

Oscar Lee Chapman's 1940-something Indian Motorcycle – John Slusser Sr.



Yeah! It looked about like this one...maybe not this good, though.

When I was about 14 or 15, I used to ride my bicycle all over the country and one of the places I would go, on occasion, was over to Oscar's. The Chapmans lived about three quarters of a mile east as the crow flies, but by road it was closer to a mile and a half, maybe a bit more.

From somewhere, Oscar had acquired an old Indian motorcycle and it was already worn out by the time he got it and he spent untold hours working on it. One time I rode over there to see what was going on and he was in the garage working on it and having a very hard time. The old carbureator on the thing had sticking float and shortly after he'd get it running, it would flood out. He was using some very "colorful" language every time it did it and I remember very clearly how his mom, Dessie, would shout from the house to the garage "OSCAR LEE CHAPMAN, YOU STOP USING THAT FOUL LANGUAGE!" He must have been about 17 by that time and he wasn't paying much attention to her and her threats.

Anyway, I said maybe we could make a float out of an old fishing bobber. He found one and carved one out and managed to get it to function somewhat. Seems like it was held on to the float arm with a piece of wire, probably not the best method. But, after all, we were in a 1950's farmers shed and there weren't many odds and ends to use for such a task. You know, barbed wire and binder twine will only go so far. I don't remember if there were any other issues with trying to use a piece of cork, but after a few attempts, it seemed to work.

So, Oscar got it running and it would continue to run long enough so he took it down the road a ways and turned around and came back. There was only one problem. If you closed the throttle all the way, the engine would quit and he didn't have whatever was needed to fix it. When he turned it around, it died and he had to kick start it to get it going again.

Pretty soon he says "Hey, John, you had the idea that got it running, do you want to take it for a ride?" Well, heck yes I did! It was the very first time I had ridden anything bigger than Carson Brandenburg's "Servicycle"...a small motorbike that was used in WW1 and WW2 by the military. Oh yeah, that's another story. I think I was about 10 or 11 when I rode that one, so, I thought I could ride anything.

Oscar says "Now, you gotta' be careful not to let the throttle all the way back 'cause it'll die. You think you can kick start it?" I didn't know, but I tried to start it and I just didn't have enough lead in my butt to get it started. It need a pretty healthy kick to get the motor to turn over fast enough to fire. However, I really wanted wanted to ride it in the worst way. And, oh yeah, I forgot to tell you that the clutch wouldn't completely disengage either.

He started it and I got on it and took off like I knew what I was doing. The road went backand forth, west and north until I came out to what is now Stutesman's road. In those days, it wasn't Stutesman's because it didn't go through past their place. And it sure wasn't 400th Road either. Anyway, I turned west and headed up the rise towards Simpsons saying to myself, "How in the heck am I gonna' get this thing turned around without killing it?"

"I know!", I thought, "I'll turn into the Simpson's and make it around in their big barn lot, a big open area between the house, garage, grainery and their big barn." I managed to get it herded in to their driveway and into the barn lot.

Now, I have a real problem. There wasn't enough room room for me to get it turned around without stopping. There was a grain wagon and their John Deere and whatever else in the way. "Wait!", I'm thinking, "I'll go between the grain wagon and the grainery and that should give me a good shot a making a wide turn!" Guess what? When I turned between the wagon and the grainery, there was a plow setting there! I lifted my legs, probably closed my eyes and I missed it. By the time I got through there, it was time to turn and I HAD to turn or run right into the west end of the barn! When I turned the handlebars, the back wheel slid a bit and when it jerked, it made my hand twist the throttle a bit and it spun the back wheel and straightened right out. "WHEW!". How lucky was that?

The rest of the trip was uneventful. I safely made it back to Oscar's and shut it off. He said, "How'd it go?". I just said it was OK and let it go at that. I was thinking that I might want to ride it again someday....AFTER it was fixed. I didn't feel the need to tell hm what had happened. Plus, it was good that nobody was home at the Simpson's. I'd have been embarrassed, for sure!