

**Indian**  
MOTORCYCLE  
ILLUSTRATED

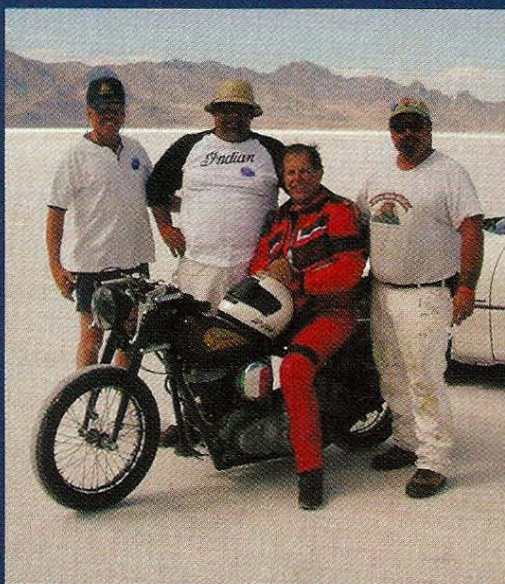
# BONNEVILLE

*The new company races an old Indian*

BY BUZZ KANTER

**I**F YOU THINK BONNEVILLE IS MADE BY Pontiac, or that the salt flats is a new salsa dance step, get with the program. We're referring to the land speed records at Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah, where enthusiasts have been challenging physics and their mechanical skills for the last several decades.

Bonneville can turn you into a hero or a zero in no time flat, and there is no looking back. You either set a new record or you didn't. And we're talking a sustained top speed over a measured mile, one that you have to back up with a return run.

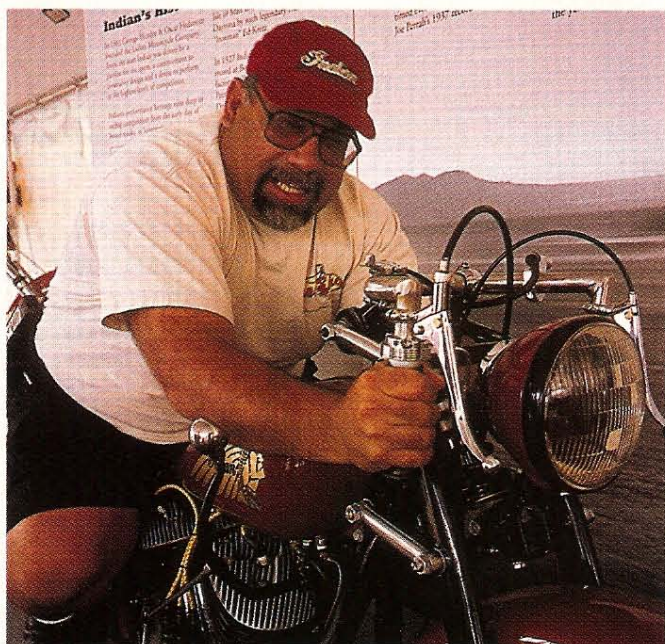




**LE ATTACK!**







**Dave Hansen posing on the Chief in Sturgis the week before departing for Bonneville.**

Last year an unusual group of motorcycle enthusiasts got together and came up with the idea that it would be fun to build and campaign an old Flathead Indian Chief

on the salt. They got the new Indian Motorcycle Company involved with design input, financial support, and marketing, and they began planning and building their challenger.

Besides wanting to go fast and have some fun, I was told one of the purposes of the Bonneville project was "to immerse the designers of the reborn Indian Motorcycle Company in its legendary history, and to serve as the inspiration for the next generation of Indian Motorcycle models as the company gears up for its centennial year in 2001."

The 80-cubic-inch Chief salt assault vehicle was built, with much design input from Indian, at Dave Hansen's The Shop,

in Ventura, California, using parts from Indians that ranged over two decades, from 1927 to 1947. "We used a rigid '37 Chief frame and a '47 Chief fork and fenders," Hansen told me. "We laced up a '27 Chief front wheel and a rear from a '37 Scout." The tanks, which were made by Yellow Spear Restoration, were trimmed 4".

## BONNEVILLE DIARY

BY DAVID HANSEN

**SUNDAY AUGUST 13, 2000**

My good friend Tomas Padilla and I arrived at Wendover, Utah, following a week displaying the bike at Sturgis. It was the first time either of us had been to Speed Week, and seeing racers everywhere when we went in town told us we were in Gearhead Heaven.

We checked into our hotel and couldn't wait to drive the 10 miles to the start of The Salt and another six miles to the pits where we located our team. We were met by our pilot and Bonneville veteran Vance Breese and his wife Char, Crew Chief Mickey Goodin, and Roger "Ramjett" Chatelet. Vance, who has crossed the salt at over 300 mph, had worked with Mickey and Roger before.

We reviewed the starting procedure, which involved a set of rollers to spin the rear tire until the Chief fired. We couldn't kick her over as we had removed the kick-starter boss from the frame to make it as narrow as possible. And the bike was geared so tall there was no way to bumpstart it.

There were a lot of machines waiting their turn in line, and we knew when our time had come we had to be ready. Each of us had a job to do, and we had to get it done quickly if we had a chance of success. And don't forget the temperature on the Salt was over 100 degrees. Our starting line for the five-mile Short Course

**Vance Breese at speed on the salt. The best time was 123.775 mph.**





was about seven miles from the pits. We never got near the seven-mile Long Course, which was for vehicles capable of 175 mph or faster.

The starting procedure was to unload the bike from the truck, set up the rollers, and have Tomas back the truck's rear tires onto the rollers. While waiting for our run, I'd help Vance with his leathers, while Mickey made his last-minute inspection of the bike. Then we'd back the bike onto the rollers, and put it in second gear. Then, as I held the rear of the bike and Mickey steadied the front, Tomas would spin the truck's rear tires at 10 mph. The Indian's rear wheel would spin at about 20 mph, which was enough to get it to roar to life. My job was then to put it into neutral, roll the bike to the starting line, and hold the throttle at about 1500 rpm as Vance made his final adjustments to his helmet and leathers.

Tomas, Mickey, and Roger then would load the rollers, ramp, and themselves into the truck and get ready to chase Vance down to the finish line to pick him up. When the starter was notified that the track was clear, I would jam the shifter into first, and Vance would take off. I'd run back to the truck to chase him down. I have to suspect the first few times we did this we must have looked like the Keystone Cops, but after a few times, we got the routine down and actually started looking like we knew what we were doing.

Racer and Bonneville veteran Vance Breese thanked the Indian Motorcycle Company as "they expended considerable resources to design the race bike so that it was safe at elevated speeds on a track that is quite rough."

While a special race motor was part of the plans, time ran out before it was ready, so Dave did what he had to. "We pulled the motor out of my personal 1933 Chief to test the handling of the chassis, and tune the components." The race bike uses a King clutch, Kiwi transmission gears, JIMS engine shafts, JE pistons of Dave's own design, stainless steel valves, Kiwi's Bonneville cams and lifters, and a Starklite hand-clutch conversion.

Fuel was fed through The Shop's own Fre-Flo Bendix/Keihin carb manifold adapter, which allows for a larger venturi and an accelerator pump-type carburetor. Dave was proud that everything in the powertrain, other than the hand-clutch conversion and King clutch, had already lasted at least 30,000 street miles.

### MONDAY, AUGUST 14

We were in line for our first run by 8 a.m. About a mile down the five-mile course the safety on the fuel valve snapped shut, turning off the gas flow. We retrieved the bike and got back in line. We secured the petcock and clocked over 117 mph, with Vance reporting the chassis was rock steady. We were elated!

We made four more runs that day and were able to achieve 121.304 mph. What had started out as a series of shakedown runs to test the chassis and components on Sunday had turned into a full-blown run at breaking the record of 122.948 mph.

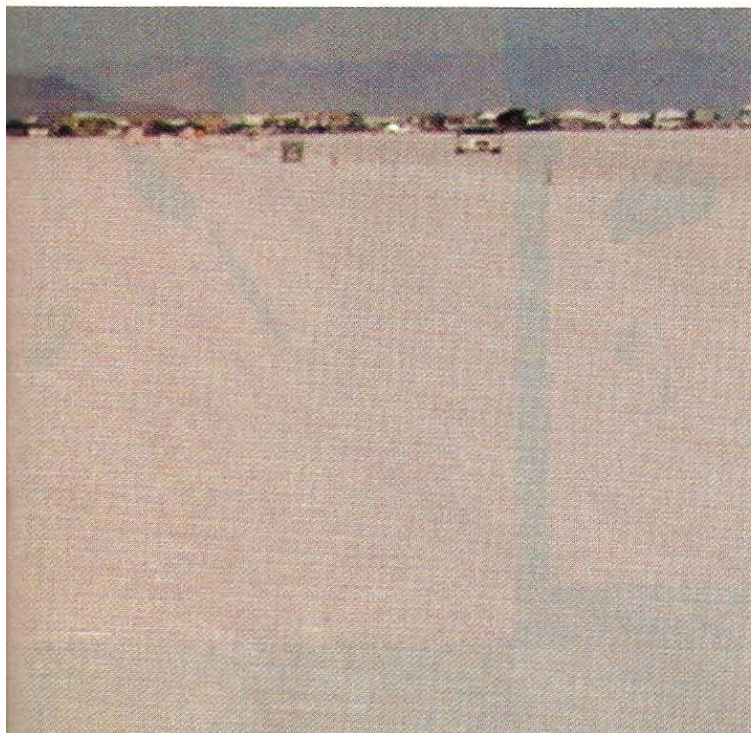
Even though the bike displaced roughly 1340cc (80") the goal for this machine was to run in the MVG 750 class. The M signifies a modified chassis, V is vintage (pre-1956), and G stands for gas-powered. As an added bonus, Flathead motors can

drop two displacement classes down below OHV motors of the same displacement, allowing the Indian to compete against 750cc OHV motorcycles. The speed record in that class was held by an old vertical twin Triumph, with an average of speed of 122.948 mph, in 1997.

The results were pretty good right off the truck, especially when you consider they ran Dave's street engine, with little more than new rings and resealed valves. Not sure how they would do, the public announcement was that this first effort was to test the chassis, rather than actually go for a record. This was done in case they didn't get up enough speed to be a contender. The first pass was 117 mph. Not bad, but no threat to the 122.948 mph class record.

### TUESDAY, AUGUST 15

We arrived early and made our first run at 6:30 a.m., but we couldn't get over 121 mph. And we were still having problems with the fuel valve. Back in our pits, we installed the highest gearing we had, tie-wrapped the petcock open, and gave the bike its final once-over before the next run, which clocked 123.047 mph, qualifying us for the record. The Chief was immediately





impounded for the night. We had to wait until the following day to make a backup run. Impound is when the officials seal the motor, and do not allow any changes other than to the spark plugs and oil.

The team then began to dial the bike in. They changed the gearing, carb jetting, and ignition settings. The next pass registered a record-breaking 123.775 mph. Because it beat the record the bike was impounded for another run the following day. The rules state that to qualify for a new record you must beat the old one, and then go fast enough on the second pass, a day later, to average a speed over the old record.

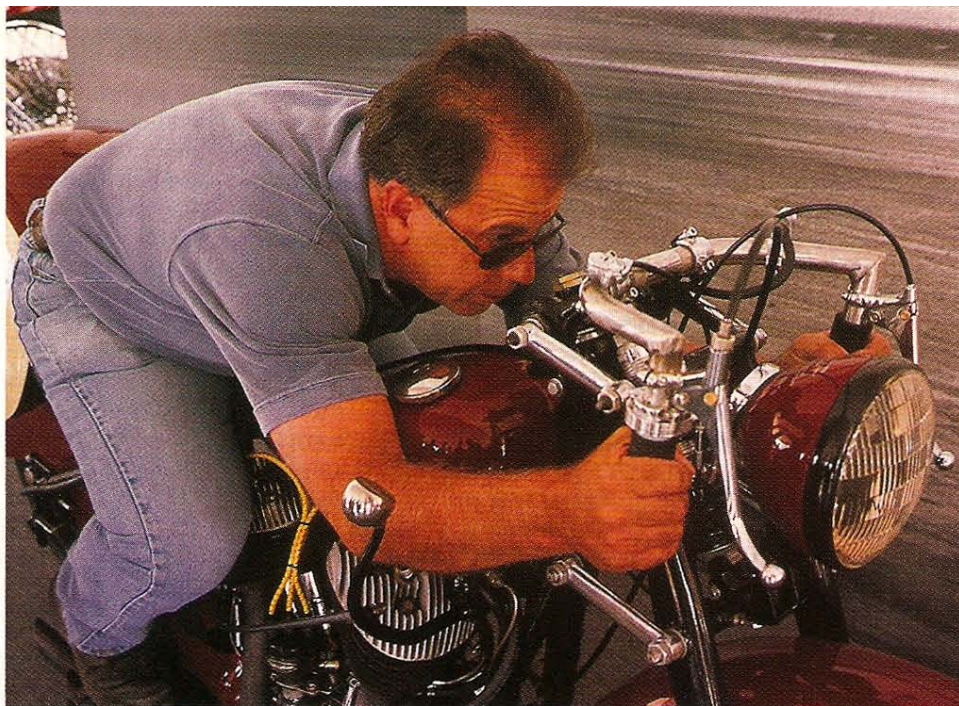
The next day they regared the old Indian and pulled off the front fender. The air was very still and rider Vance Breese ran almost 124 miles per hour. Back to impound and the next morning they set a new record at 122.991 average speed.

After returning from the Bonneville with another new record, Breese shared with us his feelings about the people at Indian Motorcycle Company, "I believe there was considerable learning about history and what it means to be Indian. They worked and suffered for this knowledge." He then acknowledged the value of their participation. "I think their actions speak volumes about their intentions for the future of the mark and their understanding of what it means to keep the flame of Indian passion alive."

### WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 16

The days are getting longer and faster as the day began at 5 a.m., and the only vehicles allowed on the start line are those that had qualified the day before. We felt good to be there. Vance's first run clocked 122.060 mph, which, combined with the times from the previous day, meant we fell short of the record by 0.43 mph.

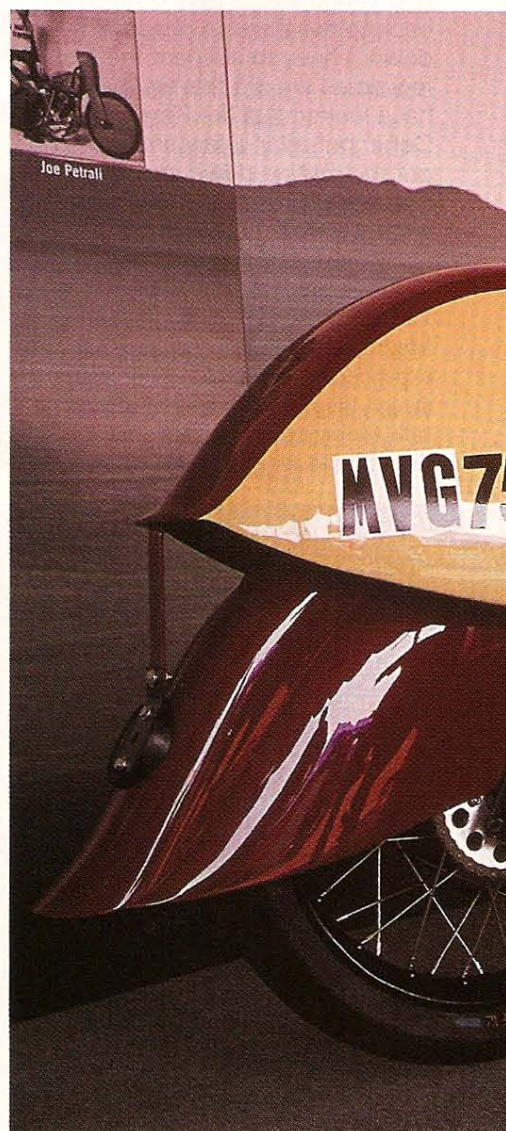
Our next run fizzled out with another petcock failure. Our third run clocked 122.033 mph, which was still too slow. We drove back to the pits, where we removed the front fender, replaced the shift knob with a piece of rubber hose, and changed the octane of the gas we have been using. We sizzled down the salt at 123.775 mph, and qualified once again. Back to impound where the bike had to wait till the next day.



**Above: Rider Vance Breese posing on his racer. Note how the bars are angled and the hand shifter fits on the bike under his right arm.**



**The race engine was not finished in time, so they ran Dave Hansen's street motor!**





Bonneville Speed Week comes around every year, and you have to ask what's next for the Indian? It seems the old Indian/Harley rivalry has not gone away. Harley introduced its first OHV twin, the Knucklehead, in 1936. It was, by all measures, a terrific success for Harley, and was the machine that proved Harley's mechanical superiority over Indian for the first time. Prior to the Knucklehead, Indian was usually considered a better motorcycle than Harley, and Harley was always playing catch up to Indian.

#### THURSDAY, AUGUST 17

It was another 5 a.m. morning, and after six days on the Salt, with back-to-back 100-degree weather, we were on the final day of Speed Week. It was the proverbial Last

Call. Everyone was bone-tired and worn-out, and our backs were to the wall. We changed the oil and put in fresh plugs. We checked the bike over, and Vance,



**Below: The race bike was on display at Indian's booth in Sturgis the week before the record-breaking effort.**

who must have been feeling the pressure to nail it, delivered 122.207 mph. The bike was rolled back to impound, where we removed the rear head to allow the officials to measure the size of the motor. Everything checked out, and we are the proud owners of a new Land Speed record of 122.991 mph with my old 80" Flathead street motor.

Bonneville was the experience of a lifetime. If you ever have the chance to attend

Speed Week on the salt, my strong recommendation is to do it! Even without the record, the people I met and the vehicles that I saw were worth the trip. But we did get the record, and to make it even sweeter, we did it with some really great guys on a 1937 Indian!

In 1937, racer Joe Petrali took a factory streamlined Knucklehead for a speed run in Daytona Beach on the sand. But the streamlining, while looking aerodynamic and advanced, actually hurt the bike's handling. So off it came. Petrali made another pass down the sand and the press clocked him at 136.183 mph, setting an unofficial record for normally aspirated motorcycles. Prior to that, Indian held the American record at 132 mph, set in 1926 by Johnny Seymour.

So, now that this Indian team has set a new 750cc record, its next goal is to pass 136.183 mph and raise the Indian to speeds in excess to what Harley did in 1937. Details to follow.

*Editors note: The same team then returned to Bonneville a few months later for the USFRA World of Speed. They ran their new race motor coupled to a Hanlon Indian overdrive four-speed transmission. In spite of the bitterly cold weather and strong headwinds, they registered a 127.885 mph run to qualify, breaking their own record set a month earlier. The next pass was 124.463 mph for an average of 126.174 mph, beating their previous record by over three miles per hour. They plan on going for yet another record in May 2001. **AIM***

