

**1919 Indian Bicycle**

*Using bicycles in the motorcycle sales wars*



You may know most of America's first motorcycles were little more than bicycles with motors. But did you know that manufacturers actually used bicycles as part of their strategy to sell motorcycles?

Take the case of the Indian Motorcycle Company, and this 1919 Indian bicycle with an attached Smith Motorwheel.

Indian's history with bicycles actually began way back in 1889. That's when the Hendee Manufacturing Company, which eventually became the Indian Motorcycle Company, was formed to build bicycles. The company only started building motorcycles in 1902. By the mid-teens, the factory was making 30,000 motorcycles a year. To make way for that production, the bicycle part of the business was farmed out.

This 1919 model was made for Indian by the Davis Sewing Machine Company of Dayton, Ohio, which also made Harley-Davidson's bicycles of the day.

The idea, says Mel Short, who owns this beautifully restored machine, was for the bicycles to look as much like the motorcycles as possible. This bike is a deluxe man's model with a flared and skirted front fender, and with what looks like a gas tank attached to the frame. In fact, that tank holds the battery for the headlight.

The bike also has a drop stand in the rear, rather than a side stand, to make it look more like a motorcycle. Even the handlebars are braced like motorcycle bars.

"Both Indian and Harley sold bikes in their motorcycle shops to bring boys and their dads into the showrooms," Short says. "The thinking was that later they would come back and buy a motorcycle."

But there was another way to make the jump to motorized transportation—by fitting a small motor and a separate driving wheel to the bike like a sidecar. The Smith Motorwheel didn't come with the bike, but was purchased separately. It would attach to almost any bicycle.

"This motor is a 1915," Short says. "It has a direct vent, and no muffler, so it was probably pretty loud."

There was no clutch, so to start the motor you would activate the compression release, pedal the bicycle, and then close the compression release to get the bike firing. To brake, the rider used the bicycle pedals and the compression release. "For the back roads of those days," Short says, "it worked just fine."

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