



# A MOTORCYCLE JOURNEY TO MEDUCTIC

By Neil Peart



▶ HAND HAMMERED WARMTH



▶ AAX RESPONSIVENESS



▶ AA AGGRESSIVENESS



## IT WAS A RAINY DAY...

a really rainy day, in September, 2003, when I set out to ride my trusty old BMW from my house in Quebec to the SABIAN factory in Meductic, New Brunswick. It was dark (and rainy) when I left, at 5:30 in the morning, and every few minutes I had to wipe my face-shield with my glove, trying to see the road ahead.

That was the first six hours.

When I turned south at Rivière-du-Loup, and crossed into New Brunswick, the rain tapered off at last. For the next five hours, the day remained cold and windy, but dry, and I made a little detour to ride through the world's longest covered bridge (well, who wouldn't?). By late afternoon, I was awfully glad to reach the Holiday Inn and enjoy a hot shower and a Scottish beverage.

The next morning was bright and sunny as I drove with my new friend, Bill Morgan, to the SABIAN factory in Bill's Suburban. The autumn colours were just starting to brush the deep green woods along a wide stretch of the Saint John River above the Mactaquac Dam, a beautiful setting for the SABIAN complex, from the original barn-sized foundry to the modern array of offices and manufacturing areas. The forested river banks reflecting on the glittering water and the tree-shaded lawns gave new meaning to the words "industrial park."

Back in 1974, when I first joined Rush, I bought a 22" ride cymbal that had been made in that factory, and I was still using it, almost thirty years later. Recently I had been hearing some other drummers, friends of mine, playing SABIANS, and I'd been impressed. A few weeks before my visit, I played some samples

from the regular SABIAN line, and, frankly, they blew my old cymbals off the stands.

Now I had been invited to visit the factory with the aim of creating a "signature" line of cymbals. A daunting challenge, to say the least, to try to contribute something new to a tradition dating back hundreds of years to the cymbal-makers of old Constantinople.

I might compare it to the notion of dining at a fine restaurant and barging into the kitchen to direct the chef. Or perhaps going to the BMW factory and expecting to design my own motorcycle, or to a Highland distillery to create my own single malt. Just because I appreciated the products didn't mean I knew anything about making them.

But I would soon learn more about cymbals than I had ever suspected, even after nearly forty years of sitting behind them and hitting them.

The first thing I noticed at SABIAN was the people — how nice they were — and the second thing was how much of the cymbal-making process was still done by hand: the craftsmen at the lathes cutting the grooves into one cymbal at a time, Charlie Brown with his shy smile and leather apron sitting behind a wooden block with a hammer, and cymbal master Mark Love sonically matching sets of cymbals in the famous SABIAN "Vault."

Mark showed me a row of dull gray disks, the raw bronze blanks he had prepared for us to experiment with, and we decided to start with the all-important ride cymbal. At first he had its bow lathed, and left the bell raw. Interesting, but a bit "clangy," so Mark had Charlie Brown give it the hand-hammering treatment. Better,

but still lacking in "nuance." Next we tried a combination of lathing and hand-hammering on the bell, and presto! That was what I wanted, a sharp, musical sound with a range of complex overtones.

I'm not sure if Mark naturally shared my taste in cymbal sounds, or just intuitively responded to what he saw I liked, but he was soon bringing me a selection of crash cymbals and hi-hats that really "worked" for me and the way I played. We began to discuss other possibilities for the sound and look of a line of cymbals that

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would be new and distinctive. By the end of the day my head was dizzy with new information (and from hitting all those cymbals!), and I was glad to join the SABIAN family on the porch overlooking the river, for cocktails and conversation on a beautiful September afternoon.

The next discovery came a few weeks later, after Mark and I continued our conversations by e-mail, and he sent me his latest "inspiration," some prototype crash cymbals with the AAX "pinpoint" lathing on the top, and the classic Turkish-style AA lathing on the bottom, combined with the hand-hammered bell, which we had decided to make a recurring theme on all the cymbals. The narrower grooves on top made for a fast, lively response, while the traditional wider ones on the bottom gave a full, rich tone. This combination proved to be exactly what I had been looking for in a crash cymbal:

a unity of rapid attack and swell around a solid, musical sound with a smooth decay.

On my long ride home from Meductic (on another rainy day), I thought over all I had learned about cymbal-making, and what I wanted to "express" with this new line. Cruising down the wet, shiny highway and wiping the streaming drops off my face-shield, I also considered names for the line, wanting something that would reflect our aim of creating an excellent, highly-musical cymbal, crafted by a unique combination of traditional methods. I came up with Excelsior, and Heritage, and when I thought of the burnished, subtle appearance we wanted them to have, it suggested Patina.

But the name everyone liked was Paragon.

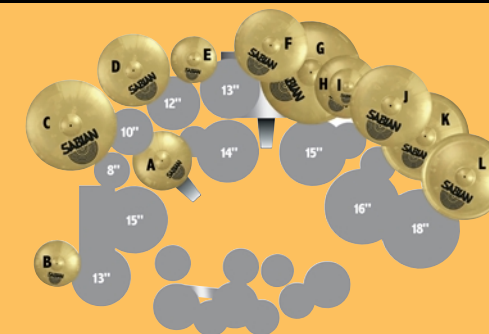
I thought of that word in the sense of the expressions "a paragon of excellence," or "a paragon of virtue," and the dictionary definitions were certainly in line with our intentions: "a model or pattern of perfection or excellence," "supremely excellent person or thing," "model (of virtue etc.)," "a perfect diamond weighing a hundred carats or more," "a large, perfectly round pearl."

Perfection, excellence, virtue — a diamond, a pearl, a gold-standard of cymbals. That's the sort of thing we wanted. (Well, yeah!)

And with all credit to Mark and the guys at SABIAN, and due deference to matters of taste, I think it's what we achieved.

On that September morning when I set out in the rainy gloom to ride those 600 miles to Meductic, I never imagined I was riding into an adventure that would teach me, inspire me, and reward me so much. And what a pleasure it is to have contributed to the design of the instrument I have been playing for almost forty years.

The journey continues.



### NEIL'S > SET-UP

- |                                |                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A 13" Signature Paragon Hats   | G 22" Signature Paragon Ride    |
| B 10" Signature Paragon Splash | H 14" Signature Paragon Hats    |
| C 20" Signature Paragon Crash  | I 8" Signature Paragon Splash   |
| D 16" Signature Paragon Crash  | J 18" Signature Paragon Crash   |
| E 10" Signature Paragon Splash | K 20" Signature Paragon Chinese |
| F 16" Signature Paragon Crash  | L 19" Signature Paragon Chinese |