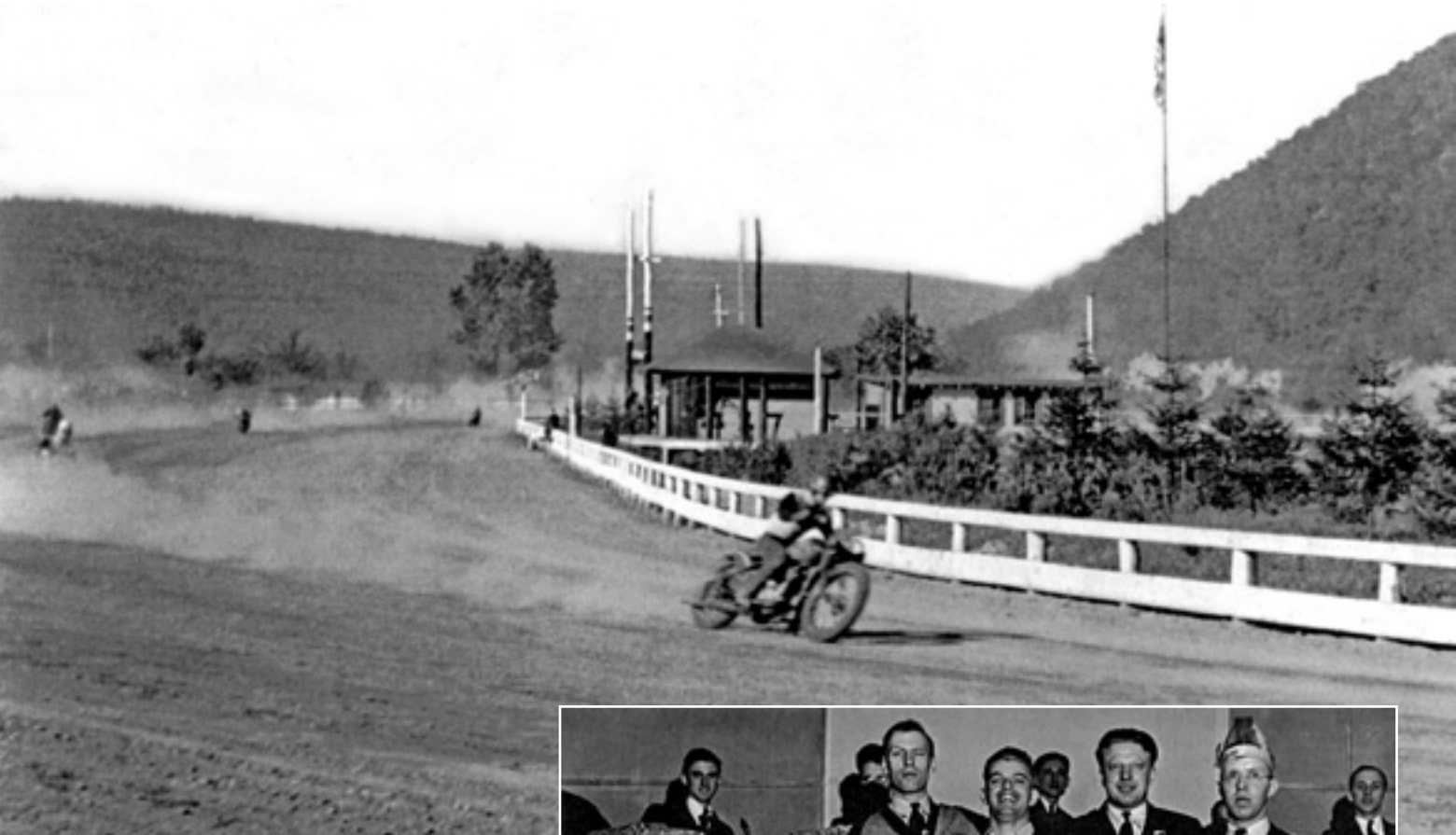


Jared and Justin Rinker in 2003 on a 1951 Indian Chief.

controlling interest in the company to Ralph Rogers. Decisions by Rogers to discontinue the Scout model and introduce lightweight motorcycles of poor quality doomed the company to bankruptcy in 1953. Successor companies have kept the name alive since that time but their success has been intermittent.

While the original Indian Motorcycle Company has passed into history, the Rinker family is intent on keeping its memory alive. The Rinker’s may have created Indian history when Buck, Steve, and Justin raced against each other in the Mountain Fest Grand Prix in Morgantown, West Virginia. Steve recalled, “We were told at the race this was the only time three generations of the same family competed on Indians, and that was really nice to know.”

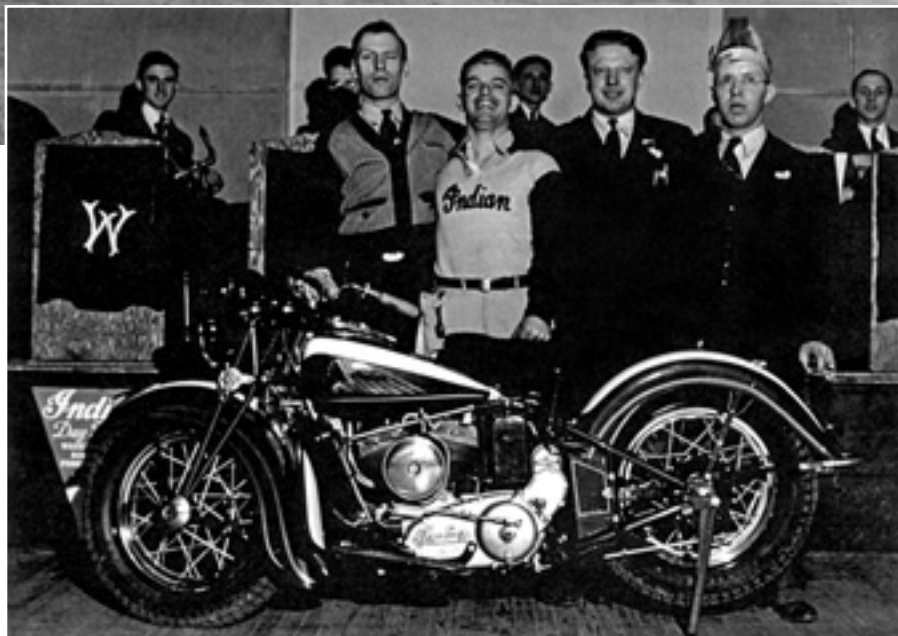
The Rinker family enjoys motorcycle racing and enters a 1930 Scout, model 101 to compete in the brakeless tankshift category. Two years ago the Rinker bike finished sixth in the point standings. Steve stated that “Carl Temple from Davenport, Iowa, is our rider. I own the bike, and he has the nerves.”



Motorcycle racing at the Cumberland Fairgrounds. These 1930 era bikes were hand shifted and brakeless.

While the Rinker's enjoy racing, their primary interest in bikes remains reflective of Buck's original motorcycle in need of repairs. According to Steve, "We buy an Indian motorcycle that needs to be fixed up; that is where our abilities and skills are found. I showed my sons how to work on bikes, and now they are involved. It is important to understand that we consider ourselves to be caretakers of Indian motorcycles. Hopefully, there will be other individuals in the future who feel the same way, so that what our family accomplished will be passed on to others that will get the same enjoyment."

Jared shares the same opinion of preserving Indian motorcycles. "I enjoy the search for original parts to make a bike look new. Restoring them is a labor of love and going through the process is satisfying. Once a bike is finished and restored to its original glory, we can't do anything but smile. The feeling of accomplishment makes it worthwhile because an Indian motorcycle has been



Left to right: Dick Fox, unknown, Jim Gaupaugh, and Edward A. Cosgrove of Cumberland, MD, with a new Sport Scout during an Indian seminar in 1938 or 39.

brought back to life and will be enjoyed for years to come. Like Dad says, we are the caretakers of Indian motorcycles."

The Rinker's sporting goods store and motorcycle museum is located approximately 3 miles west of Romney, WV on United States Route 50. For more information visit **www.Bucksindian.com**. Arrangements to visit the museum may be made through email correspondence at **rinkerindian@frontiernet.net**.



The Tri-State region was home to hill climbing and racing events from the 1930s through the 1960s. The most celebrated rider was Joe Hemmis, a Cumberland resident who won multiple national hill climbing awards. The 1959 season was particularly noteworthy for Hemmis when he competed in 36 events finishing first, 32 times for a winning percentage of .889. The same year he won double national championships by winning titles in Canada and the United States. The most memorable incident of Hemmis' career occurred in 1964 at the national championship in Muskegon, Michigan, where he was interviewed by Bud Palmer on ABC's *Wide World of Sports*. Hemmis won a total of five national championships and more than 100 trophies during his career.

Tri-State motorcycle racing was highlighted in 1968-1969 when promoter John Barton organized a series of events at Fairgo, a former horse racing venue located at the Cumberland Fairgrounds. Barton's events attracted more than 75 riders, including the 1967 National Champion Bart Markel of Flint, Michigan. The half mile track again hosted motorcycle racing in 1969 when amateur and expert riders competed. Unfortunately, the events were plagued by rainy weather which contributed to poor attendance and the end of motorcycle racing at Fairgo.



Top Photo: The 1929 Indian 101 Scout hill climber that Edward Cosgrove, Jr. rode to victory is now part of the Rinker Collection.

Inset photo: Edward Cosgrove Jr. the day he won the Class B Championship on the 1929 Indian 101 Scout.

