



THE ART OF SPEED  
**CLASSIC MOTORCYCLES**

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM LOESER

PART I

## The Experimental Years



**W**e might think we live in an era of rapidly changing motorcycle technology, but in reality the pace of change today is incremental compared to the early years of motorcycling. While an epic sport bike that would trounce the Grand Prix race bikes of old on any track, today's Yamaha YZF-R1 has more in common with a thirty-year-old FZR 1000 than it has differences.

In the early days, this was not the case. And that's because the first several decades of motorcycling marked a period of trial and error. There was little orthodoxy in design because no one had yet figured out what did and what did not work. Thus, you had engines produced in every possible size and configuration, from crude De Dion-style single cylinders to complex aircraft-style radial five cylinders, and those engines were utilized in a wild variety of ways, from being mounted in the now-traditional location in the frame cradle to being mounted under the seat, or even, in the case of the above-mentioned radial five cylinder, in the front wheel.

While most of the innovative designs tried in the early years of motorcycling didn't catch on, usually with good reason (imagine the effect the centrifugal force produced by the engine rotating in the front wheel would have on steering!), they did lead to this being the most creative period in motorcycling history, resulting in the production of the most fascinating machines.



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## 1910 FN

The Fabrique Nationale de Herstal (FN) company is known for its military weapons and ammunition, but from 1901 until 1967 the company also made motorcycles. FN machines were popular in the years following World War II for dominating trials and monocross competition with their lightweight, agile, small-displacement singles. FN was the first in the world to produce a four-cylinder bike and was well known for its shaft-drive designs.

The genius behind the early FN machines was Paul Kelecom. Kelecom's four was designed to minimize engine vibration, notorious in singles, by balancing the position and firing of the cylinders to cancel each other out. In 1904, FN introduced a shaft-drive, in-line four, which grew over the next five years to a 300cc machine. These bikes were produced

for twenty years and loved by European and US riders.

The bigger shaft-driven bikes were terrific runners but expensive, so in the 1910s, after Kelecom had his fun, FN switched to manufacturing smaller, lighter, and cheaper bikes with chain drive. FN produced an impressive range of 250–900cc four strokes, and smaller two-stroke singles and twins that made great competition bikes. The FN reputation and reach was further enhanced with bulkier machines, including a flat twin that was nearly 1,000cc, which were used by the Belgian military during World War II. Later in life, FN had a good run outsourcing and manufacturing scooters. FN continued to produce motorcycles, mostly meant for competition, well into the 1950s, but eventually phased them out in favor of its traditional focus, which came to include aircraft engines. After 1967, FN was out of the business of powered two-wheelers.

The 1910 FN weighed about 165 pounds and could go maybe 40 miles per hour, which was quite breathtaking for the day. This one didn't have a clutch, requiring the rider to stall at stops and pedal furiously to get going again.



PART III

# The Art of Speed



The motorcycling world took quite a while to recover after World War II. People had more important things to worry about, such as survival, and the development of something as impractical as motorcycles took a back seat to staying alive.

But once the basic needs of food and shelter were met, people turned their attention to meta needs such as motorcycles and racing. While the war had been a tragedy of unimaginable scope in terms of human suffering, it had also been the most intense driver of technology the world had ever seen, and by the mid-1950s that technology was being applied to motorcycles. The result was that motorcycle performance took a quantum leap in the postwar years. Motorcycles that would do the 100–100 miles per hour, once the exclusive domain of the racing community—became available to average riders. The world had developed a taste for the thrill of speed, and motorcycle manufacturers were only too happy to sate that desire.

Caption?



# 1957 Maico Typhoon

**M**akowerk was a West German bicycle and accessory company founded by Ulrich Matsch, and later taken over by sons Otto and Wilhelm Matsch, which began building motorcycle engines as early as 1916. In first offerings in the internal combustion world were mostly small displacement two-stroke singles. After World War II, the company began producing complete motorcycles, scooters, and even micromotors.

During the 1950s, Maico recognized there was money to be made in supplying simple transportation devices to the masses and quickly released the 150cc Blizzard and the 400cc Typhoon. Both were startlingly beautiful motorcycles, the Blizzard looking more like a traditional motorcycle akin to the DKW RT125, whereas the Typhoon was much more futuristic, an art deco take on German engineering.

Maico also jumped on the scooter bandwagon. After first trying the Maicomobil, a two-wheeled vehicle that resembled a car (enthusiasts and detractors alike referred to it as "The Dustbin"), Maico added to the lineup the Maicoletta, a bathtub-looking contraption quite similar to the bikes that were tried and failed from BSA, Ducati, and Triumph. At the time, with its 150cc two-stroke engine, the bike was one of the biggest scooters in the world—heavy and fast, capable of 70 miles per hour, with four speeds, front and rear drum brakes, an enclosed drive, and Bosch electric pendulum starter, which started the bike by rotating the crankshaft gently back and forth.

In the 1960s and '70s, with street bike production looking like a dead end, the company made an about shift and began building bikes to be used off-road—the dirt bike craze had begun and was dominated by the likes of CZ, Husqvarna, and, quickly, Maico. In the early days of the eastern invasion, before the Japanese had really gotten their wheels under them, Maico produced legendary, loveable, and competitive motocross bikes that destroyed the competition. Vintage off-road motorcycle enthusiasts' most prestigious prize in the twenty-first century is coming across an original Maico off-road machine for sale.

The success of Maico's off-road machines lasted for twenty years, until some unexpected financial and quality problems sounded the death knell in the mid-1980s. After two consecutive years in which their bikes literally fell apart at the seams—unprecedented power but no chassis and suspension to manage it—and in the face of the now unstoppable Japanese competition, the company quietly folded and passed into motorcycling history. Many of their motocross bikes are still in use in competition today, trusted, reliable friends that are go exactly where you point them, bounce just how you want them, and turn precisely when you need them.

Innovative and futuristic, note how the Typhoon's engine case and other parts lend themselves to blend with the swoopy, art-deco-style bathtub bodywork.



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## CLASSIC MOTORCYCLES

### THE ART OF SPEED

**By Pat Hahn, By (photographer) Tom Loeser**

**Finally! The world's most incredible motorcycles are given the artful representation they deserve.**

The motorcycle should have disappeared with the advent of the inexpensive automobile, since Henry Ford's Model T usurped the motorcycle's position as a primary form of utilitarian transportation, but a funny thing happened on the way to extinction - the motorcycle not only survived but thrived. Enough people were enamored of the thrill and beauty of the two-wheeled mechanical beast to ensure it would continue to exist indefinitely. And exist they have! Many of the motorcycles manufactured over the past century truly fit the description of "classic," and many consider these machines works of art.

Written by noted motorcycle author Patrick Hahn, *Classic Motorcycles* presents the history of motorcycling as told through the most significant, iconic, classic motorcycles of all time, with both period photography and modern portrait photography. All the best domestic and international makes are represented here, from BMWs, Indians, and Triumphs to Vincents, Ducatis, and Harley-Davidsons - the most classic models. You'll drool over the 1933 Matchless Silver Hawk, and you'll want to tear out the page displaying the 1956 Triumph Thunderbird and frame it. Each motorcycle was shot in a studio setting using photographer Tom Loeser's light-painting technique. Period ads and relevant historic photos and documents are spread throughout the book to supplement the portraits of the bikes, really evoking a sense of time and place. Prepare to be in awe of the undeniably classic motorcycles in this collection. It's the only motorcycle history you'll need.

#### Key Points:

- The book includes stunning photographic portraits of the most historically significant motorcycles ever built.
- *Classic Motorcycles* offers strong international content for motorcycle enthusiasts worldwide.
- Very few authoritative motorcycle histories have been published during the past decade, and those that are available on Amazon are mostly self-published.

#### Author Information

Pat Hahn loves solving motorcycling dilemmas, particularly those related to riding strategy and safety. His subtle humor and keen instinct help with topics like risk management, situational awareness, riding technique, and crash avoidance and put them into terms any rider can understand. Pat is the author of the four books, *How to Ride a Motorcycle*, *Maximum Control*, *Motorcyclists' Legal Handbook*, and *Ride Hard, Ride Smart*, and is communications and outreach manager for TEAM OREGON Motorcycle Safety Program. He lives in Corvallis, Oregon.

Photographer **Tom Loeser** specializes in motorsports photography. He has spent 12 years shooting auto racing for events such as Long Beach Grand Prix, Denver Grand Prix, St. Pete Grand Prix, and 12 hours of Sebring.