

Duesenbergs were grand, but this 1937 model could not save the brand. BY ROBERT C. YEAGER

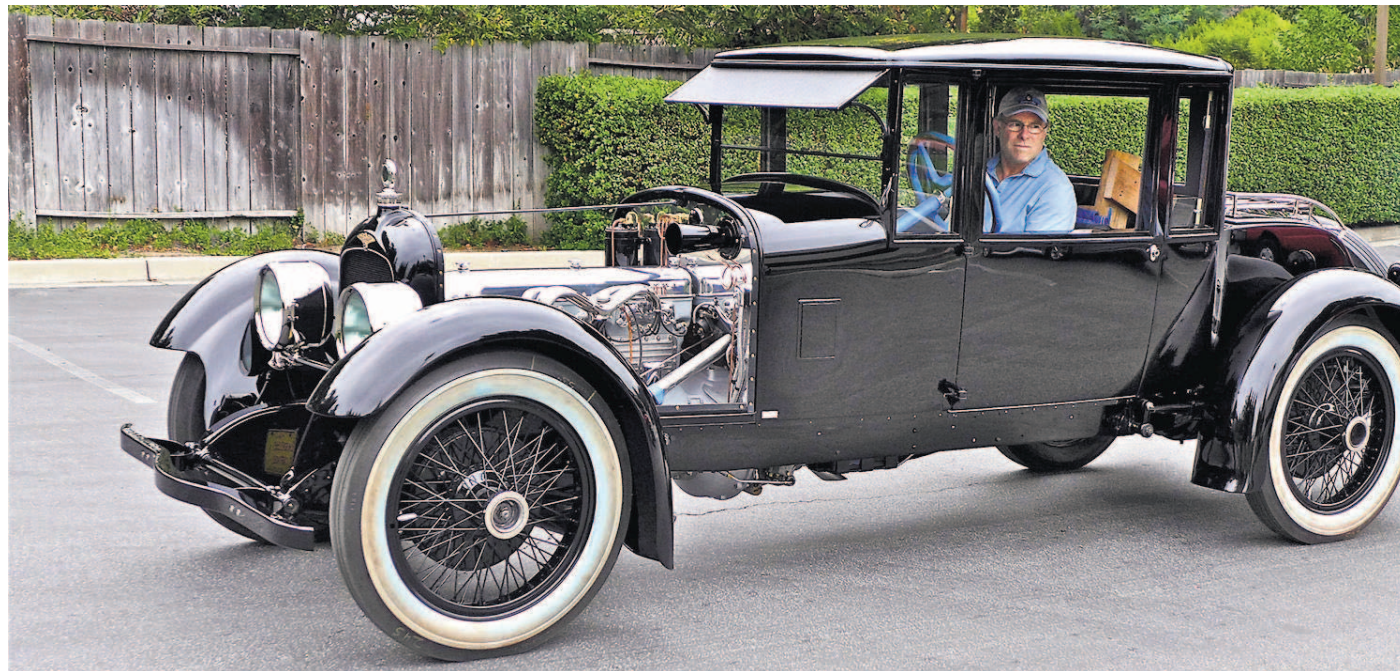


The classic Indian bike makes a throaty comeback. BY JERRY GARRETT

Small cars beat small crossovers in a new crash test. BY CHERYL JENSEN

Automobiles

The New York Times



ROBERT C. YEAGER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

It's a Duesie. The First, in Fact.

By ROBERT C. YEAGER

SCOTTS VALLEY, CALIF. — Nobody would have called the car a beauty. Impossibly high-waisted, cloaked entirely in black, with boxy hips and awkward lines, it stood primly erect on the shop floor, a lonely figure amid seductive shapes.

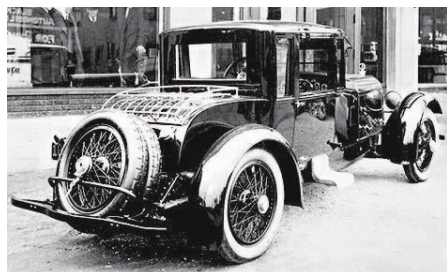
When first approached about restoring it, the shop's owner, Bruce Canepa, hesitated. The métier of his business here — part restoration facility, part racecar works and part collector-car dealership — runs to low-slung Cobras, Corvettes, Porsches and Mercedes Gullwings.

"We've got the expertise, but it's just not our thing," Mr. Canepa protested to the car's owner, a longtime client and fellow racing enthusiast, Jimmy Castle. "Nearly everything we do here is postwar."

Mr. Castle, who lives in Monterey, an hour's drive south, insisted. He wanted Canepa to do the work, and he wanted to keep the project close to home.

Three years and some 10,000 hours of intensive restoration work later, the car, a single-bench-seat Duesenberg Model A coupe, is to make its debut next Sunday at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Élégance on the Monterey Peninsula of California.

The Duesenberg joined the household of the Castles, the missionary and landowning family with major interests in Hawaii, in 1921. Though a prestige model in its early days, it was later pressed into service as a work vehicle in Hawaii. Over the years, the car's upholstery had been gnawed by horses, its wood frame invaded by tropical termites and its aluminum skin etched by the elements. The steel fenders were battered and rusted; original parts were missing or had been haphazardly replaced.



COURTESY OF CANEPA

MAIDEN VOYAGE Top, Bruce Canepa takes the initial drive in the first privately purchased Duesenberg. Above, the same car in 1921.

"She was pretty homely," Mr. Canepa said.

Yet for all its issues, Mr. Canepa realized this was a car like no other. It was, after all, the first privately purchased example of what many consider America's most historically significant automotive brand. It also boasted a singular provenance: the only Duesenberg, according to an authority on the marque, Randy Ema of Orange, Calif., still in the original owners' family.

Before agreeing to take the job, Mr. Canepa polled his crew. "I wanted to make sure our guys, who are used to restoring Le Mans racers, really wanted to work on a 90-year-old Duesenberg."

Most, however, had already grasped that this was more than another elderly automobile. "The more we looked," Mr. Canepa said, "the more everybody just thought it was the coolest thing."

True to the company's racing heritage, the Model A Duesenberg was the first American passenger vehicle equipped with four-wheel hydraulic brakes and an

NEW LIFE FOR AN HEIRLOOM

A video traces the restoration of a Duesenberg owned by the same family since new.

nytimes.com/autos

overhead cam in-line 8-cylinder engine. In another sign of the maker's competition past, the Castle car was fitted with full-length steel belly pans.

Typical of the era, the Castle coupe, car No. 601 in the factory's record, was produced as a running chassis without a body. At a time when a Ford Model T roadster cost less than \$400, a Model A Duesenberg's price tag, including a coachbuilt body, could easily exceed \$7,000, Mr. Ema said.

The coupe's aluminum-skin body used an ash frame. "Everybody we talked to about restoring that frame said, 'We'll just scan it and make a new one,'" Mr. Canepa said. "We said, 'No thanks.'"

"Today, the whole restoration philosophy is about preserving as much original content as possible," he said. "From Day 1, that was our objective."

Mr. Canepa turned to a local master woodworker, Charles Pyle, a specialist in Craftsman furniture and fastener-free joinery. Mr. Pyle took apart the frame, removing hundreds of tacks and nails and replacing rotted sections with new wood. For strength, the structure was infused with epoxy. Period-correct hide glue, made from boiled hooves, horns and animal skin, was used for final assembly.

Though Mr. Pyle's work was done mostly with the same types of hand tools used almost a century earlier, there were exceptions, including a vacuum he designed to draw the epoxy into the wood. The

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BEHIND THE WHEEL | BMW 6 SERIES GRAN COUPE

A Coupelike Sedan Suitable for Caligula

By JOHN PEARLEY HUFFMAN

SANTA BARBARA, CALIF. — It's the screwiest name on any new car, a name that seems swiped from the mid-1970s heyday of the Ford Gran Torino Brougham, the Dodge Royal Monaco Brougham and the Oldsmobile Delta 88 Royale Brougham.

More shocking, it's on a BMW; a company generally known for rationality. But there the name is, discretely appearing in chrome in the quarter windows of each rear door: Gran Coupe.

There's plenty of space to add "Brougham," and BMW should. At \$111,995, the as-tested price of a 650i Gran Coupe, it darn well ought to be a Brougham.

The Gran Coupe is an extension of BMW's long-standing 6 Series line of two-door coupes and convertibles. But it's really not a coupe at all — rather, it's its own four-door thing. The front sheet metal is carried over from the 6 Series coupe, but the wheelbase is stretched more than four inches, to 116.9 inches. That, incidentally, is the same wheelbase as the 5 Series sedan with which the 6 Series shares most of its structure, chassis, suspension and drivetrain components.

The Gran Coupe is BMW's tardy response to the low-slung Mercedes CLS and the handsome Audi A7, both squashed four-doors styled with lower roofs and radically raked windshields. Underneath, these Germans don't differ much from their makers' more conservative, more conventionally proportioned sedans. But the styling influence of the CLS is also apparent in mainstream sedans like the Kia Optima, Ford



Fusion and Toyota Avalon.

In the United States, the Gran Coupe is offered as a 640i with a 315-horsepower twin-turbocharged 3-liter straight 6, as a 650i with a 445-horsepower twin-turbo 4.4-liter V-8 or as an M6 with a version of that twin-turbo V-8 fortified to produce 560 horsepower. All-wheel drive is optional on the 640i and 650i.

My 650i test car had the M Sport package, a giant glass roof and other options that knocked the sticker up from the \$87,395 base price for the 2013 model.

But while the CLS and A7 are merely sexy, the Gran Coupe is as decadent as red satin sheets on a giant round bed under a mirrored ceiling. The Mercedes and Audi try to seduce you, but this fantastic looking BMW is ready for a weekend at Caligula's. It is, by far, the most exuberantly and boisterously styled car in BMW showrooms today.

The Gran Coupe is 2.8 inches lower than its sibling 550i sedan. So getting into the car is best done by putting your rump on the seat first and then jackknifing your body a bit to duck under the roof. Depending the length of your legs, the swivel into a perfectly shaped seat can either be graceful or a slam of your Allen Edmonds cap-toe oxfords into the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



PHOTOGRAPHS BY BMW OF NORTH AMERICA

NAME GAME An extension of the 6 Series line, the Gran Coupe is not a coupe.

It's a Duesie. The First One, in Fact.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

frame restoration required almost a year and a half.

Rebuilding the engine was no simpler. The job went to Ed Pink Racing Engines in Van Nuys, Calif. "We've done quite a few World War I-era projects," said Frank Honsowetz, Pink's general manager. "But the Duesenberg was a quantum leap more advanced."

Unlike modern cars, whose camshafts are turned by belts or chains, the Duesenberg's was driven by a geared vertical shaft at the front of the engine. With the existing gears badly worn and new parts unavailable, replacements were machined from solid stock, a task that took eight months.

Other work included replacing the brass carburetor, refurbishing the camshaft and connecting rods, fabricating finned-aluminum side covers and recoating the engine in its correct shade of gray enamel.

In 1928, when Duesenberg introduced the Model J, the Castle car was shipped back to Indianapolis for updating. Wheels and hubs, brakes, bumpers, steering, head lamps — even the trunk's spare tire spindle — were replaced with Model J parts.

"That just meant more work," Mr. Canepa said. "Our job was to deliver the car as new."

Entrusted with day-to-day oversight of the restoration was Dave Stoltz, a fabricator and machinist at the shop. Like Mr. Canepa, he is a former dirt-track racer who had never restored a car of this vintage but whose hands, his boss knew, could shape anything from metal.

The four known photographs of the car in its original condition were taped above his workbench. Mr. Stoltz devoted hours to research, and he reached out to experts like Mr. Ema, the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Automobile Museum in Auburn, Ind., and other specialists. "I'd love to claim I did everything myself," he said, "but I've had many helpers."

One who pitched in might easily have been a competitor. By coincidence, Arnold Schmidt was restoring the second purchased Duesenberg in Valencia, Calif., 300 miles south of the Canepa shop. Mr. Schmidt helped Mr. Stoltz complete the coupe's steering assembly; when Mr. Schmidt needed to find where a fuel filter



ROBERT C. YEAGER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



CHARLES PYLE



ROBERT C. YEAGER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

STAGES Clockwise from top, Dave Stoltz, lead fabricator for project, with the photos he used as reference; the replacement steering wheel; rotted wood body framing took over a year to restore.

belonged, Mr. Stoltz returned the favor with a photograph he had found in his research.

Stumped for the coupe's original spotlight, Mr. Stoltz found an identical piece on a Pierce-Arrow in a museum. Armed with a digital camera, tape measure, cardboard and scissors, he drew plans and fashioned a template. A British restoration company made a housing from his drawings, and Mr. Stoltz machined the light's hardware to produce a perfect match — and followed up by creating new mounting stands for the headlights using old photos.

Mostly, however, original parts were painstakingly renewed. Rather than replace the car's fenders, for example, Mr. Stoltz repaired rusted areas with fresh steel, seamlessly welding old and new metal together. Original nuts, bolts, washers

and other hardware were sorted into piles, labeled and soaked in penetrating oil.

Early this year, some in the cliquish world of classic autos suggested that Canepa's team might be in over its head.

Mr. Stoltz was unfazed. "I love thrashing on it," he said with a flinty grin. "Especially when somebody says you can't do it."

Mr. Canepa assigned Mr. Stoltz a crew of helpers and put the job on 12-hour shifts. By late June, the most elusive pieces, including an original brake light (found on the Internet) and the correct wool pin-stripe upholstery, were in hand.

On July 3, the crew flipped on the ignition and, for the first time since the late 1960s, the coupe's engine sprang to life.

"Just think," Mr. Canepa said with a smile. "When we started this project a lot of us couldn't even spell Duesenberg."

The No. 2 Duesenberg Is Also Pebble-Bound

By ROBERT C. YEAGER

"WE HEARD THERE WAS an early Model A Duesenberg for sale in Jefferson City," Arnold Schmidt of Valencia, Calif., recalled. "So on a whim and a prayer, in 2007 Mike Hogan and I drove to Missouri to try and buy it."

When the door of Stuart Exon's garage swung open, they knew the trip had been worth it. Peering into what Dr. Exon, a retired surgeon, called his lion's den, they saw the Duesenberg company's second-ever privately sold passenger vehicle — and its first dual-cowl phaeton, an open-top twin windshield design.

"It was a lot of bare aluminum and rust," Mr. Schmidt said of the car, which Dr. Exon had bought for \$20,000 in 1972.

After buying the vehicle for \$90,000 for Ron and Sandra Hansen of Fillmore, Calif., Mr. Schmidt embarked on one of the most difficult restorations of his 37-year career. Among the biggest challenges: replacing rotted lower sections of the wood frame and interior body structure and salvaging the car's original steel cowl, hood and fenders.

Despite the car's sophisticated chassis and running gear, some of the coachwork, by Fleetwood Metal Body in Pennsylvania, could only be called crude, Mr. Schmidt said. For example, rather than finishing steel fender edges by rolling a smooth bead, flat bars were spot-welded along the edges, then the gaps simply filled with lead.

As a result, repairs required peeling back the metal along each fender opening, replacing areas of rust, reforming the piece's shape, and — without using fillers, a no-no in restoration — meticulously hand-filing the edges back to their original contours.

"The process took our metal man, Bob Foresee, up to three months per fender," Mr. Schmidt said. "We could have made replicas in two weeks."

Throughout the six-year project, Mr. Schmidt consulted



ROBERT C. YEAGER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

RUNNER-UP Arnold Schmidt with the second Duesenberg.

with Randy Ema, a Duesenberg authority in Orange, Calif. Mr. Ema's shrinelike restoration shop, unmarked by any exterior sign, contains 28,000 original linen-and-ink drawings from the Duesenberg factory, as well as thousands of parts and patterns. There are also photographic negatives, official company records and correspondence.

Mr. Ema's trove of factory plans proved invaluable when restoring the dual windshields — it turned out they had been shortened by three inches. Similarly, Mr. Schmidt learned that the wood originally used in the steering wheel was black walnut, not Honduras mahogany as he'd thought.

He made two correct replacements, the second wheel going north to the shop in Scotts Valley, Calif., where the first privately sold Duesenberg, whose wheel had been upgraded to a Model J spec, was being restored.

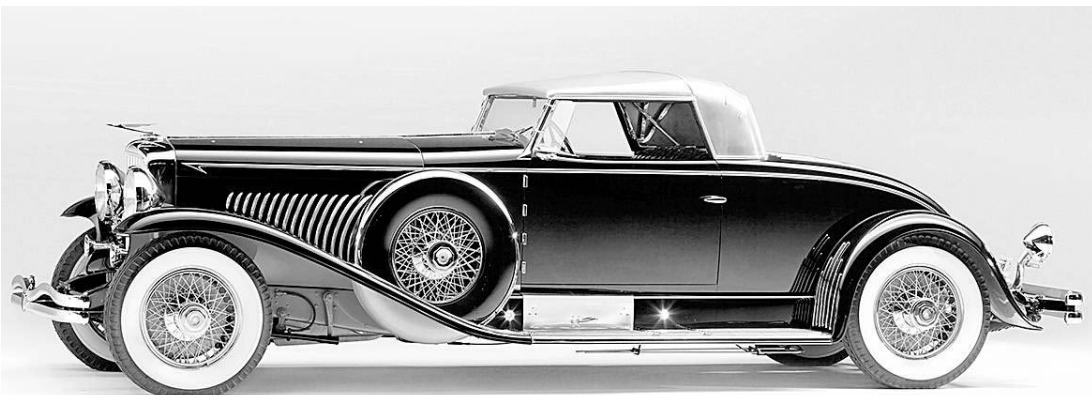
Designated No. 603, the Hansen Duesenberg was delivered to its first owner in 1922. In 1947 it was bought by Fred Huttleson of Sacramento, Calif., for \$212. On occasion, Mr. Huttleson's sons drove the car to high school.

Despite its rough appearance, the car "fired right up" in Dr. Exon's garage, Mr. Schmidt said. An estimated 10,000 to 12,000 hours have gone into the restoration of the cream-color vehicle, at a cost of "well over \$1 million," Mr. Schmidt said.

CORRECTION

Because of an editing error, a report in a roundup of Wheels blog posts last Sunday about Ferrari coupes modified into convertibles misstated a sales estimate by David Gooding, president of the Gooding & Company auction house. He said the modified car to be offered at a Russo & Steele auction might sell for 20 percent of the price of an authentic convertible; he did not say the modified car would sell for 20 percent less than a factory-built convertible.

COLLECTING



PHOTOGRAPHS BY GOODING & COMPANY

The American Standard-Setter

By ROBERT C. YEAGER

“With its DNA in motorsports, its advanced engineering and coach-builders like Rollston, LeBaron and Murphy, Duesenberg was the most impressive and important American car of its era,” said Sandra Button, chairman of America’s premier automotive judged competition, the Pebble Beach Concours d’Élégance.

Duesenbergs have made more trips up the ramp to accept Pebble’s Best of Show award than any American marque. Indeed, Duesenbergs are regarded as so superior to their domestic peers that, out of fairness, they compete in their own class, Ms. Button said, adding that among European cars, only Mercedes-Benz and Rolls-Royce share this distinction.

In 2011, a 1931 Duesenberg Model J known as the Whittell Coupe brought \$10.3 million at Gooding & Company’s Pebble Beach sale — at the time, the most expensive American car ever sold at auction.

“In looks, sportiness and speed, nothing could compare to a Duesenberg,” said Randy Ema, an authority on Duesenbergs based in Orange, Calif.

With its throaty roar, the Model A could cruise comfortably at 70 to 80 miles per hour, its engine with a single overhead camshaft spinning smoothly at 4,000 r.p.m., Mr. Ema said. A comparable Packard of the era was lucky to make 60 m.p.h. and 2,200 r.p.m.

Born in Germany, Fred and Augie Duesenberg came to America with their widowed mother in 1885 and grew up in



STARS Standouts among Duesenberg models include a 1931 Model J, known as the Whittell Coupe, and Clark Gable’s Model 1935 JN Convertible Coupe.

Iowa. Fascinated by farm machinery as boys, by the turn of the century they were racing bicycles and tinkering with internal-combustion engines.

Backed by a Des Moines financier, the brothers got involved with racing cars. In 1914 Eddie Rickenbacker drove a Duesenberg Special to 10th place at the Indianapolis 500, and the brand went on to become Indy’s first three-time champion. In 1921, a Duesenberg won the French Grand Prix.

As Duesenbergs racked up racing victories, the rich and famous flocked to the company’s passenger cars. Clark Gable, who was married at the time, scandalously squired Carole Lombard around Hollywood in his cream-colored Model J. Tom Mix, Gary Cooper and King Alfonso XIII of Spain all owned Duesenbergs. Jay Leno owns several.

At first boastful — “built to outclass, outrun and outlast any car on the road,” the tagline said — later Duesenberg ads became snobbishly discreet. “He drives a Duesenberg,” advertising copy for the Model J read. Accompanying illustrations pictured Gatsby-like models, often clad in formal evening or hunting attire.

Some 650 A models were built before giving way to the Model J in 1928, according to Mr. Ema. During World War II, A models were frequently scrapped for their aluminum. Mr. Ema estimates that only about 40 complete cars survive today.

The Depression took its toll. E. L. Cord acquired the company in 1926, although Fred Duesenberg continued as chief engineer until his death in 1932. In 1937, Duesenberg collapsed with the rest of the Auburn Cord Duesenberg corporate entity.

The Wheels Blog



INSURANCE INSTITUTE FOR HIGHWAY SAFETY

BUG CRUSH The 2013 VW Beetle received a Marginal rating in the new test.

Insurance Group Rates Small Cars in Crash Test

Half of small cars evaluated by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety in its new severe small-overlap front crash test received a passing grade, the group announced on Thursday, generally outperforming the compact crossovers and S.U.V.’s that were tested earlier.

Six of the 12 small cars tested received a Good or Acceptable rating as well as the group’s highest designation, Top Safety Pick+.

The two-door and four-door Honda Civics earned the top rating of Good. (The Civic results had been announced in March.) Earning the Acceptable rating were the Dodge Dart, Ford Focus, Hyundai Elantra and Scion tC. The Chevrolet Cruze and Sonic and the Volkswagen Beetle were rated Marginal.

The Kia Soul, Kia Forte and Nissan Sentra received the lowest rating of Poor.

The Scion tC and Kia Forte are 2014 models; the others are 2013s. The group, which is financed by the insurance industry, said it had not tested the Toyota Corolla with this group because a redesigned model would come out this month.

The new small-overlap test is intended to replicate what happens when the front corner of a vehicle hits another vehicle or an

object like a tree. In the test, 25 percent of the car’s front on the driver’s side collides with a five-foot-tall rigid barrier at 40 miles per hour. Because the edge of the vehicle hits the barrier, it misses the main crush-zone structures built into the middle of the vehicle that would reduce crash forces on the passenger compartment.

CHERYL JENSEN



VOLKSWAGEN OF AMERICA

VW’s new diesel will arrive in 2014.

Volkswagen Reveals Cleaner Diesel Engine

Volkswagen, which has been one of the few automakers to consistently offer diesel-power passenger cars in the United States over the last several decades, has announced a new line of diesel engines.

Volkswagen said its EA288 TDI Clean Diesel engine would be available in the 2015 Golf, Beetle, Passat and Jetta models, which are scheduled to go on sale in the United States during the second half of 2014.

Volkswagen said in a news release that the new diesel would eventually replace the current generation of 2-liter TDI engines offered in some VW and Audi models. At 150 horsepower, the new engine gets a 10-horsepower increase over the version being phased out, and aside from similar

bore spacing, will be completely different. VW did not release displacement or fuel mileage numbers. BENJAMIN PRESTON

Some Quick Runs In the New Indian Bikes

The latest attempt to revive the Indian motorcycle brand was unveiled recently in Sturgis, S.D., where the annual biker rally was under way.

The Indian Motorcycle lineup, created by Polaris Industries after it acquired the rights to Indian two years ago, consists of three models that cost about \$20,000 to \$23,000: the Chief Classic, the Chief Vintage and the Chieftain.

In a sneak preview near the company’s headquarters outside Minneapolis, I had a chance to test the bikes. I will reserve final judgment until I’ve spent more time on the bikes, but my initial impressions are favorable.

The motorcycles feature the requisite gobs of chrome, lavishly sculptured parts and voluptuous lines, with Polaris managing to walk the fine styling line between character and caricature.

The beating heart of all three bikes is the new Thunder Stroke 111 engine. “It is a 49-degree, air-cooled V-twin with 6-speed overdrive transmission,” Gary Gray, Indian’s product director, said in an interview. “It produces 119 foot-



INDIAN MOTORCYCLES

The Chief Classic.

pounds of torque, and it will fly.”

The engine delivers substantial bursts of power when prompted in any gear. The exhaust notes are deftly tuned to deliver optimum, but not deafening, amounts of burble and howl — critical aural components of any cruiser-style motorcycle aspiring to compete for the Harley-Davidson crowd.

JERRY GARRETT

ONLINE: WHEELS

► Highlights from *Wheels*, the *Automobiles* blog, which is updated each weekday. To read more and to submit a comment for publication: nytimes.com/wheels