wastes no time at all, but hustles them right back to yet another carnival-red-building—his shop.

Really, it's a combination of shop, office, and personal museum. Thibeault knows a good deal about museums. Around 1960 he was operating what was probably America's first mobile antique motorcycle museum. The walls around his huge postmaster desk are covered with clippings, photographs and Wall of Death posters.

Motorcycles are Thibeault's love, but the Wall is his passion. "I've always been fascinated by dromes," he said. "I got started in the business selling parts through the mail to all the drome riders in 1947, 48—right after the war. I counted 17 motordromes in America at that time. I had motorcycles I'd sell them, gas tanks. And I kept in contact with all of them."

Photo courtesy Lucky Thibeault

Thibeault taught himself to ride the Wall inside this drome in his backyard in 1949. The neighbors were less than enthusiastic, and sent the cops around to make him stop.

In 1949 Thibeault got a break and he went from being a fan to being the man very quickly. "I met this guy from Fall River (Massachusetts) who had a drome and he played the Marshfield Fair," he said. "I made a deal and bought it off him." It was late in the year and the outdoor fair season was over in the northeast. This was good in a way, since Thibeault didn't know how to ride a drome. So he set up the Wall in his back yard and began to teach himself how to use it. His neighbors weren't too keen on having a drome so close to where they lived their lives, and Thibeault was hauled into court and ordered to desist riding it where it was.

He learned how, though. Teaching yourself this skill, he says, "is almost impossible to do. There have been two other guys since me, but I've told them how to ride it. Nobody told me anything. The guy that sold it to me just put it in my yard and walked away."

Thibeault moved his attraction down to Rocky Point, an amusement park in Rhode Island, where he did a two-year stint, 1950 and 1951, as a One Man Suicide Squad. "I rode the show by myself, I done three acts by myself, I rode on the rollers, I did my electrical work, I did everything." After the '51 season Lucky sold the drome and went to work for other shows, riding the Wall at fairs and carnivals from Canada to Savannah, Georgia. In 1960 he met his wife, the former Sparky Pooler, and she bought a small 17 foot drome. "I taught her to ride," Thibeault said, "and we went out for a couple of years with it and we had a lot of fun. It was one of those things, I was running my [repair] garage, trying to run that [drome], and eventually I sold it."

The Indian Scout is the perennial favorite of Wall riders—even today—because of its handling characteristics. Thibeault's own Wall machine is a modified 1931 Scout frame powered by a 1960 Harley-Davidson 175cc engine. The frame has been shortened and beefed at critical points, but the real Wall-riding trade secret is in the fork rockers. The pro's choice is the short rocker Indian used on very early Scouts. "They came on 1920, '21, and '22," Thibeault said. "You couldn't get 'em afterward. They changed to the longer links for easier riding. We didn't want that, we wanted it stiffer." In drome trim, the springs are turned upside down so the longest leaf is on the bottom, and the spring arm is moved back to meet the rocker behind the rigid fork instead of in front of it. The leaf now flexes up over bumps instead of being pulled down as before, and the geometry is now trailing link. This simple trick keeps the bike stable under the ultra-heavy centrifugal loads of Wall riding.

Thibeault runs a very large rear sprocket because of his small engine and the weight it has to move. The bike is heavy, since some of the modifications around the rear wheel were done with bar stock instead of tubing, and he himself is no flyweight. Lucky has owned the frame since 1950, it was one of three that were tricked out especially for him. The California Hell Riders show has one of the others and the third one got away—he doesn't know where it is. The tanks are from an Indian four cylinder. At one time he had Scout power in the Scout frame, and he speaks rapturously of the Indian's climbing ability. "You just gotta touch it and it goes right up the Wall," he said. He's somewhat less enthusiastic about the small 2-stroke Harley mill. "It ain't the fastest. This was made for a 20-foot drome, no bigger. I made it for a Cage of Death that was 18 foot across. When I bring this up on a 20 foot

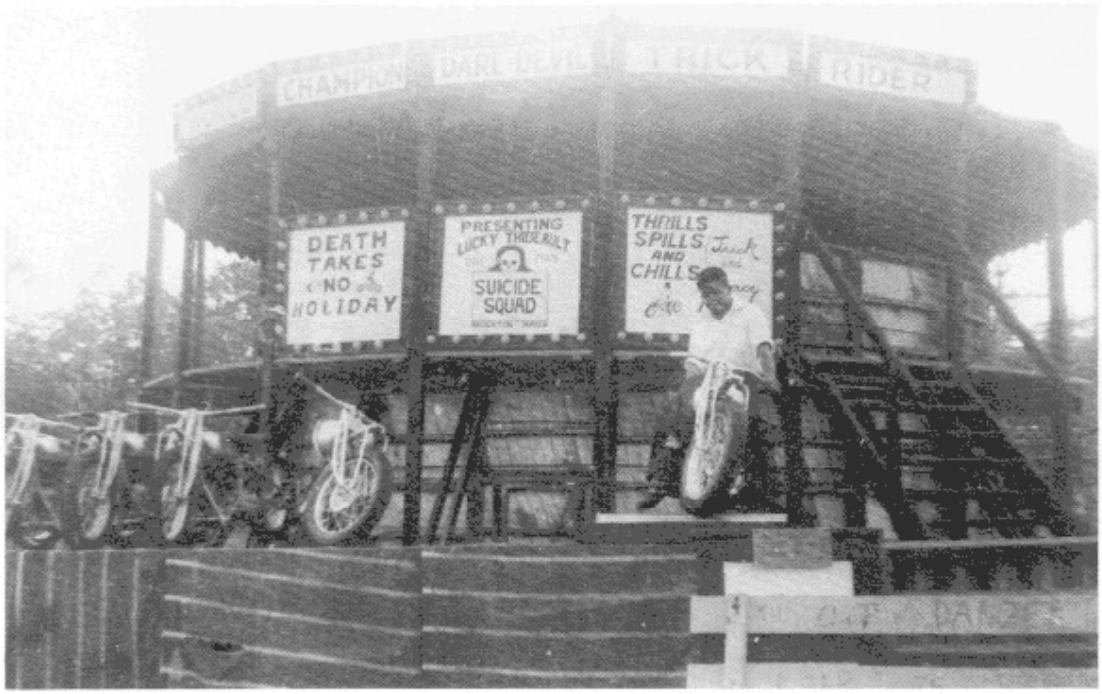

Photo courtesy Lucky Thibeault

Lucky outside his first drome, Rocky Point, Rhode Island, 1950. Death Takes No Holiday.

drome, I've really got to pour it on. You got to fight it, you got to get a hot head on this thing. When it's cold you're gonna fall off because you haven't got the power." Aside from the mandatory siren, the only accessory on the Scout is a Harley spare spark plug holder. Thibeault gets about a week on a plug. After that, he said "I throw 'em right away."

The Cage of Death was one of Lucky's later carnival attractions. An old advertising flyer directed to carnival and fair operators details the Globe and Cage as Thibeault was using them during the 1967 and 1968 seasons. The Cage was unique in this country. "It came from Germany," Lucky explained, "it was made of ladders and it was eight or ten feet high." Originally it had four poles and as the riders—there were two—roared around the sides, the cage was raised into the sky. There was no bottom on the cage, it was just a ring in the air, and any kind of mistake or mechanical failure would send the rider hurtling to the ground below. "Two people got killed in it," Lucky said. "I went down to New Jersey and bought it, and I left the poles there. I made it all over, made a platform and braced it, and I played stock car shows."

Thibeault directed attention to the tires on his Wall bike—brand new Cokers with that rich black tone that only fresh rubber has. "They're not like you think," he said, "they've been done over. I found the trick on that." He fits them to a special wheel that sets up in a drum lathe, then he takes down one side of the tire with a huge wood rasp. The newly sloped surface of the tire works up the starting tracks first and gives added traction and grip. "They'll hang right on the Wall that way," he said. Tires have always been a concern in the Wall game, and in the old days they had a different approach to seasoning a skin. At that time a drome show might use a number of riders, with only one star. "A guy had a big drome," Thibeault said, "he'd hire what you call a straight rider. All you'd do is go up and announce your name and ride. I'm a straight rider. So they give us new tires. After you go up and come down many hundreds of times, you're going to break in the tire. Then they take your tires off and give them to the trick rider."

But what's it really like to ride the Wall? "The first thing," Lucky says, "you're gonna get dizzy. I'll put you in there, it wouldn't take you long, you could ride it, but you're gonna get wheezy. So you stay on the starting tracks, up and down. You take a rest, then you go a little more. They you get so you can ride that slope wall straightways, and you're getting your bearings. You keep riding, keep riding, and after you've ridden it so much you go up and hit the straight wall—pour it on, stay above, not too far. If you slip you ain't got far to fall.

"As you ride, you get over the dizziness. I had an Air Force guy explain it to me. They were watching me one day. They said that in the back of your head you have fluids, and they balance themselves. That's what they claim.

"You can take somebody on the back," Thibeault explains, "and the G force will black them right out. I put them on back and tell them to put their fingers on me and if they feel they're going to black out then poke me and we'll dive down to the floor. But when you feel their fingers loosening, I know what they're doing."

Stepping back outside Lucky's garage, Plain Street is right there still carrying its prosaic name, doing its prosaic job. Out on Plain, they may not know or care about the world of the Wall. But here at chez Thibeault, its oldest exponent is alive and very well, ready to ride vertical at any time.

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Lucky in his lair—the master's own Wall bike is a 1960 Harley 175 engine fitted into a highly modified 1931 Indian Scout frame with a bright red and yellow paint job.