

## From HRD to Black Lightning and RTV1200: Ian Boyd has amassed the ultimate Vincent collection

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*When we asked Ian Boyd which of his bikes was his favourite, he answered: "All of them." Fair answer.*

*But he dubbed this Norvin as "the most beautiful" in his collection.*

*The 'Nor' comes from the Norton featherbed frame; the 'vin' is the 1000cc Vincent engine.*

"THE POSTMAN" visited a motorcycle enthusiast with a globally significant collection of Vincent Motorcycles. West Australian Ian Boyd did not have any grand ambitions when he decided to start a motorcycle collection. He didn't even consciously decide to focus his efforts on Vincent motorcycles. His collection started with one Vincent and, well, one thing led to another.

That was 29 years ago, when Ian was a cray-fisherman pondering how to keep busy in his retirement. He has since amassed such an extraordinary collection of Vincent motorcycles that it is regularly referred to as the best in the world. And it's difficult to argue with that assertion.

Of all the models built by the revolutionary, but sadly short-lived British high-performance motorcycle manufacturer, Ian owns at least one of every model — except one. The ultra-rare White Shadow has so far eluded Ian's reach. Only 15 White Shadows were made, and their rarity and collectability were on show last year when a White Shadow (originally painted red, on special order) sold in the USA for \$434,000.

Not that anyone visiting Ian's custom-built bike display showroom, under the main roof of his home north of Perth, is likely to complain. For the most part, visitors are gob-smacked.



*Thought you had a nice bike collection? THIS is a nice bike collection.*

“I’m a hoarder, not a trader,” Ian says. His hoarding has so far netted 69 bikes but he told us there are “seven more on the way”. Ian’s house was built to accommodate his collection of bikes and cars. “It was no good at my old house,” he said. “There were bikes in the bedrooms, bikes in the passage; it was hopeless.”

Most bike collectors would give their left arm (and probably part of their right) to have just one Vincent in the shed. Ian has 39. And perhaps even more extraordinary is that you could remove all of the Vincents from Ian’s collection, and you’d still be left with a classic European bike stable to die for. (I’d been ogling the Vincents for a good 15 minutes or so before I noticed the Manx Norton — although I *had* noticed the 1970 E-type Jaguar). But it’s the Vincents that steal the show. From a 1935/36 HRD TTR works bike through to Black Shadows and a Black Lightning, and on to a late 1990s RTV 1200 re-creation, Ian’s bikes tell the Vincent story from pre-birth to stardom, and then from financial oblivion to attempted reincarnation.

All the Black Shadows supposedly had black engines — although this one of Ian’s does not. “They were short on money by this stage, and couldn’t afford the paint,” he told us. Alongside the Black Shadow is an RTV1200; an Australian effort from the late 1990s intended to recreate the Vincent by blending that great old-motor styling and best-available technology for chassis, suspension and aerodynamics. The bike worked, but the business venture didn’t. Ian’s is one of only a handful that were made before the whole idea went belly-up.

For the uninitiated, the Vincent motorcycle story is a British story — but it’s one with a strong Australian connection. But first, let’s back up a little. The first Vincents wore a badge that read ‘Vincent-HRD’, with the ‘HRD’ prominent and the ‘Vincent’ under-stated. HRD were the initials of Howard Raymond Davies, a British soldier who survived being shot down and taken prisoner of war in World War One and who went on to design and sell high performance motorcycles under the HRD name. His bikes were mostly powered by JAP engines and were successful on the racetrack. (For the record, JAP engines are not from Japan. JAP was a very English firm created in the early 1900s by a chap named John Alfred Prestwich who used his initials to name his business, as was the practice in those days.)



*It would be difficult to name the most famous of Vincent's bikes because almost all of them were extraordinary and all have become collectable classics. But the Black Shadow, launched in 1948 and capable of 125mph, is a star. It was, at the time, the fastest motorcycle in the world. Note the air-cooled twin front brakes (drums on both sides of the wheel) and the unmistakable Vincent V-twin engine.*

The economics did not work out for HRD and Mr H.R.Davies, and the HRD name changed hands a couple of times, ending with another Brit by the name of Phil Vincent. Now, Phil wasn't short of a quid — his family had money from Argentinian cattle ranches, as one did — and had already built a bike of his own. He'd also designed and registered a patent for a cantilever rear suspension set-up. But he saw the economic sense in continuing to use the HRD name, since it had established significant racetrack credibility. Phil used the name Vincent-HRD from 1928 through to 1950, then changed it to 'The Vincent' — mostly because the company's marketing effort was aimed at America, and 'HRD' was seen to be too similar to Harley-Davidson's 'HD'.

Company founder Phil Vincent patented the cantilever design in 1928, at age 20.

The Australian connection to the Vincent story comes from a brilliant Victorian engineer by the name of Phil Irving. Phil had a motorcycle workshop in Ballarat in the late 1920s but, when the Great Depression forced him out of business he looked further afield for opportunities. A rather unusual opportunity came along in 1930 when he found himself being the mechanic and pillion on the back of a 600cc side-valve Vincent-HRD, undertaking a UK-to-Australia-and-back promotional ride.

That gig got Aussie-Phil Irving to the UK, and also made him visible to Brit-Phil Vincent. One thing led to another and, before long, Aussie-Phil and Brit-Phil had become great mates, and Aussie-Phil found himself on Brit-Phil's payroll. It was a successful pairing. In 1934, Aussie-Phil designed an overhead valve 500cc engine which became the basis for The Vincent Meteor and, later, the more racy Comet 500. But a greater contribution was yet to come. In 1936, or so the story goes, Aussie-Phil noticed two Comet 500 engine drawings lying on a table. The drawings were coincidentally resting in a V-formation, looking all the world like a 1000cc V-twin.



*The earliest bike in Ian's collection is this 1935-36 Vincent-HRD 500 factory works bike. The bike was raced at the Isle of Man in 1935 by Ken Bills, but didn't finish.*

Aussie-Phil and Brit-Phil agreed mating Comets was a grand idea, and so the 1000cc Vincent motor was born, in turn giving birth to the 45-horsepower 110mph Vincent Rapide. The Rapide evolved through multiple incarnations over the years including the legendary Black Shadow and the Shadow's high-performance sports variant, the Black Lightning, which used aluminium in place of steel wherever possible and weighed in at a startling 170kg (compared with the Black Shadow's 208kg).



*This is said to be the most famous motorcycle photograph in history. Gosh he must have been cold.*

It is generally (but not universally) agreed that American racer Rolland Free was riding a Black Lightning in 1955 when, wearing not very much at all, he set a world record speed of 184.83mph at the Bonneville salt flats.

Amazingly, just as Rollie Free and that great photo were making Vincent a household name across the world, the end was nigh. Late in 1955, Brit-Phil announced that Vincent's bike-building days were over.

