

## RUPP INDUSTRIES

There was a time when the giant industries, which currently crank out a tremendous variety of motorcycles, snowmobiles, and all manner of ATVs – did not exist on the scale they do today. There were no four-wheelers or side-by-sides, snowmobiles were a very small niche market, and motorcycles were almost exclusively big and heavy – intended for serious riders.



The only exceptions, at least in the U.S. market, were a handful of small, private companies, such as Cushman, the scooter manufacturer based in Augusta, Georgia, and the Busy Bee company, out in California, which produced the lightweight, Mustang line of motorbikes.



Interest in off-road riding, which helped to drive the great motorcycling boom of the late-1960's and early 70's, had yet to occur. In lieu of off-roading, one activity which came about, and was quite popular for a while, was go-carting. Small tracks popped up all around the country, and lots of folks were bolting up various powerplants to the back of fabbed-up frames, and skittering around ovals and short, twisty circuits. As a matter of course, demand drives supply, and multiple small manufacturers began producing "turn key", ready-to-go, go-carts.



One such company was created by a fellow named Mickey Rupp, in Mansfield, Ohio. Rupp Manufacturing began very modestly, initially consisting of little more than Mickey assembling go-carts in the basement of his residence, and selling them locally.

Rupp enjoyed significant success among the variety of cart manufacturers which existed early on, thanks in part to Mickey's personal innovations, such as a unique braking system which enhanced operator control, along with a seat-back-mounted fuel tank. Early models included the A-Bone, and the A-Bone Deuce, which featured twin engines!





That's Mickey himself, with a Deuce. Imagine trying to wrestle that little beast around a tight track.

Building on the success of his line of go-carts, Rupp next began working on products for a market which did not yet even exist. He welded up a two-wheeler frame, fitted it with wheels and tires which might be used for a small lawn and garden trailer, and mounted a horizontal shaft, utility engine. Key to the arrangement was a centrifugal clutch. No manual clutch, and no gears, meant that Rupp's creation was a simple, twist-and-go, fun machine.

Mickey Rupp introduced his first "mini-bike" as they came to be known, in 1962. They were marketed under the name Dart Cycles, and from the beginning, Rupp machines included features which set them apart from similar products which would come along later. Those first Rups were offered with either a 2 ½ or 3 horse motor, and were equipped with front suspension and a drum brake. Also, key to Rupp's eventual, tremendous success was national marketing, as Mickey began running ads in Cycle World magazine.

1962  
for  
**BUILD, LOOKS,  
PERFORMANCE**

**Dart-Cycle**  
by RUPP

ONLY \$199.00  
... 10 1/2 H.P. 4-CYCLE 2-SP. 25.5\"/>

*Builder of the  
Champion-like Dart-KART*

The all-NEW Dart-CYCLE is rugged, yet beautifully designed... for fun, sport or any leisurely recreational transportation. Weighs only 65 lbs. - carry it in your car, truck or boat... use it any where. 2 1/2 HP, 4-cycle Lauson engine (2 HP option) at least additional cost gets you away and keeps you going - 4" Hoss-Morse clutch gives you perfect control and 5" Friction Expanding brake assures maximum safety.

Send 25¢ for full color Rupp Catalog of Cycles, Parts and Components and accessories.

Rupp Mfg., Inc., Cycle Dept., 175 Albert Road, Mansfield, Ohio

Dart-CYCLES also available in Standard models.



Here is good example of early Rupp advertising, and it certainly reflects Mickey Rupp's flair for marketing, a vital component of his tremendous success.

Minibikes became an instant success. While go-carts were more suited for use on a prepared track, and as such required time, effort, and commitment to transport and utilize, mini-bikes could be stored in any corner of a garage, shed, or basement, and pulled out at a moment's notice for riding around the yard, open fields, out on the trails – virtually anywhere except on roadways, as they were not street-legal. Plus, minibikes were incredibly simple, reliable, and easy to maintain. And, with their small, unintimidating size, relatively quiet exhaust note, and ease of operation thanks to the centrifugal clutch, meant that virtually everyone and anyone could climb aboard a minibike, twist the throttle, and enjoy the fun and exhilaration that a two-wheeler provides.

As with the very first Dart Cycles, Mickey Rupp continued to distinguish his products from scores of cheap competitors by loading his line of mini-bikes with quality features. By 1964, the Rupp lineup included a model called the Continental, which had front and rear suspension, six-inch wheels, a 3 1/2 horse motor, and a first for any minibike – a headlight and taillight!

New from Rupp... the 1964 automatic 2 speed TT-500 Minibike, powered by a potent, no nonsense 5 HP, 4 cycle engine. A power glide with extra energy just waiting your command... a great new transmission that shifts for itself... always at the precise moment.

And the Rupp TT-500 doesn't stop there... it's loaded with new, re-extended, goodies like shock, spring loaded suspension, disc brakes - front and rear, after-market powered lighting system with high and low beam, custom center fuel tank, collapsible foot pegs, and lots of other groovy substitutes that make it a real winner.

Yes, the convenience and economy of a minibike... the gets and go of a big cycle... all in one package. Good looking... rugged... spunky... tender to the wheel... and still small enough to put a brace of them into your car trunk. Give you any ideas for the secret area? Or getting into the parking lot to the operator area? Or mile tabs? Or looking around between events? Or... well, you've probably got a hundred ideas yourself.

**IT'S FUN TO BE SHIFTLESS**  
2 SPEED 5HP

Try one on today at your nearest Rupp dealer. Or, for a colorful detailed brochure send 25¢ to Rupp Manufacturing, Inc., P. O. Box 100, Dept. CC688, Mansfield, Ohio 44903.

**RUPP**  
QUALITY IN MOTION

With a tremendous sense for ever-greater opportunities, in 1964 Mickey introduced his own line of snowmobiles, called the Sno Sport. And, as with Rupp-brand minibikes, right from the beginning, the snowmobile line was brimming with features, including electric start, and options such as speedometers and tachometers. Various engine options provided choices between 30, 40, and 50 horsepower on those early models. As with his minibikes, Mickey Rupp found instant success with Rupp snowmobiles, and by 1965 was already producing and selling some 500 units per year.



By the mid-1960's, mini-bikes were everywhere. They were sold in just about every corner store, and even the big retail chains, such as Sears, Penneys, and Montgomery Ward prominently featured them. Literally everyone was riding mini-bikes. Remember, at this point, similar, small, lightweight motorcycles were just coming on the scene. Minibikes by comparison, were cheap, easily accessible, and besides – everyone was riding them!



Right out of the Sears and Roebuck catalog. Note how rudimentary these machines were, compared to Rupp products. Of note in this image was the virtually universal feature of high-handlebars on minibikes, as they were intended for riders of all ages – not just kids.



In the mid-60's, by comparison to Rupp products, virtually every other line of mini-bikes were extremely rudimentary. Suspension was almost unheard of, small, steel wheels were the order of the day, and brakes typically consisted of nothing more than a metal plate which rubbed against the rear tire by way of pressing down on a brake pedal. Plus, typical mini-bikes did not particularly emulate motorcycles, especially in one respect – their fuel tanks were mounted within the frame, down by the motor. Rups by comparison, were among the first mini-bikes to feature a motorcycle-type gas tank, placed in the conventional location – between the saddle and the steering stem.

Mickey Rupp's minibikes set the standard. Rupp products were quite literally head and shoulders above the competition, as premium Rupp products featured a larger-than-standard frame, which meant these models were more of the size of a mini-cycle, rather than a mini-bike – an important distinction. Plus, this larger chassis meant that the rear sprocket no longer aligned with the narrow-layout, side-shaft motors utilized in minibikes. This meant that an extra feature had to be employed. A jackshaft – which is a horizontal shaft, suspended by mounts and bearings on the frame behind the engine. With this arrangement, the primary sprocket drives one, short chain to a sprocket mounted on the jackshaft, which in turn spins another primary sprocket, mounted further outboard on the shaft, which in turn drives another chain, now in line with the final drive sprocket on the rear wheel. This intermediate drive system also enabled Rupp to incorporate a two-speed transmission into select models.

By the late 1960's, Rups were offered conventional, motorcycle-type wire wheels, brakes front and rear – including disc brakes in 1968!, front and rear suspension, the aforementioned lights and conventional fuel tank location, chrome fenders, and a full, chromed exhaust system, among numerous features unique to Rupp products. Also in '68, Tecumseh engines were introduced into all models. And, taking a cue from groovy 1960's style, Rups came to feature beautiful, candy-apply colors, not seen on any other mini-bikes. Colors which were available included metallic red, blue, and gold.

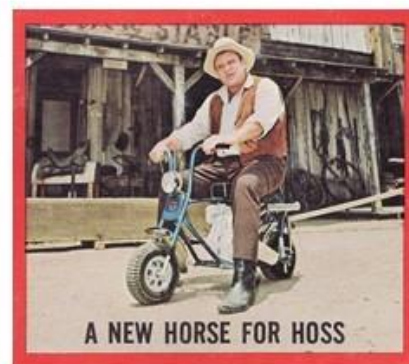


It cannot be overstated just how popular minibikes were at this time. They were virtually everywhere. It seemed just about every kid in America either owned a minibike, or wanted one. And, riding this wave of popularity, Mickey Rupp's company had exploded in size and capacity. By 1969, Rupp Industries employed over 400 people, and occupied a 180,000 square foot facility. In 1970, Rupp sales topped 30 million dollars. By 1971, the Rupp workforce had grown to more than 850 people, and the company's operations expanded to include a research center, an administration building, a styling building, an all-purpose proving grounds facility, and production operations included state-of-the-art, automated assembly systems. Keep in mind that in addition to the tremendous popularity of Rupp mini-bikes, Mickey Rupp had continued development and marketing of his line of snowmobiles. Sales of these products were likewise extremely successful, as in 1970, Rupp produced and sold some 35,000 snowmobiles.



Such was the proliferation of the minibike phenomenon during the 1960's, the little fun-bikes expanded into all aspects of motorsports and general society.

Celebrities, such as Steve McQueen (left), and Dan Blocker (below), who played Hoss on the long-running Bonanza tv show, were at various times seen riding about on minibikes.



One of Mickey Rupp's most amazing creations, and an audacious marketing tool, this was the Super Sno-Sport. Built in 1969, and described as featuring a fuel-injected Ford engine producing in excess of 500 hp, the "sled" was reported to be capable of reaching 150 mph.

Mickey Rupp himself was not at all merely an entrepreneur and successful businessman. He was also a car racer! Details are thin, but Mickey apparently at some point earned his professional driving license, and competed in the USAC Champ Car series in '64 and '65. His ultimate achievement in racing was undoubtedly when Mickey qualified for the 1965 Indianapolis 500 where, in a year which saw considerable attrition throughout the field of starters, Mickey drove a smart race and finished in sixth place! A tremendous achievement for anyone involved in motor sports. I've found no other information regarding Mickey's racing career, so it is presumed that following the '65 season, he likely retired, to focus on his growing business.



Mickey eventually began offering all kinds of additional products beside his snowmobiles and minibikes. Truly a man of vision, Rupp foresaw the future popularity of ATV's, and in the early 1970's, introduced an entire lineup of three and four-wheel fun machines, all of which are today extremely sought after and collectable. Products included the Go-Joe – a four-wheeler, configured along the lines of modern ATV's. It featured a fully-encompassing, red fiberglass body, had large, balloon-type tires, was powered by an 8 hp engine, and seated two people.





Even more desirable among collectors today is the Ruppster. Mickey referred to this model as a “dune buggy”, and the little machine does indeed mimic the classic Manx dune buggies in appearance. Considering its off-road-only function, the Ruppster could certainly be considered the forerunner of today’s side-by-sides. Like the Go-Joe, it ran on big, balloon tires, sat two people side by side in its red, bathtub-like fiberglass body, and was powered by a 12 hp motor. Steering was via a conventional automotive-type steering wheel. The Ruppster was advertised as having the ability to climb 45-degree grades and reach 40 mph.

**Hottest Stock Rod  
Off the Road**

**RUPPSTER**

You don't have to do a thing to the Ruppster. Just get in and enjoy it. No shift, gear or throttle through the Rupp "Torque Converter" is snappy like 12 ratios down the 45. Climbs 45° grades like they're flat. Goes uphill in the open. Dunes through, mud and mire. Even hits the 3 or 5 inches of snow you'll meet. Big 21 x 11 knobbies. \$1200. \$1200. \$1200.

It's a heck of a Fun Machine. Try it at your Rupp dealer. Or write direct for literature. The Ruppster is assembled just Rupp Industries, Inc., 2795 Avenue Road, Mendota, Ohio 43042, Dept. 199271.

Cooper Tires • Swanton • Rupp's Performance • For Parts  
Full information for fun people

**Live it Rupp**

**RUPPSTER**  
happening.

It's a little different... and adventure is in the air... and with the Ruppster, almost anything can happen.

The air is clean and clear... time is precious. And a Ruppster... well... a Ruppster will be the Ruppster.

Something else may be happening out there... but nothing like the way that he is... he's having fun.

It's the... of it... the Ruppster... I like to think of it as a combination of both... adventure... for fun... more again.

It's partly the Ruppster... I don't mind... it's fun to have fun... it's a Ruppster... and there are other days.

Well, anyway... some things don't work out the way you think... but I will have the Ruppster... and there are other days.

See the Ruppster at your Rupp dealer... or write for literature to Rupp Industries, Inc., 2795 Avenue Road, Mendota, Ohio 43042, Dept. 199271.

**Live it Rupp**

Fun machines for fun people.  
Rupp Industries, Inc. • The Fun • Fun • Fun

Another Rupp atv was the now-iconic 3-wheeled Rat model. It also featured a fiberglass body and balloon tires at the rear, but up front is a minibike front end. The rider sits in a reclined position on a padded seat mounted atop the fiberglass body. Steering was by tall, extended handlebars, and the Rat was powered by a 5 hp motor, mounted in the rear, behind the rider and under the fiberglass body. A later version, called the Truk-R, actually featured a pickup truck-type bed on the back, and was powered by a more powerful, 8 horse motor.





As popular as Rupp's core-products - his minibikes were at one time, more sophisticated machines from other manufacturer's, designed specifically for young riders, invariably began to enter the recreational two-wheeled market. Honda had brought out its line of Mini-Trails, and in 1972 released the immensely popular XR75. Yamaha likewise, hit a huge home run in '71 with introduction of their JT-1, 60cc, Mini-Enduro. Kawasaki and Suzuki soon followed suite as well, plus there was a flood of other brands also vying for this huge market of small-displacement fun machines. Mickey Rupp responded by releasing his own line of small-displacement, full-on motorcycles, in both fully street-legal, and off-road-only versions. These machines were offered in 80cc, 100cc, and 125cc displacements, the smaller bikes powered by Fuji engines, while the 125's featured Sachs powerplants. They were very nice little bikes, too, and today are particularly sought after by collectors.



**TOUGHEST INTERMEDIATE  
ON EITHER SIDE  
OF EITHER OCEAN.**



And, here's a bit of trivia for those of you out there who are really into this stuff, and know your vintage dirt bikes. Look very closely at Mickey Rupp's motorcycle-series, and you will see that the fuel tanks look quite familiar. They should, because they're almost a direct copy of the gas tanks featured on John Penton's, second-generation, Chrome Moly Framed models – except in about 3/4 scale, and in metal, compared to the fiberglass versions used on Pentons. I've never found any information to determine why or how Mickey Rupp came to replicate the Penton fuel tanks, or from whom he sourced them. Considering that the fiberglass versions used on Pentons were almost certainly either produced by the KTM factory, or sourced somewhere in Europe, any connection is a far-flung one, indeed. So, there's some deep, deep, vintage dirt bike trivia.



With all this success, and given Mickey Rupp's tremendous capabilities with respect to design, manufacturing, marketing, and sales, what happened to Rupp? Why aren't they still around? Basically, it's the same old story of any small business facing the onslaught of gigantic corporations. Such was the world of motorcycles in the early 1970's. The Japanese were investing huge sums in an effort to saturate the market with every and any size and type of bike imaginable, and every one of them of excellent quality and performance, and at very affordable prices. In 1972, Honda alone offered no less than 24 different models – everything from QA50's to the revolutionary CB750. Plus, minibikes, even those as sophisticated as those which Mickey Rupp offered, were out. Everyone wanted motorcycles. Even one of Mickey's bread and butter products – his snowmobiles, couldn't keep Rupp Industries in the black. A couple of mild winters, plus a general softening of the market for snowmobiles, meant that sales had taken a nosedive.

Having created a substantial infrastructure, Mickey simply could not keep the doors open. In 1973, and facing bankruptcy, Rupp was forced to sell controlling interest in the company he had developed into such an amazing presence in the industry. Rupp industries was purchased by an investment group, which attempted to keep things going, on a much-reduced scale. The new owners did try, working to update existing products and introducing new models – teaming up with Arctic Cat for example, to try to resurrect the Rupp line of snowmobiles. Quality control issues however, along with tremendous competition from the big brands, simply pushed Rupp right out of the market. In 1977, the new owners filed for bankruptcy, and 1978 was the last year for any products to bear the name of Rupp.

But, most fortunately, that was far from the end. As described here, all manner of Rupp products are very much sought after today. Rupp minibikes for example, were and are considered to be among the most desirable and appealing of this kind of product. Additionally, lesser-known Rupp products, such as the three and four-wheelers, bring top money in any condition. Minibikes in general have experienced a tremendous resurgence in interest, and a Rupp is at the top of the list for any enthusiast considering obtaining and restoring a classic minibike. Bob and I are no exception in this respect. A Rupp minibike is high on our must-do list, and I personally am very interested in locating and re-doing a Rupp motorcycle.

So, there is one of the most interesting motorcycle and ATV stories ever, and to think it all originated and took place right in Mansfield, Ohio. Quite an amazing legacy, and certainly a fascinating segment in the history of motorcycling.

