

Floyd Clymer Tried To Revive Indian in the '60s

By John Gunnell

When we spotted a '47 Indian Chief for sale during the 2008 Iola Old Car Show last July, we had to go see it. At the seller's vending space, we bumped into the owner of Elmer's Museum (www.elmersautoandtoymuseum.com), in Fountain City, Wis. We learned that his museum has a number of old cycles, including several new-in-the-box "Clymer Indians" that came from Italy.

In 1969, the Floyd Clymer Motorcycle Division, located at 22 N. Virgil Ave., in Los Angeles, announced "The World's Most Interesting Motorcycles are Coming to the U.S.A." The company had launched a program to bring five motorcycle models, all manufactured in Europe, into the United States as "new" models. Four of the bikes were advertised as Indians and the fifth was named the Clymer-Munch Mammoth. Clymer's ads said that Indian Scout and Indian Chief models were also in the works for the next season — 1970.

Mr. Floyd Clymer was best known as a publisher, but had a lengthy history in the world of cars and cycles. In 1902, his father, Dr. J. B. Clymer, of Berthoud, Colorado, purchased the first automobile to be sold in his state north of Denver. In 1905, this single-cylinder Oldsmobile was replaced with a big 7-hp Reo. That same year, J. B.'s 11-year-old son, Floyd, became a full-fledged automobile dealer selling Reo, Maxwell and Cadillac cars.

Floyd Clymer earned legendary status among automobile and motorcycle buffs. He literally grew up as the history of these machines was unfolding. By the early 1950s, he had spent over a half century testing, racing and restoring both two- and four-wheel vehicles (not to mention a number of trikes). Even President Teddy Roosevelt had once referred to Clymer as "the world's youngest automobile salesman." He was also an Indian motorcycle dealer at some point.

In later years, Clymer became a publisher of car and motorcycle books, with his publishing headquarters that time at 1268 S. Alvarado St., in Los Angeles. He produced well over 25 books, including 12 volumes of his Historical Motor Scrapbook. When interest in motorcycles picked up during the mid-1960s, it was natural for Clymer to want to use some of his publishing profits to move into the motorcycle business.

Clymer's 1969 line of Indian and Mammoth motorcycles was said to be aimed at enthusiasts throughout the world. He described his products as, "Strictly custom-built motorcycles" and emphasized that he had no intentions of getting into the mass market. Clymer offered models from a 50cc Super Minibike to an 1100cc high-performance machine "These machines are all foreign built in our own factory in Germany or, in some instances, assembled in Italy using British and Italian components," Clymer promoted. "We are utilizing the facilities and long-time expertise of specialists who make parts for motorcycles. It is more economical to operate in this manner."

In some cases, Clymer bought parts from firms that also produced them for other manufacturers. "This way, we gain the benefit of their long experience and testing facilities," he pointed out. "Because of their mass-production operations, their component prices are lower than we, operating as a small manufacturer, could possibly duplicate."

Clymer had no dreams of becoming a big motorcycle maker and admitted that he couldn't do so. "There is a good demand for specialized motorcycles and that is the market at which we are aiming," he said. "We assure you that we have many innovations that will soon appear on our motorcycles and that these features will be much talked about."

The smallest of Clymer's 1969 models was the 50cc Indian Ponybike, which came in colors of Red or Blue and sold for \$295. This unique road or trail bike had five horsepower and was capable of 45-48 mph. It had a three-speed transmission. Equipment included a dual seat, a choice of road or trail tires, two brakes and lights.

The Indian 500 Roadster was powered by a 500cc overhead-cam, single-cylinder engine supplied by Velocette. The engine came in either normal (\$1,450) or Thruxton high-performance (\$1,550) versions. It was a high-output, sporty bike with Borrani rims, Ceriani forks, a tachometer and Campagnola twin-disc brakes. A front disc brake was optional. The Thruxton versions could hit 117 mph.

Third up was the Indian 600 Roadster. It had a chain-driven overhead cam engine, dual exhausts, a four-speed unit transmission design, German Bing carburetors, Bosch electrics, Magura bars and controls, a speedometer and a tach. Ceriani forks and Campagnola twin-disc brakes were optional. Sales of this "goes like a bomb" bike — which was due out in Feb. 1969 — were slow. This bike cost \$1,790 new, which was a ton of money in 1969.

Clymer's 8-Valve 500cc Grand Prix racing engine was a dual overhead cam job of which Clymer hoped 50 could be built in Germany. This bike was intended for Grand Prix racing circuits only. Prices were \$2,750 for just the engine and \$3,500 for a complete Grand Prix Race Bike. Delivery was slated to start in March 1969 on a first come, first served basis. A \$1,000 deposit was requested. Clymer's brochure showed no picture of the engine or this bike.

With a chain-driven four-cylinder overhead-cam engine, the 1969 Clymer-Munch Mammoth motorcycle was built for going fast. This light-weight bike, constructed with space-age materials, could do 120 mph, according to Clymer. Weighing 540 lbs., the Clymer-Munch Mammoth featured a Bosch electric starter, a massive front brake assembly, dual headlights, Magura bars and controls and VDO and Bosch electrical equipment. This bike was priced at \$4,000 including duty and air freight, \$3,400 if shipped by boat and \$3,200 if picked up at the factory in Germany. Delivery required two to four weeks.

"The Mammoth appeals to the enthusiast," Clymer advertised. "The sportsman who might buy a Ferrari, Maserati, Mercedes-Benz, Aston-Martin or Rolls-Royce is the type of buyer who appreciates and buys a Mammoth." Clymer's Indian Scout was advertised as a 750cc (45 cid) side-valve V-Twin. The power plant was said to be a "complete new version of the V-Twin." A 61-cid Indian Chief was also in the works in mid 1969.

The small Italian-made Indians show up on eBay from time to time, as well as at motorcycle shows. There was one for sale at an event in Seymour, Wisconsin last year. Another one showed up for sale in the Clintonville shopper last year. As for the Munch Mammoth, one of the biggest collectors of these models was David R. Manthey, of Portage, Wisconsin. One of his Mammoths was exhibited at the Meadow Brook Concours d'Elegance in the Detroit area and as it drove onto the show field, it literally shook the ground.

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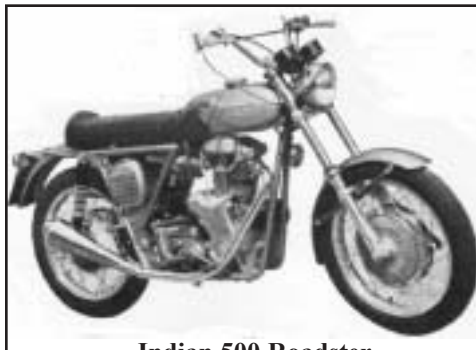
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