

OLD INDIANS NEVER DIE

The 2009 Rally in Scotland

Story and photos by Daniel Peirce





An Indian Chief with a Princess sidecar in front of the Traquair House, which hosted the rally, and a perfect Indian Four on the house grounds (facing page).

So there I was, completely surrounded by Indians. There were easily a hundred of them and more were coming. I knew the only way out was to start shooting.

No, this isn't the beginning of a bad Western novel. I was composing a panoramic photograph of a line of 112 vintage Indian motorcycles at the 2009 Old Indians Never Die Rally. This was an international Indian rally held July 24-26 near Edinburgh, Scotland, and the Indians I was shooting came from far-flung locales like Australia, Denmark, Canada, Germany, Great Britain and of course the Indian's birthplace, the U.S.

The Old Indians Never Die Rally was the brain-child of Indian motorcycle enthusiast and Edinburgh resident Alan Forbes, who also happens to own the U.K. rights to the Indian

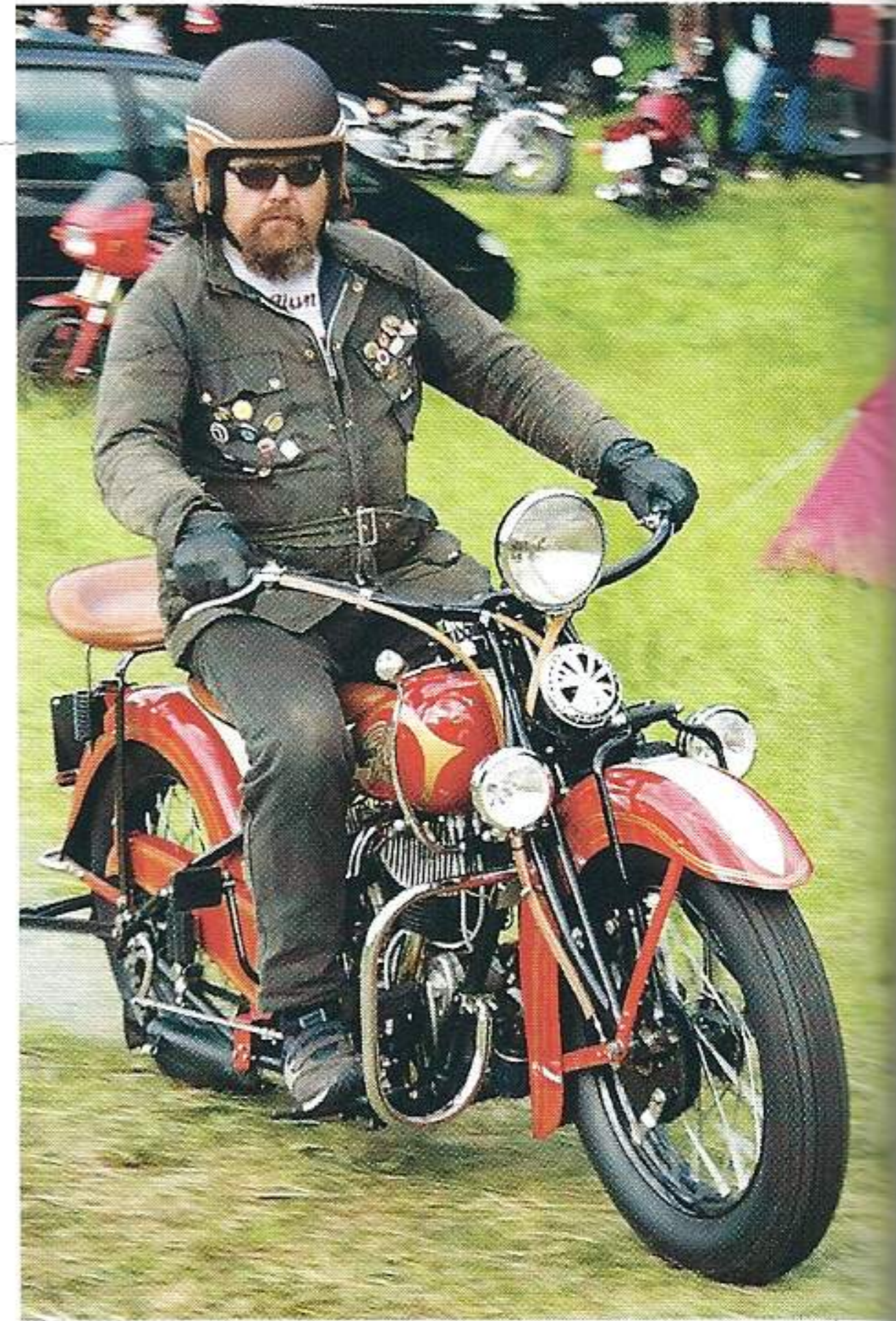
name. This rally was an encore performance of the original Old Indians Never Die Rally held in 1995, the subject of a German film documentary by the same name that became legendary for Indian enthusiasts

around the world. By popular demand, Forbes brought it back for a repeat performance.

Forbes is part international Indian motorcycle expert and part showman, an ideal combination to promote an event like this. From good food and nightly entertainment to providing real teepees for participants to sleep in, he made sure everything was in place to provide a memorable experience. Saturday night's finale was a midnight gathering in a riverside pasture to celebrate the lighting of a giant, flaming Indian logo. Spectacular is a good word for it.



Rally participants lined up with their bikes — all 112 of them — for a panoramic photo (continued on following pages).



Left to right: A group of riders pass through the village of Roslin during a day tour with rally organizer Alan Forbes (Forbes at far right), while another rally-goer makes his way through the camping area at the rally site.

So what was I doing there? I had been invited as the event's official photographer: A chance to go to Scotland and photograph rare Indian motorbikes? How could I pass that up?

On to Scotland

The venue for the rally was the stately and historic Traquair House, a rural estate located about 20 miles south of Edinburgh, in the middle of the green rolling foothills of the Scottish Highlands.

The grounds of the Traquair House have ample fields for camping, and lush, manicured lawns for gathering and entertainment. In one sense, the elegant surroundings seemed perfectly fitting for the revered and celebrated Indian marque. On the other hand, it also clashed in a funny way, with bikers in black leather and their roaring, smoky machines.

Compared to the rustic biker rallies I'm used to attending in the U.S., the Old Indians Never Die Rally had an almost surreal quality to it.

While Friday was generally spent getting settled, the day

tours, or "ride outs," as they were called, were the highlights on Saturday and Sunday. Saturday's ride out was to the Glenkinchie Whisky Distillery, and Sunday's destination was the famous Rosslyn Chapel. You may recall the Rosslyn Chapel as one of the locations featured in the movie *The DaVinci Code*.

Amazingly to me, of the nearly 300 antique Indians that were brought to the rally, the great majority of them actually ran, and run they did — the hills and surrounding villages were full of them. In the nearby village of Peebles, museum-quality Indian motorcycles lined the streets in front



Weekend festivities included the lighting of a huge Indian logo, creating a brilliant silhouette in the evening sky.





Left to right: Australian Peter Birthisel brought his Vindian (Vincent engine in an Indian Chief frame), a faithful copy of the prototype crafted by Vincent and Indian in 1948, and teepees were available for anyone who wanted one.

of every pub. A few hearty motorcyclists even took their machines to brave the city traffic of downtown Edinburgh.

With the exception of brief but inescapable summer showers, the weather was ideal for riding, with mild temperatures and fair skies. The roads were in generally good shape as long as you didn't mind dodging the occasional sheep or waiting your turn to cross a single-lane bridge. Everywhere we traveled the land was clean, green, historic and well worth exploring.

The local folks welcomed the bikers with warm smiles and a genuine interest. Of places I've visited, I'd have to list the people of Scotland as some of the friendliest around. It often seemed like they enjoyed listening to my Texas twang as much as I enjoyed listening to their rich accents.

Speaking the language

International event that it was, it was hardly surprising to hear a wide variety of languages spoken at the rally, with thick accents of French and German mixed with that unmistakable Aussie drawl. Yet regardless of their country of origin, everyone there was fully fluent in the common language of Indian motorcycles. I found I could somehow communicate with almost everyone, even the Canadians!

The Indian Motorcycle Club of Australia was well represented, one of the largest groups to attend. All of their bikes ran, and they arrived a few weeks earlier to tour Ireland before the rally. Among the extraordinary machines the Aussies brought

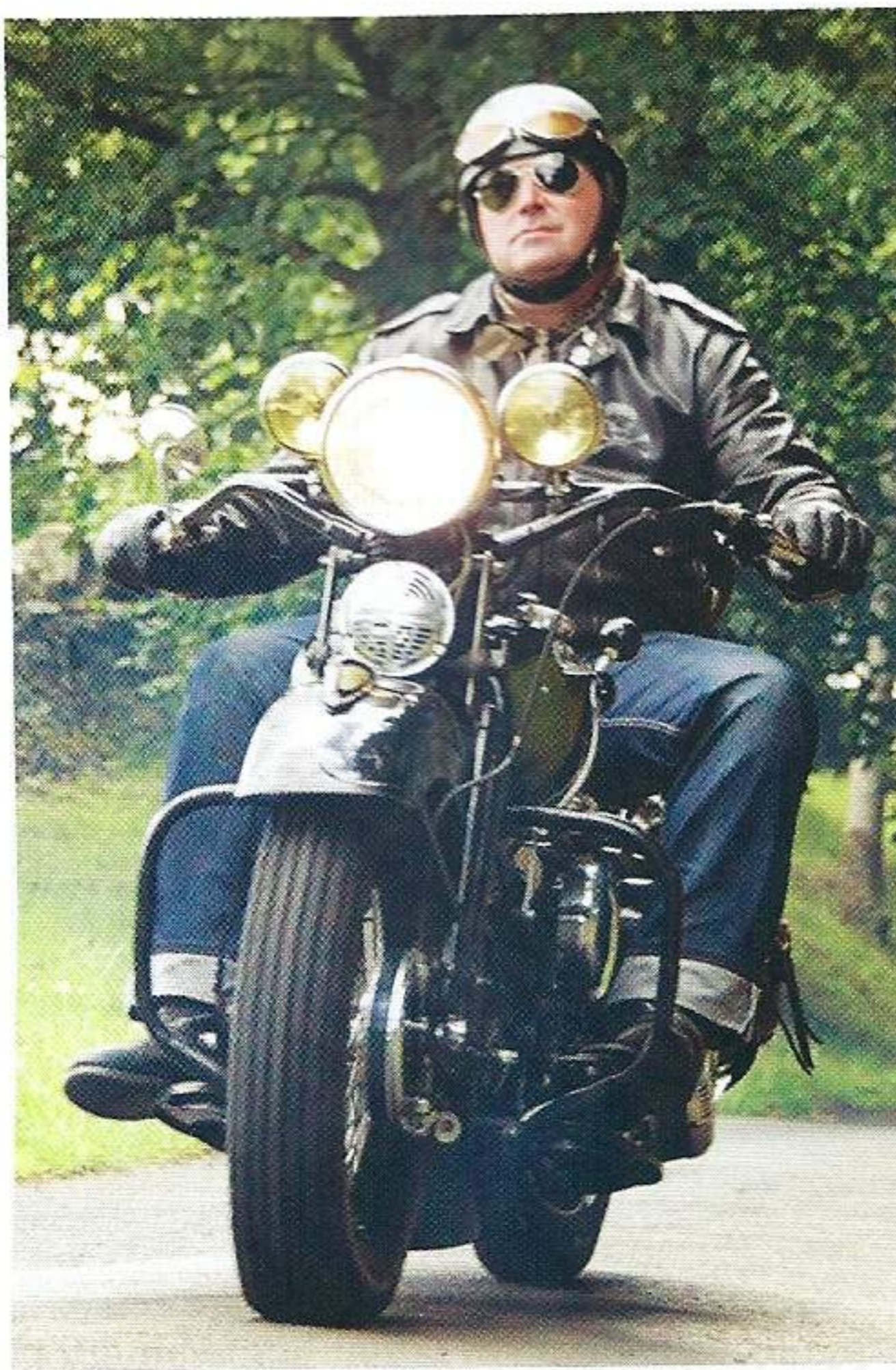


Chromed tank logo on an Indian Four is a lovely touch, even if it's not stock.

was the extra-extraordinary Vindian — a Vincent Rapide engine stuffed into an Indian Chief frame. The unusual bike



Classic cruising was the order of the day during the Old Indians Never Die Rally.



is a recreation of an actual prototype experiment between the Vincent and Indian motorcycle companies in 1948. This Vindian was built in Australia by Peter Birthisel and, according to him, it is as close to the original prototype as you can get.

Indian models at the rally ranged from a 1901 Camelback to a modern Indian Dakota 4. Forbes owns the Indian trademark in the U.K. and has built a modern, fuel-injected version of the inline 4-cylinder Indian motorcycle (see sidebar).

In the end, the rally hosted nearly 450 people, a mixture of participants and curious visitors. A video crew was on hand to produce a follow-up documentary about the second Old Indians Never Die Rally, and they even filmed me as I organized and photographed my once-in-a-lifetime 360-degree panoramic picture of over 100 Indian

motorcycles in a single picture (see more at www.trickphotog.com).
The week after the rally saw Forbes leading a five-day, 540-mile riding tour of the Scottish Highlands. The tour was an added bonus for those who had spent the money to have their bikes shipped to the U.K. Alas, I was unable to go along, but Jim Bagnard, a fellow American who did go, said he felt reborn by the experience. Jim got to ride the tour on one of the prototype Dakota 4 Indians. I can only imagine what it was like to cruise around Loch Ness with a bunch of classic Indians.
Rumor has it that Forbes and his crew are planning to hold yet another international Old Indians Never Die Rally in a few years. However, this next one is to be held in the U.S., on the East or West Coast. Whichever is decided, if you are an Indian enthusiast, I guarantee this will be the event you've been waiting for. *MC*

Resources

Rally Videos
www.MotorcycleClassics.com

Indian Dakota
www.indian-uk.com

Alan Forbes: Chief of the European Indian Scene

Alan Forbes isn't a big player on this side of the Atlantic, but across the way in the U.K. and Europe, he's a major face in the old bike world, especially the old Indian world.

A British-born transplant to Scotland, Forbes' love of the brand was sparked while growing up in England next to an American Air Force base, where he was treated to a steady diet of fried chicken, rock and roll and Indian motorcycles. The rock and roll influence was as strong as the motorcycle influence, as Forbes studied music at Edinburgh College of Art before morphing into Eugene Reynolds, lead singer with late-1970s punk-rock band the Rezillos (later the Revillos).

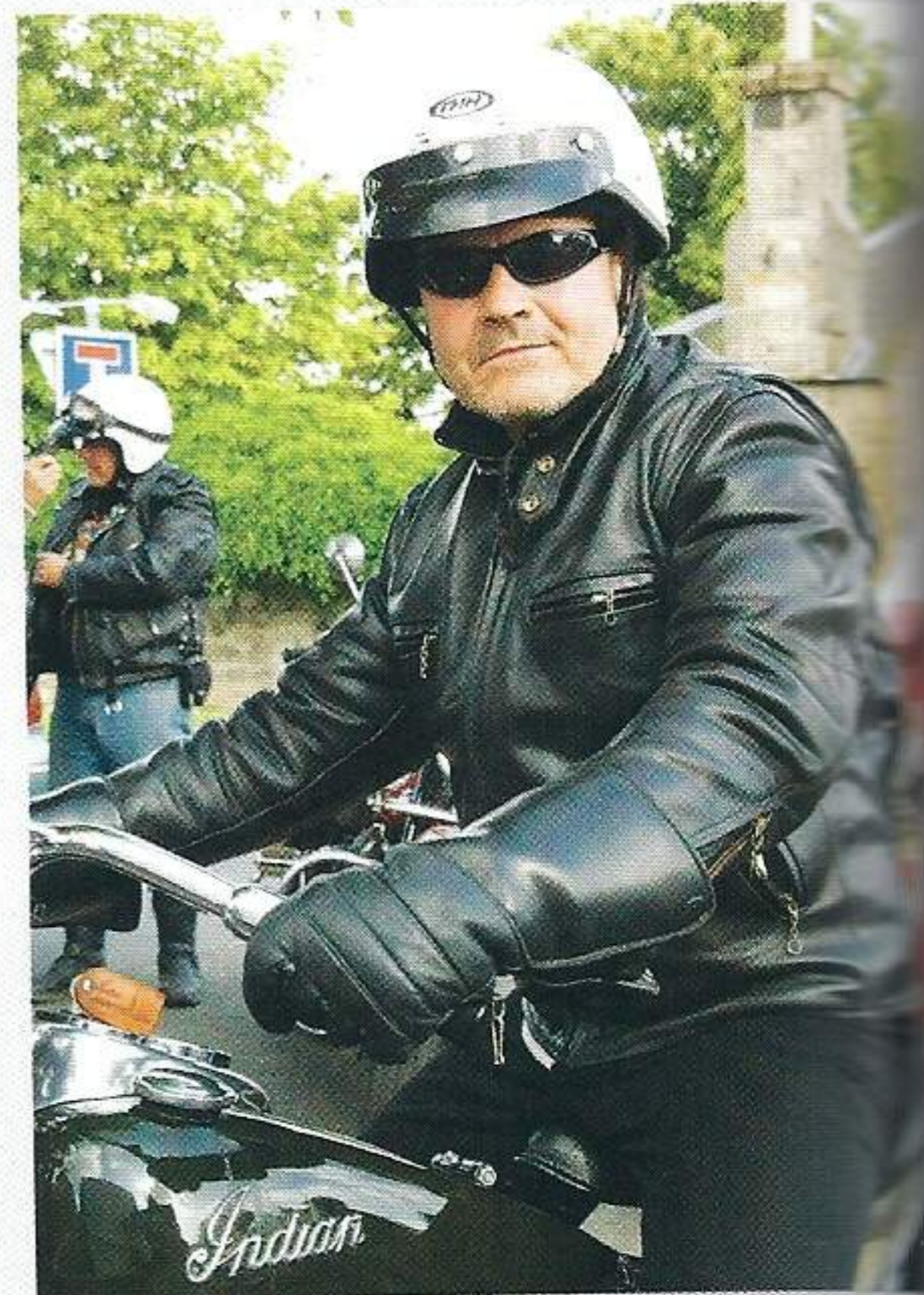
His love of Indians made his music career possible, as he parlayed his enthusiasm for Indians into cash, providing parts and service to other U.K. Indian owners to support his college studies. And while the music industry was apparently good to him, Forbes' passion for Indian

motorcycles never left him. If anything, it just kept growing.

In 1992 he founded Motolux in Edinburgh, a specialty shop selling, servicing and restoring Indians. Around the same time, he acquired the U.K. rights to the Indian name, and a few years later came across Wiking, a Swedish company that had designed a Volvo-based, air-cooled inline four inspired by the Indian fours of the 1930s and 1940s. Forbes acquired rights to the Wiking design, and in 1999 announced the Indian Dakota 4.

The Dakota 4 was a minor sensation when announced, and it looked like Forbes had a winner on his hands. He planned an initial batch of 200 of the shaft-driven, 1,845cc Dakota 4s, with most targeted to U.S. buyers. A few prototypes were built and tested, and reaction to the 720-pound machines was generally favorable. Priced around \$30,000 U.S. (where they would be marketed solely under the Dakota brand; Forbes didn't have rights to the Indian name in the U.S.), they were considered a bargain for what was essentially a hand-built machine.

A U.S. sales office was established in 2001, Dakota Motorcycles USA, but unresolved pro-



Rally organizer Alan Forbes (above) and the promised Dakota 4 (left).

duction issues and other factors stopped the project before it really got off the ground. There's been precious little press on the Dakota 4 in the last few years, although we understand that Forbes is still pressing forward, with hopes to produce the bike in the near future.

— Richard Backus

