

1938 Indian Four Motorcycle (1:10-scale)

It seems the boys at the Indian Motorcycle (the missing “r” is deliberate) Company weren’t above copping a good idea as their own. Take the famous Indian “four,” introduced in 1927 and offered until 1942, when it succumbed to the war effort. It was originally the brainchild of William Henderson, whose company offered the then in-line four in 1910. When his company suffered a cash shortage, Henderson accepted an offer from Ignatz Schwinn (as in Schwinn Bicycles) in 1917, to buy the motor. Two years later, when he split with Schwinn over design differences, Henderson resurrected the four on a motorcycle called the Ace in 1919. Sadly, the Ace Company collapsed when Henderson was struck by an automobile and killed in 1923 while testing a new design. After changing hands a couple of times, Indian finally purchased the Ace designs, tooling and dies in 1926. After making a few design changes of its own, Indian introduced the Indian Ace the next year, changing it to the Indian Four in 1929 after more extensive changes were made. Redesigned yet again in 1938, the new four boasted an F-head layout with intake valves on top and exhaust valves on the side. This kept the intake air cooler for better compression. The cylinders were cast in pairs, the valve gears were fully enclosed, and the engine had automatic oiling for quiet operation and extended life. They even spruced up the instrument cluster. The Indian Four helped the company compete with Harley Davidson. To raise the stakes, a wide variety of color schemes were offered, when E. Paul du Pont acquired Indian. Just five dollars extra allowed a buyer to paint his cycle any color in the du Pont inventory. (DM’s image is painted in two-tone classic India Red and silver.)



Want a companion to the 1936 Harley Knucklehead, and/or the 1942 Indian Four, put out by FM? Then, the 1938 Indian Four from DM is your ticket. It’s the only motorcycle image offered (the 1948 Indian Chief, discontinued on 6/30/03), and is a work of (the modeler’s) art. This image boasts operable steering, clutch, kickstarter and brake pedals, shifter, and seat springs. The plastic chain rotates with the rear wheel. The rear fender has a clip to stow the rear stand (a second prop-stand swings out from the left, under the engine) and lifts to expose the rear wheel. The seat’s done in real leather and the front of it lifts to provide access to the oil tank filler cap. Everywhere you look, fine details abound. The handgrips are even done in soft plastic. The aforementioned paint job gleams, as do the chrome accents. The artwork on the tank is just gorgeous, with its Indian chief with headdress, and makes you realize that tank art didn’t begin with the customizers.

My dad owned an Indian Four as a young man growing up during the Great Depression, giving testament to the bike’s popularity even when cash was dear. His association with the machine ended at a tollbooth, when he was sandwiched between a car and the booth and took flight. Fortunately, he suffered only minor injuries and gave up cycle riding from that day forward. But I could hear the admiration in his voice when he described his Indian Four.

T. H. Pine
Wordworker@earthlink.net