



INDIAN: YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW



Part Two: Steve McQueen's Model 741 STORY AND PHOTOS BY RAY SEIDEL

Indian Motorcycle Company has historically been on a roller coaster ride...from record sales, to near financial disaster, then repeat, repeat, and repeat again. This was also true during the war years of WWII when the company was run by E. Paul du Pont (yes, from the family of du Pont paint fame. And yes, Indians were painted with du Pont paint. And **ANY** color in the du Pont catalog for an added charge.) President du Pont had been a motorcycle buff since its pioneer days, and also enjoyed its sporty nature, supporting Indian's racing even during the lean times when money was tight.

It is my opinion Indian would have folded had du Pont not come on board when he did, and with his pride and financial resources, du Pont would have kept Indian afloat even if The Great Depression had taken a greater toll on the company than it had.

By 1940, Indian was busy making motorcycles, thanks to a 5000 unit contract from the French military for Chiefs and sidecars, albeit with old worn out machinery and tools from the depression that hadn't been replaced. At the same time, Indian started making prototypes of smaller motorcycles at the request of the United States War Department. To get by with the shop equipment on hand, Indian assembled a bike from Scout and Junior Scout parts. The result was the model 640 with a detuned 30.50 cubic inch Junior Scout engine and extended forks and seat stays for added ground clearance. Although necessarily anemic, it met its goals of being super rugged and easy to service. Soon thereafter an essentially identical model was made with a swapped out Sport Scout engine that would be known as the model 741. While the 640 were fine for field conditions, the peppier model 741 was preferred for American roads. Both models got a "Two Thumbs Up" from the War Department, and Indian went into full production.

Indian wrapped up the order for the French military at this time, and 2200 Chiefs were crated off to a freighter bound for Le Havre, France. Sadly, the ship never made it past the U-boat infested waters. So... there are a couple thousand Indian motorcycles sitting at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. Luckily for Indian, they had already deposited the check.

Production had increased for Chiefs and Indian 4's as the prospect for war (and rationing) loomed ahead. It was well understood by police and civilians, that if they wanted to purchase a new motorcycle, it would have to be before war is declared. Indian was working hard to keep up with demand, having just hired an additional 300 machinists and workers. Profits were also up, 10 times higher than the year before, and the largest since 1929. Had Indian not sold off machinery during the depression, and had they replaced worn out equipment, they could have produced much more in the huge "Wigwam" factory. And they would have sold well, for as soon as war was declared and gas rationing began, motorcycles of every kind and condition were in big demand.

Another foreign order came for Indian in late 1941, this time from the British

War Department, for 5000 motorcycles. (Also 5000 from Harley-Davidson). Some were for Indian Chiefs, but most of these would be the 640 models to stretch gasoline supplies as far as possible. Most of Indian's production was for the 640 for overseas use, plus Chiefs and model 741's for "essential use" and police. Sales are so good, Indian sets aside a \$500,000 nest egg for post war development, still leaving more than half a million in profit. At the same time, Indian was awarded the Army-Navy "E" for excellence award.

However...for all of Indian's efforts during the war...over 40,000 military and over 4,000 civilian motorcycles, Indian showed a net loss of more than \$617,000 by war's end. (See last month's issue).

The "Army Indian" was made over a three-year period, most going to the British and their allies, for a total of 35,044 units. Indian's left hand throttle was considered a plus so couriers could hand off message packets. Almost 4000 were sent to New Zealand. The model 741 was a favorite with Canada, and the New Zealand Army who used them from early 1942, through the Italian campaign of 1943/44, until retired in 1949. Only one Model 741 of the thousands made was sold directly to the US Army.

By 1942, the Army found the Jeep to be a better choice for the tasks it had given the motorcycles. Less expensive to make, could carry more, go anywhere, and more versatile. 600,000 Jeeps were used in WWII, as contracts for motorcycles were cancelled.

This particular model 741 belonged to actor Steve McQueen. Steve brought it into Stark's Indian shop for restoring in 1977. Stark told him it would take a year before they could start on it because they had so many ahead of it. He didn't like waiting that long...and Bob had one of his own that he just finished. McQueen saw that one, said let me take yours, you take this one, I don't care what you do with it. So a year later they started on this one. (Steve had gotten his 1st '42 Scout from them in 1976).

This bike is completely original with one exception...the chrome rim on the speedometer should be painted. Bob likes chrome rims. So he put one piece of chrome on it. But wait, this bike has a **gloss** olive-drab paint job on it...did any come that way? Yes they did, right out of the crate from the factory...for ceremonial purposes. One of these would be worth around \$18,000 - \$19,000 today. Totally reliable, and with a 4? to 1 compression, you can "kick" start it with your hand, and it fires right up!

"Put these out like popcorn," Bob says, "put them all over the world." On today's civilian roads, going flat out lying down on the tank, it can do 64 mph. However, the engine can go from 500cc to 600cc just by changing the pistons in it. Doesn't change the looks at all. Bob's dad had these stacked floor to ceiling in his shop after WWII. They never even tried to sell them as 500cc, changed them all to 600cc, and then sold them for \$350 apiece.

This one, and other Indian's, can be found in Starklite Cycle's museum in Perris, CA.