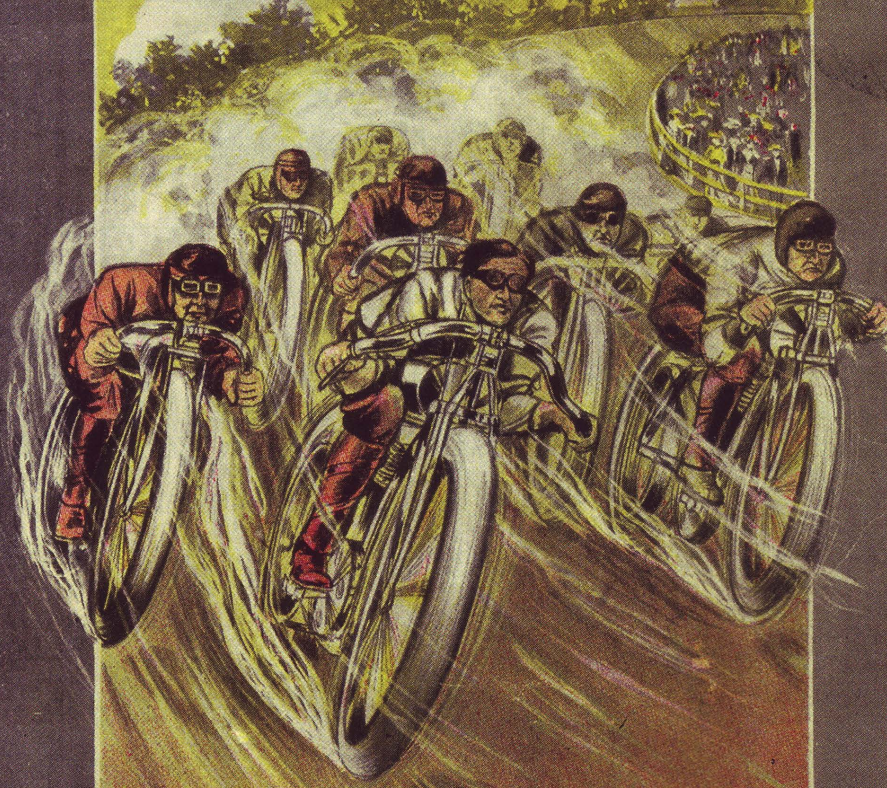


1909

# NATIONAL MOTORCYCLE RACE MEET



OPENING OF THE FAMOUS  
INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY  
AUGUST 13-14 1909

INDIANAPOLIS  
ENGLISCH

OFFICIAL PROGRAM 10¢

# 1909

## The Great Motorcycle Invasion

STORY BY: Mark Dill

On Aug. 1, 1909 The Indianapolis Star predicted thousands of motorcyclists would soon "invade Indianapolis." In a week capped by a turbulent motorcycle meet to open the Indianapolis Motor Speedway to motorized competition, the city hosted the annual convention of America's top governing body of motorcyclists, a parade and the finish of a 388-mile endurance run. While expectations were high, growing pains soon became apparent.

Hundreds of motorcyclists streamed into Indianapolis from points all around the country the week of Aug. 8, 1909. They were greeted by a city draped in gala attire. Streamers and flags stretched across all the major intersections of downtown

### A FIRST

The official program for the 1909 motorcycle races proudly proclaims "Opening of the Famous Indianapolis Motor Speedway."

Indianapolis. Most of its buildings were draped in red, white and blue bunting.

More than sanctioning the first motorcycle race meet at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway;

the Federation of American Motorcyclists (FAM) planned its annual convention in the city. Big elections were scheduled and prominent Indianapolis motorcyclists like Charles Wyatt, president of the Indiana Motorcycle Club, were in the running for national offices.

None of this was taken lightly by city leaders. The relocation of FAM offices to Indianapolis meant prestige and, more importantly, another platform for economic growth.

The Indiana Motorcycle Club was founded by Wyatt and a handful of friends at his home on Lexington Ave. in October 1907 when there were barely 50 motorcycles in the city. The club, with its new headquarters at 444 W. Vermont St., had ridden a groundswell of interest as motorcycle ownership surged in the following two years.

New motorcycle dealerships sprouted up. The G.H. Westing Company at 219 Massachusetts Ave. sold Indian motorcycles for \$175. Hearsey-Willis Company at 113 W. Market St. sold Excelsiors for \$225 and Yales for \$200. Much was riding on the success of FAM's visit to Indianapolis, and the city was prepared.

Less so was its new wonder, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. Its irrepressible president, Carl Fisher, threw

his inexhaustible energy at completing an almost impossible task: establishing a world-class speedway from undeveloped land in four months.

An activist for the development of the American automobile industry, Fisher was convinced auto manufacturers needed a giant testing facility. In December 1908, Fisher and three business partners purchased 320 acres of farmland five miles outside Indianapolis. The Indianapolis Motor Speedway was not incorporated until March 20, 1909 and development of the land did not start until the end of that month.

By July 1, Fisher was sweating out the possibility of failing to have the track ready for the contracted FAM motorcycle meet beginning August 13. For the indomitable Speedway president, that was unacceptable.

Most of the facility was ready, including 41 buildings, among them garages, machine shops and grandstands, as well as 3,000 hitching posts for fans arriving by horse. Engineering a solution to a creek running under the southwest corner of the track created big delays. Further, smoothing a running surface of 90,000 cubic yards of three types of stone from 18 different suppliers from around the country was time-consuming work. Despite a crew of 450 men, 300 mules, four 6-ton rollers and three 10-ton rollers, the task was painstakingly slow.

Fisher refused to back down. He ordered a night shift of men hired so the project could run around



## ON TRACK

Motorcycle riders from around the nation line up for the start of the first motorized competition at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.

JMS Photo

the clock. Utilizing gas lines installed for the inflation of passenger air balloons for a June 5 event, he illuminated the construction areas. This was augmented by 100 Prest-O-Lite burners, the highly profitable product of a business he and partner James Allison owned. Bright-burning acetylene gas emitted a flame used in their car headlight product which was the forerunner to electric headlights.

The first major event of the week was an endurance run originating from Cleveland, Ohio at 6 a.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 10. The Indianapolis Overland Automobile Company's "official" escort car paced 96 riders as they confronted a passage along 388 miles of roads ranging in quality from fair to nonexistent.

About 12 hours later, 76 survivors arrived at the end of the first leg of their journey to spend the night in Columbus, Ohio. Along the way the hearty riders were greeted by farmers who had driven wagonloads of people to park under shade trees and wave them on. Others placed chairs in front of their homes and children ran alongside the roads waving flags.

This enthusiasm paled in comparison to their greeting the following day in front of the Denison Hotel at the corner of Ohio and Pennsylvania Streets in Indianapolis. East Ohio Street outside the Denison was packed with spectators as 64 dusty survivors, some running full-tilt to check-in with FAM

officials before the 6:30 p.m. deadline, dodged those foolish enough to try to grab them.

The next day, Thursday, Aug. 12, offered a jam-packed agenda. At 1 p.m., 200 motorcyclists posed for a photograph in front of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument before embarking on a parade of their machines throughout the city. A train ride took others to Kokomo, Ind. as guests of a rubber company, and many competitors tuned their machines at the Speedway. That evening FAM officials and competitors were treated to a vaudeville show and banquet at the German House.

The events at the Speedway produced controversy. The giant track was imposing to riders accustomed to compact wooden velodromes and the hard-packed sands of beach shores. The rough crushed stone surface of the Speedway made their experience terrifying.

The lightweight five to seven horsepower machines exceeded 65 mph and bounced over the rough surface. With narrow tires, they looked more like ordinary bicycles than today's motorcycles. The loose, piercingly-sharp stones shifted under the thin, narrow tires as the riders leaned into the turns.

On Thursday night, the eve of the scheduled race meet, FAM officials met to discuss the suitability of the new speedway. Many suggested a last-minute shift of the program to the Indiana State Fairgrounds.

An angry Carl Fisher asserted that, "the Speedway will positively be in finished condition and ready for record time." FAM president Earle Ovington ruled in favor of the Speedway late Thursday night.

The Speedway's first motor competition fell victim to rain as race day morning revealed an unsuitably wet track. The two-day meet was rescheduled from Friday and Saturday to Saturday and Monday.

Despite the trepidation of many of the competitors, there was plenty of excitement. Indisputably, the two top stars of the entry list were Jake DeRosier, frequently hailed in the newspapers as the "world champion," and Ed Lingenfelder, the top west coast rider. Among the amateurs, Stanley Kellogg had a long list of accomplishments. A sterling field of manufacturers included Indian, Excelsior, Harley-Davidson, Peugeot, N.S.U., Merkel and Thor.

Locals held high hopes for Indian rider Erwin Baker of Indianapolis, who later earned the nickname "Cannonball," for his daring endurance runs. Baker had dominated a meet in Troy, Ohio on July 31, winning three of five races and finishing second in the other two.

Saturday was hot and clear and 8,000 spectators gathered at the new speedway to witness what had been billed as a series of record-breaking events. On that score they would be disappointed, as not one record fell.

The competitors were spooked by the rough track with its tire-piercing rocks. Some of the riders refused to answer the call as the first of eight planned events assembled at 2 p.m. The race was a five-mile handicap for private entrants. Seven men entered with the faster riders leading

## THE INDIAN

Looking like not much more than a modern-day bicycle, this fire-engine red 1909 Indian is housed in the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame Museum. Fred Huyck claimed three victories, and "Cannonball" Baker won the last race of the event, all on Indians.



slower ones by several seconds. A.G. Chapple won with a time of 4 minutes, 53.2 seconds. Indian motorcycles of Springfield, Mass. swept the first three finishing positions.

The second event was a mile race for amateurs riding bikes with engines of less than 61 cubic inches of displacement. It started on the backstretch with the signal issued by telephone. It finished in front of the frontstretch grandstands with Indian rider Fred Huyck winning over favored Stanley Kellogg of the Merkel team.

After the race, J.A. Turner stopped his bike at the judge's stand saying he represented the concerns of many others in announcing that he was afraid to enter more races. Kellogg simply refused to go on. Some of the FAM officials called their riders "yellow."

The third and fourth races were five miles each. The first of the two was limited to members of the Indiana Motorcycle Club and was won by Paul Kottowski riding a Minneapolis bike. His time was 5 minutes, 17 seconds. The other five-mile run was for machines with less than 55 cubic-inch capacity and was won by Huyck, who beat Chapple to the line by little more than the length of his bike.

The fifth event was a 10-mile race for professionals, but initially all the riders refused. Fisher and the FAM officials convinced the two biggest names in the sport, Ed Lingenfelder of Alhambra, Calif. and the top Indian rider, DeRosier, to stage a match race.

Fisher and his director of contests, Ernie Moross, announced the event as a battle between the champion of the east, DeRosier, and the champion of the west, Lingenfelder.



Courtesy of the Legend Publishing Company as seen in *KID: Racing Before the 500*

## HAVING A GOOD DAY

Chicago's Fred Huyck sits atop his Indian motorcycle. Huyck won three of the seven races held at the Speedway on August 14, 1909.

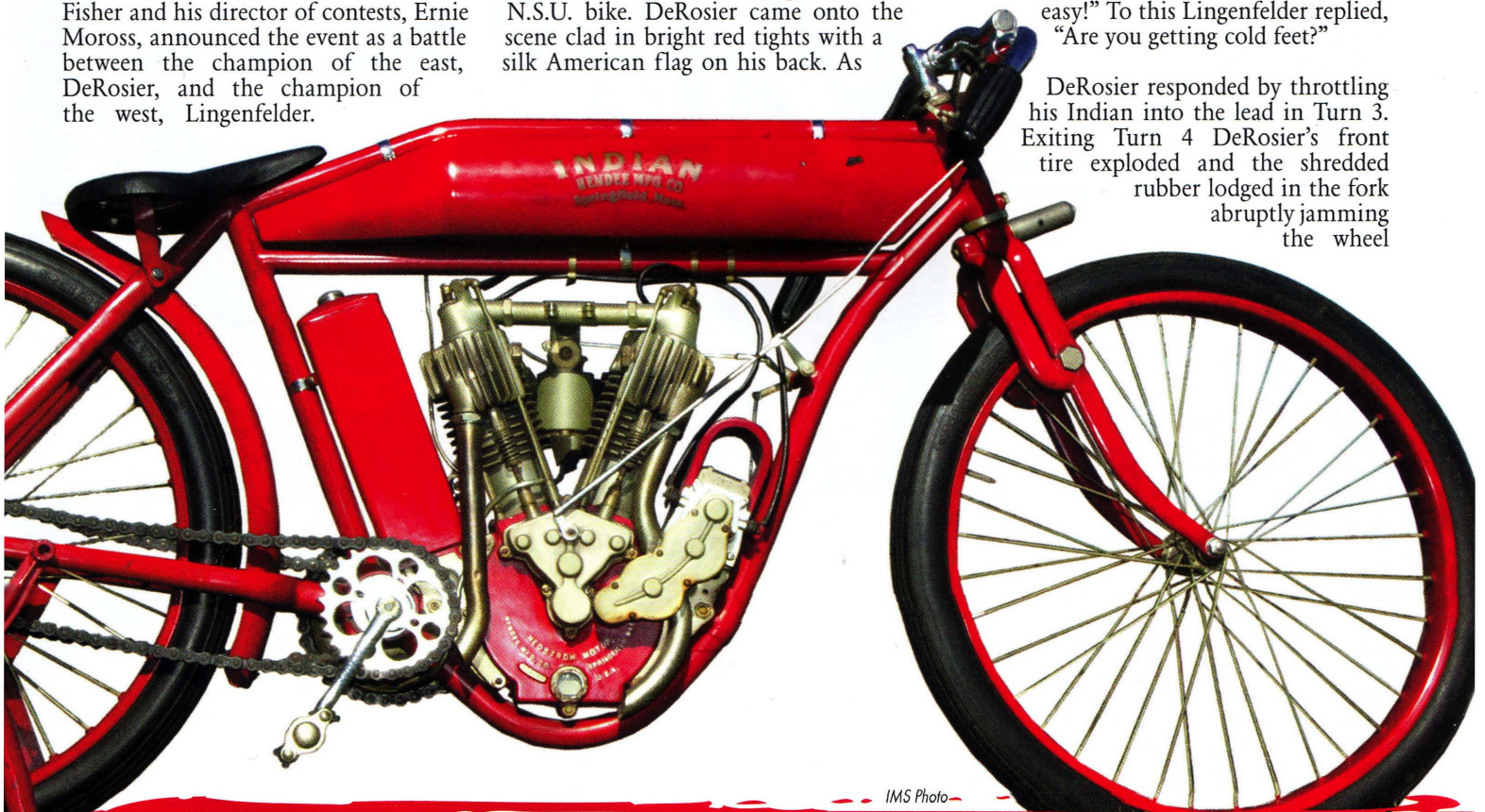
Moross, serving as starter for the meet, shouted into a megaphone to introduce the two riders. This was augmented by loud blasts of patriotic music from a band in front of the grandstand.

Lingenfelder appeared first. Attired in a pure white uniform, his crew secured his feet to the cranking pedals of his N.S.U. bike. DeRosier came onto the scene clad in bright red tights with a silk American flag on his back. As

the band fired up "The Star-Spangled Banner," the Canadian-born rider pointed to his flag.

With their engines popping and crackling like musket fire, the racers were away. Lingenfelder led, and on the backstretch of the second lap, DeRosier pulled even, shouting at the Californian, "Take it easy!" To this Lingenfelder replied, "Are you getting cold feet?"

DeRosier responded by throttling his Indian into the lead in Turn 3. Exiting Turn 4 DeRosier's front tire exploded and the shredded rubber lodged in the fork abruptly jamming the wheel



IMS Photo

and hurling him over the handlebars and onto the unforgiving sharp stones.

The machine slid for 30 feet with DeRosier rolling in front of it. After stopping, DeRosier, stunned and with his uniform in shreds, rose to his feet only to stumble into a ditch on the inside of the track.

The crowds swarmed the area and police fought to keep them from storming the course. DeRosier was rushed to Methodist Hospital where he would recover. Lingenfelder paced off the remaining two laps to officially record the victory.

Despite the realization of their fears in DeRosier's accident, the organizers were able to assemble two more races. Huyck won his third event of the day in another handicap race, a five mile contest for machines of less than 61 cubic inch piston displacement.

The last race was a 10-mile national championship for amateur riders. Forty-six riders were originally entered, but only four presented themselves. The race was notable as it helped further the career of its winner, future star Erwin Baker. Baker was the only rider in the meet that would also go on to drive in the Indianapolis 500.

The final scheduled event of the meet, a 25-mile race for professionals, never happened. FAM president Ovington mercifully pronounced the meet over.

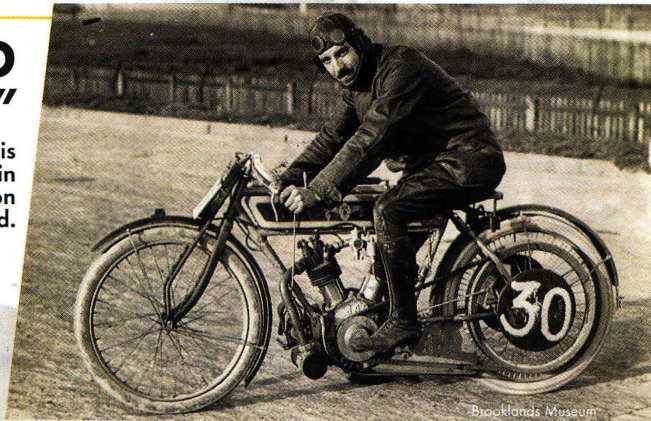
Despite the complaints of competitors, the great motorcycle invasion of 1909 had many high points. FAM praised Indianapolis as excellent hosts to their convention and two Hoosiers were elected to national offices. Fred Willis was elected president and Wyatt vice-president, which was enough to bring FAM's western district headquarters to Indianapolis.

While the track surface was clearly too rough for the lightweight bikes, the progress Fisher and his team made was a marvel of will. There was an air of destiny about the new track that was summed up in the Aug. 13, 1909 Indianapolis News, "It promises to do much toward increasing the fame of Indianapolis." ●



## "THIS AIN'T NO TEA PARTY"

The diminutive DeRosier (Main) places on his helmet in preparation for a race at Brooklands in England. His victory over the English champion Charles Collier (Inset) was widely heralded.



# Jake DeRosier

STORY BY: Mark Dill  
PHOTOS BY: Brooklands Museum

Pioneer Motorcycle Hall of Fame racer Jake DeRosier was as tough as he was successful. He broke his left leg three times and his left forearm once, had one rib removed, fractured his skull, severed an artery and suffered serious leg burns from flaming engines. Best known in Indianapolis Motor Speedway history for his accident in the track's first motorcycle race, DeRosier won hundreds of races before his death in 1913.

Born in Québec, Canada in 1880, DeRosier moved at age four with his family to Massachusetts. Bicycle racing was the rage of the 1890's and DeRosier started his career there. French auto racing driver Henri Fournier introduced DeRosier to motor bikes in 1898 while visiting the United States.

Motor bikes like Fournier's were used to pace bicycle racers, punching a hole in the air to increase their speed. DeRosier mastered this skill and began racing motorcycles in 1901. His first accident came at Madison Square Garden in 1902 when he fractured his skull.

A few days later, with bandages still wrapped around his head, he was back at the Garden for another motorcycle meet. When one of the bikes became available, he volunteered to compete. Fortunately for his health, the machine failed.

DeRosier then returned to the grandstands, only to jump out onto the track when a friend had a spill. When a police officer demanded

he leave, DeRosier got into a shoving match with the officer and spent the night in jail.

Such was the spirit of DeRosier, a diminutive man once described as a "slight, slender fellow that a strong Christmas breath might blow over." Ten days after his scuffle with the policeman, he was in a hospital again after a tire blew on his pacing bike and he suffered a four-inch split in his shinbone that doctors stitched together with wire using no anesthesia.

All this bravado was not unrewarded. When DeRosier emerged as top rider at the 1908 Federation of American Motorcyclists (FAM) national championship in Paterson, N.J., he was awarded a contract with Indian Motorcycles. With Indian backing, he raced every week and had hundreds of victories.

DeRosier's career flourished as board tracks surged in popularity. Hard tumbles were part of the deal, and on several occasions, doctors dug four-inch splinters out of his back.

Still, DeRosier came out on top more often than he took spills. By the time he came to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in August 1909, newspapers called him "world champion."

His grit was unquestionable. Confined to a hospital room for two weeks following his Indianapolis Motor Speedway accident on Aug. 14, he hemorrhaged for seven days. Amazingly, he was back on his Indian at Lowell, Mass. by Sept. 10, 1909. After Indianapolis was paved with bricks, he declared it among the safest tracks in the country and called for another motorcycle meet.

His fame grew in 1910 as he set the FAM speed record for 100 miles at 79.6mph. On Feb. 7, 1911 he reeled off 90 miles on the Los Angeles boards and claimed the FAM speed records from 1 to 100 miles.

DeRosier made news when he visited England in June 1911 to run the Isle of Man Tourist Trophy. He set the fast time in practice, but crashed out of the race after leading early. He endeared himself to the English with his wit, saying, "This ain't no tea party," in reference to the mountainous course.

He made up for that disappointment in a match race with English champion Charles Collier at the 2.77-mile concrete oval at Brooklands. DeRosier won the tiebreaker in a best of three series by applying his pacer bike slipstreaming skills to nip Collier at the finish. In the process, DeRosier set the mile world record at 88.7 mph.

After returning to America, DeRosier had a disagreement with Indian executive George Hendee and was fired. He was immediately hired by Excelsior and the combination showed speed with a kilometer run of 94 mph.

DeRosier's tenure at Excelsior proved brief. On March 12, 1912 he suffered severe injuries to his left leg and thigh at Los Angeles. He endured three surgeries as doctors attempted to repair the damage, but he succumbed to complications of the final operation on Feb. 25, 1913.

Hard feelings forgotten; Hendee ordered Indian flags flown at half-mast. The 33-year-old DeRosier was buried at St. Michael's cemetery in Springfield, Mass., the home of Indian Motorcycle Company. ●