

How I Got Started in Motorcycling

Contributed by BMWVMCA NEWS
Tuesday, 05 August 2008

How I got Started in Motorcycling
(See page 14 from last issue)

12 Rules of Motorcycle Restoration

“About a month ago somebody posted the “12 Rules” and I was wondering what is the origin of that bad boy.”
Steve in Detroit

Hi Steve:

I'll take credit for the “12 Rules of Restoration”. It's something I put together from 40 plus years of personal experience restoring and riding motorcycles.

A lot of these rules come from my first motorcycle at age 18: a 1939 Indian Chief. I chose the Chief because my Dad had entertained us many times with his exploits as an Indian rider back in the 1930's. I purchased the Chief for \$75.00 out of a barn in Allentown, PA in 1964. When I brought it back to my parents' home in New York, they practically threw me out of the house. I think my Dad characterized me and my “new” bike as “G--damn motorcycle trash!” Seems it was to ride, but not for his son.

So there I sat, on a street in Brooklyn, NY with an old rusty Chief, and no where to put it. I finally convinced my Grandmother to let me put it in the basement of her apartment building. But how to get it down there? Simple! Just open up the grate cover over the coal chute (yes we heated the building with coal) and ride the Chief down the flight of stairs! It wasn't as easy as that since my friends had to lift the rear of the Indian while the front wheel bumped down a step at a time. Finally as the rear wheel neared the lip of the top step, I mounted my Chief, ducked as low as I could, and with a final shove, rode it down the dozen or so steps into the basement. One of the most exciting rides of my life and the engine wasn't even running!

Over the next year or so I disassembled the Chief and painstakingly restored it piece by piece. As each piece was finished, I transferred it to my Uncle's garage out in the suburbs and eventually got it entirely assembled.....all this by age 19. I rode it home and my Dad was stunned! A crooked smile crossed his face as he said he had ridden an Indian very similar to my Chief years ago. Unfortunately less than a year later I was drafted and sent off to Viet Nam and my Chief languished in my Grandmother's garage. After deciding to make the military a career, I sold the Chief in 1972 for.....\$150.00. Ouch!

Fast forward to 2003.

While looking on eBay I noticed a 1939 Indian Chief restoration project for sale out of Oklahoma. My wife said “Sure! Go get it. You deserve it!” My two sons (19 & 23), both riders by the way, said “Yes Dad! Go for it!” A couple of weeks later the '39 Chief showed up. We all stood in awe: it was almost a religious experience! All my kids could say was “Wow. So this is an Indian!”

It took about a year to restore it and it has become my favorite motorcycle again. It took me all of about 2 minutes to get the hang of riding a left foot clutch and throttle, right stick shift and manual spark advance: some things you never forget. Over the last 2 summers I've put about 6000 miles on the Indian with only a few minor problems. Riding the Chief (done in the same colors as 40 years ago) for me is like a time machine. Every time I ride I get to be 19 again and continue my excellent adventure on that first motorcycle

John Arbeeny

Hello John,

I read your “Twelve Rules” with considerable enjoyment.

Though we are a BMW oriented group, I would like to send you a copy of our newsletter and print your story.

Richard Sheckler

Ha! You made my day!

Just so you know, my "other bike" (I have 12 vintage bikes in my garage) is a 1973 BMW R75/5 LWB!!! Photos of me are attached with both bikes! Sure, go ahead and publish the "Rules" and story and send me your newsletters along with a membership application!

I have another story you might like to publish as well. This story is of a young American gentleman's (Edward I. Horsman, Jr.) first ride on a motor tricycle and a "quad" (quadracycle...early automobile) in England on July 5, 1901.

This adventure was recounted by Edward in his hand written journals which I rescued from a trash heap over 40 years ago. I'm attaching a photo of the tricycle and "chauffeur" as well as the text. This is a wonderful story that is everyone's motorcycle ride and shows where the 12 Rules of Restoration really got their start!

Thanks and enjoy!
John Arbeeny
Lakewood, WA

EDWARD I. HORSMAN, JR. LOG BOOK VOL. III MAY 29, 1900-JULY 14, 1901 © John Arbeeny 1998

July 5th, 1901. Edwin Lemare took me to the shop where his motor-tricycle is undergoing an overhauling and reconstruction which promises to extend into eternity and to hopelessly beggar him in the mean time. This machine is another of his extravagances. It seems to need more repairing and miscellaneous attention than a steam-yacht. He bought it for a good round sum and has been altering and adding to it ever since. No new idea in motor construction appears but he seizes upon it and orders it incorporated into the luckless tricycle. The result is one of the most complicated machines I ever saw. For this tricycle, at a large expense, he has had made a "trailer", or seat and handlebar supported by a fourth wheel and suitable frame, so that he can take a passenger.

On this part of the affair I mounted, he took his seat, deftly manipulated the half-dozen valves and we darted down the road. The machine proved very powerful and capable of high speed, but its vibration was great and after the manner of petrol motors it gave out considerable noise. It needed only a few minutes to put the village behind us, and find us flying along the smooth roads of the open country, churning up a cloud of dust behind, and scattering in terror before us into the hedgerows the ducks and fowls. We owned the road. Farm wagons pulled to the side, and traps slowed up or stopped at the road crossings, till our mad career was past. The rush of it all was exhilarating, hills were nothing to us, slopes had no terrors, we tore along and I hung on grimly as we swung around curves. We brought up sharply once that I might remove an insect from Edwin's eye (the poor bug had doubtless wanted to get out of the way, but couldn't find time) and yet once more to enable me to make a picture of the daring Chauffeur and his machine.

Everything was going most swimmingly and our spirits were highest when in mounting a long and steep hill, the motor gradually slowed its puffs and seeming to lose its power barely gained the top of the rise. Edwin was puzzled, though he didn't admit it, and we made an examination. Water was leaking from the tank (it shouldn't of course) but that couldn't be it. The petrol might be stale, or the "carburetor" wasn't the newest type quite. (There was a tubular one, recently invented much better); or the escapement in the cylinder hadn't been entirely corrected. Anyway we had better turn about and make for home. And we did, but not for long. There suddenly was a sharp thud in the machinery and we stopped short. Another examination began and it developed that a certain tube which conveys most of the noise into a cylinder called the "silencer" had come loose. This, with the rest of the adjacent parts was almost white hot and couldn't be handled cooled off. So we sat down in the road and waited. A countryman came along presently, who professed to understand motors and their repairing and we let him do most of the fussing with the tools, though Edwin directed and I occasionally advised. But the threads were gone, and the tube pronounced a bad fit anyhow, so we had to give it up finally and go home without the use of the "silencer", the exhaust blowing out past my left leg, with the concentrated noise of a yard full of express locomotives. Such an infernal din as we made I feel sure the countryside never heard before. People left their supper tables to come out and stare, farm-hands crowded to yard gates, the dogs barked, and cattle scampered across the meadows as we pounded along. And why they didn't arrest us going through Surbiton I don't really know. Edwin had to stop the motor and coast every time a horse came in view, and the effort and anxiety attached to doing this made a very exhausted man of him when we pulled up at the motor shop. We spent a half hour helping the expert take off the water tank and another half hour indicating the extensive repairs to be inaugurated at once; and then we turned toward the Alcock's.

A jollier meal that that supper proved I have seldom had. The night was warm and, wised by our hostess, we three men removed our coats and sat in our shirt-sleeves. This threw an atmosphere of informality over the occasion from the start, and as Lemare and Alcock fairly bubbled with wit and pleasantry and good humor, the fun rapidly grew livelier and yet livelier, to the verge finally almost of indecorum. After coffee in the garden, Alcock offered me a night ride on his motor and nothing daunted by the afternoon's experience, I assented. His machine is a "quad" with the seat in front of the

operator and swung close to the ground. To ride in this position I quickly found was delightful. There was almost no vibration and there was nothing to obstruct the view; furthermore the motor's noise was sufficiently remote to be forgettable. Seated here he whirled me along through the lamp-lighted streets into the cool darkness of the country. I was enjoying to the full the blind rush, the smell of mown grass, and honeysuckle and the star-lit vault overhead; when a loud report was heard and stopping, we discovered that one of the front tires had exploded! (Persons having motor cars should omit to ask me to ride with them.)

Well! we couldn't fix it for the rent would have admitted one's fist, and so as well as we might bumped home on the rim, with the tire flattened out and giving notice of its condition all the way.

Wrote one or two letters, put out the lights and followed Edwin to bed.

EDWARD I. HORSMAN, JR

How did you get started in motorcycling?

Write up your stories and send them. Share your experiences with others. Save those stories for future generations.