

WARNING: The language contained within may not be appropriate for all audiences!
By Louis Cypher, Nimble Scribe

Compared to the Iron Butt, all other forms of human endeavor shrink to insignificance...

- paraphrasing Ceaser

I asked him to go over it for me one more time; just in case I'd missed something. The second time my close friend, Douglas Jacobs (DJ) explained this event, this "Iron Butt Rally" to me I still wasn't getting the point. You couldn't tell me that riding 11,000 miles in eleven days wasn't some sort of strange and savage punishment. Knowing DJ as I do, I know the list of agencies and jurisdictions waiting to inflict just such a barbarous penance to be both long and determined. My God, if those sadistic bastards at the Coast Guard ever catch up to him...well, I just can't think about that.

Try as I might to convince him that his very soul, if not the next six to eight years of his life might be endangered if this Ironthing was really a Coast Guard funded conspiracy he would not be dissuaded. In fact he was bubbling, almost gleeful, at the prospect of being accepted to this devilish dance. Later, as my medication gradually weakened, he was able to convince me of the legitimacy of the Iron Butt Rally and I began to see the first light of divine inspiration in such an test. Originally conceived to allow THOSE WHO MIGHT talk the talk to actually walk the walk, it is the humble-yet-mighty precursor of all those four-amyl's-and-a-six-pack events: the Nevada 1100, Cabo 1000, Cal 24, Utah 1088, et al. Mere participation in the Iron Butt is said to be a definitive statement of purpose and a surefire argument stopper.

These days the Iron Butt is run by a fiend the name of Mike "The Bike" Kneebone. A former Iron Butt Rider, Kneebone is the guy BMW came to when they wanted to shake the bugs out of their dainty new Boxer. Little did they envision what cruel intent Mike had in mind for their pretty little twin (the dreadful analogy that springs to mind involves Chelsea Clinton and Andrew Dice Clay at the Pocono's on New Year's Eve). Thirty-five days later Mike had racked up an inhuman 21,000 miles and BMW had some answers. That Mike, he's one sick puppy.

Anyway, DJ was set on doing this thing no matter my counsel. In fact he insisted I come along as the journalist I was born (or at least rehabilitated) to be.

THE RALLY

Basically, the Iron Butt asks only that you circumnavigate the country (our country that is; Mansfield, TX to Pomona, CA to Spokane, WA to Chicago, IL to Gorham, ME to Daytona Beach, FL back to Mansfield) in eleven days. That I'm told is not such a BFD, rolling over only seven to eight thousand miles in eleven days. "Easy enough", he says; stack together eleven 750 milers and its Miller Time on the River Styx. That however is the program for The Peanut Gallery. The real cool kids will be doing another four thousand extra "bonus miles" in the same amount of time. For those of you not up on the new math, that's eleven 1,000 plus days - in a row.

The Iron Butt is a true liability-laden anachronism in today's PC- yuppie-aristocracy (even it's basic pretense is the wanton and unproductive consumption of fossil fuels). Unlike the rest of today's society the Butt actually asks participants to accept the greatest measure of personal responsibility; those who

are attempting the win will begin to face very real and relentless corporeal jeopardy somewhere after the second checkpoint, barely more than four days into the rally. Each of the next seven long days is nothing but a crapshoot, tempered by common sense of course, at least as long as rational thought holds out in the face of monstrous levels of self-induced sleep denial.

MANSFIELD

I rode to Texas alone as DJ had decided to warm up for the rally by riding his Specially Prepared K-Bike directly to Mansfield, Tx from his dank hovel in Oakland. I for one was having none of that sort of foolishness; racking up miles is one thing, however, to me and my 1972 BMW 750 1,800 miles looked a lot more like three days than thirty-six hours.

On my way to the rally I tried desperately to wrap my brain around the question "Why?". What motivates a generally rational person to seek out circumstances certain to lead to two of my very old and insidious friends - high speed and sleep deprivation - at once? Even a one or two day balls-to-the-wall event can be chalked up to youthful exuberance, (ie. the poison from the guenads). But this, this eleven day Iron Butt, this was much more serious than that sort of thing. This Iron Butt creature can't be explained way by the same thrill-seeking, sphincter sucking forces that cause bungee jumping, the ZX-11 and Ray Roy to make a twisted sort of sense. It was clear my answers would not come easily today.

I got to The Five Star Inn on the Sunday before the Tuesday the rally would begin. I copped one of the last rooms and fled there to escape the shit Texas calls mid-afternoon. Later Bob Higdon, (Hell's Own Renaissance Man and 3.2 Beer Aficionado), would describe the Central Texas summer weather as "cruel". Every damn bit of spiteful I'd say.

About dusk I split the wall of humidity (about like a baseball bat splits a tub full of mud) at my doorway to check out the Men and Machinery gathering at the Five Star. As I walked the parking lot Mott the Hoople sang All the Young Dudes in my brain and I attempted to scribble notes on the various bikes and bikers getting themselves ready to face the Dog of Dread. Nothing made any sense--except Mott.

My friend DJ (who was busily wooing the Five Star's barmaids) was perhaps the youngest competitor at 34, and judging from appearances at least, easily the most mentally and emotionally unbalanced (of course I had yet to meet Joe Mandeville or Ken Hatten). The previous winner looked as tame as my Uncle Fred; without warning he might whip out a Hibotchi and start wildly grilling bratwurst. Why were these guys so normal? Even the Evil Lord Kneebone looked like any third guy you'd find wolfing down a polish and kraut in a suburban Chicago bowling alley. What was afoot here? What diabolic enigma was unfolding itself in this small town combination-motel-and-catfish-joint?

Turning my attention from the riders to the rides I found a much easier parallel to draw. While the motorcycles represented the gamut (for the most part), they (unlike the riders) all exhibited a common thread. While they ranged from the expected 1500 Goldwings and Yamaha Ventures to a Kawasaki Tenegrei and a new Yamaha 850 TDM with everything in between: ST1100's, a Moto Guzzi Le Mans III, BMW K-Bikes and Paris-Dakars, a ZX-11, CBR600F2, and Garve Nelson's Pacific Coast, they all displayed the same standard tools of the high miler. Virtually every bike carried boo-koo extra fuel, lights and electronics. Radar was everywhere. The ZX-11 carried so much electronic equipment (including a laptop computer) the good money was betting on an electrical fire before Indiana.

As I found myself near DJ's K-Bike I thought I'd take a closer look. On what used to be the rear pillion he'd attached a NASCAR five gallon fuel cell that pumped directly into the main tank. He'd replaced the ineffectual stock mirrors with taller high-visibility handlebar units (the better to see trailing police cruisers with). Where the old fairing mounted mirrors had been were now two 85-watt driving lights to complement the 90/130 special competition headlight (that's a total of 300 deer cooking watts). The windshield and front fender had been replaced with a super-special high protection and low wind resistance system. With 140,000 miles on the clock the owner of this bike clearly needed to get a life.

THE MEN

I spent the next two days getting to know both the Iron Butt as an event and it's milelust-thirsty participants. Although I came to the table pretty skeptical Iron Butt-wise, in two days of swilling 3.2 beer with these men, these men of strong hearts, they had begun to swing me around. As I came to know one after another: Frank Taylor, Jan Cutler, Steve Chalmers, Ron Majors, Gary Moore and Garve, sixty-nine-year-old Garve Nelson, I began to see that each of them carried an angry and demanding muse on their shoulders. It was this Machiavellian Tinkerbell that constantly whispered her doubts and misgivings into the competitors ears; she fueled a need for the self-absorbing indulgence of the Iron Butt - the burning need to dash any lingering questions of inability or weakness.

In the two tense days before the Rally I saw no displays of pre-event nervous bravado, none of the late night 120 m.p.h. parking lot drag races you find at other such events. Rather, each Iron Butt competitor I met was constantly, quietly measuring himself, not against one another but against Tinkerbell's challenge: the road, the nearly un-ending ribbon that lay both in front and behind them, coiled around them like a rabid pit-python ready to seize a spinal cord from behind the minute they turned their backs, let down their guard. The reward for error is harsh in the Iron Butt, the stakes are high and way out on the edge.

The Iron Butt, in a matter of two days had seduced me; I had found my own shoulder complete with a bloody eyed, venomous fairy, Tinkerhell. I wanted to answer the questions all of the participants were asking as well: "How far can I go? Where are my personal limits? Where will my central nervous system finally turn into Malt-O-Meal? Can I possibly make Ohio?, The East Coast?, dare I say it, The Finish?" I decided to run the first leg from Mansfield to Pomona along with the real competitors - in the allotted thirty-six hours.

Tuesday, after a battery of photographs (presumably to limit the organizers liability - "...here's a picture, this proves he was a willing entrant, not a hostage as the next of kin have suggested...") we were presented with three different "routes" to the next checkpoint in Pomona; these routes comprised of bonus questions along a self-determining course. You could either ride pretty much straight to Pomona, or select any or all of the questions in any one route. The first route ran south to El Paso along the Mexican border. The second route went north after Flagstaff up to Zion National Park. The third "psycho's only" route went East to the Louisiana bayou before turning around and heading back past the endless enormity of Texas toward California. As one can imagine the more difficult the route the greater the bonus points.

Having lived a former life along the shores of Lake Pontchartrain nothing would have suited me better than a run down to Pecan Island, Louisiana for a little coon-ass hospitality, a quick bowl of gumbo and a fried crayfish po-boy. That however was out of the question as a hasty glance at the Rand McNally

showed that Route Number Three would cost the rider dearly - around 2,300 miles in the thirty-six hour leg. Not for this boy - no sir.

I let most of the competitors take off while snapping a few last minute pictures. I'd decided on the northern route, the one that ran through Zion up in Utah. Having prowled those haunts on many occasions I felt comfortable running wide open (on my '72 Seven-Fifty - so what) and anyway I was way into a what-the-fuck-miles-be-damned attitude.

I got ready to make my desperate run West, the first question was South though, in Waco. Kneebone had allowed his Satanic hound Higdon leave to scour the countryside for the most malevolent and corrupt questions imaginable. While it normally takes centuries of devotion to develop callouses on the sticky membrane of your soul thick enough to find fascination in moribund and grotesque human disasters, Higdon has managed well in just one lifetime. To those who know him well it would come as no surprise that he'd station the first gung-ho, let's-ride-ten-thousand-miles-tonight bonus question at the sight of the Biggest Recent Bummer in the South, the Branch Davidian Compound. Kneebone and Higdon; Sick Puppies spawned in the same puddle of brake fluid.

I wheeled'er south on I-35 to begin my one leg of the 1993 Iron Butt Campaign. Damn you Nymph-Mutt Higdon.

THE SHIT

It only took one gas station attendant in Waco to point the way out to the David Koresch Compound. At about noon I found the scene just as a storm front rolled over showering me with gray skies and a ponderous, oppressive mood. As I rolled up for the bonus question, my initial concern (the current state of the police barricade tape) suddenly seemed so inconsequential I momentarily forgot the Iron Butt and possibly even my own existence. This place welled with more sorrow than I had ever witnessed, and I began to believe more sadness than I could bear. I left Waco covered in such a heavy funk I could have stopped right there and climbed full force into the nearest bottle of sourmash. Instead I kept going.

I half-heartedly polished off the next two bonus points (still in Texas) and settled into about 85 m.p.h. on I-40. It was cold and the muse on my shoulder was starting to weave her web of doubt. What made me think I could make this run? I had been mentally sizing up my route, the number was staggering. I was sure it was less than 2,000 miles, but not by much. In thirty-six hours. Jesus. What was I doing? Was I out of my mind? Shouldn't I pull over the next Highway Patrolman and insist I be institutionalized?

To compound the problem, the next question was not until Page, Arizona some 600 miles west and north. The weight of my muse and the Big Bummer in Waco were both sucking on the back of my brain, now I had some serious miles with nothing to do but stew. I was clearly developing a paranoia (read "road dementia") concerning my motorcycling abilities; I was also starting to keep a wary eye peeled for anybody in a Coast Guard uniform. But still I pushed on.

At about midnight I copped a thirty minute nap on my tank bag in a Chevron station at the intersection of I-40 and Route 666 (omen or destiny - you tell me). From here I decided to risk a short cut across Arizona through the Hopi and Navajo Nations. Although Hwy 264 is one spectacular road, it was well after One In The Morning and I would be sharing the road with our numerous and very solid friends the animals. Even though I do have a H4 headlight setup with a 100 watt high beam I was wishing for the wretched excesses of DJ's 300 watt system about that time. My headlight made me feel secure up to

about 55 m.p.h., unfortunately I was blindly pushing on at around 70, and even that was 15 m.p.h. slower than I wanted to be going. Remember I left the safety of the Interstate at Route 666. I'm not kidding.

After recovering from a few near misses (a small herd of horses, one deer, and alligator carrying a inflatable Norman Mailer doll) I started to hallucinate pretty seriously. As the edge of the storm front I'd been skirting since Waco finally broke and the sky and moon appeared above me I noticed that I was really riding in formation. Before I knew it I was in the heart of the Hopi Nation passing Second Mesa and then First Mesa, flanked on both sides by a angelic host of Hopi braves, flogging the afterlife out of their beastly, frothing ponies. This has always been a place of unsettling spirituality, but never more so than that blue-moonlit night. The feeling of generations of souls surrounding my bike and I was overwhelming; I was forced to pull over and cry out with joy and bewilderment to those who were passing along the way with me that evening. Strangely they split and took that Tinkerbell bitch with them.

At Tuba City (unofficial Celestial Home of the Choicest Indian Fry Bread and Navajo Tacos) I cut over to Hwy 89, normally choked with huge home-like motorcoaches and rented Ford Taurus's, nose-to-tail in bovine fashion, on their way to the Disneylandesque south rim of the Grand Canyon, just five miles as the crow files from the deserted serenity of the North Rim. This Thursday morning, hours from dawn, the road was eerie and silent.

I streamed northward, seemingly without a sound until I caught sight of another Iron Butt'er parked along the road. One thousand miles into the rally, this was the third participant I'd seen, emphasizing just then the individuality of the Iron Butt. For fear he was stranded I jammed the binders on and pulled along side the big blue K-Bike. It was Jan Cutler, co-owner of Reno BMW; as I stopped I realized that words could not express the things I was feeling here in this Valley of the Moon; I simply spread my arms wide to the sky and smiling ear- to-ear said to Jan, "MY GOD, IT'S FULL OF STARS...". He was apparently mind-synched right into my groove; although he said nothing; as he fired his bike and stomped it into first he let out a piercing howl, screeing gravel as he gained the road, cramming the K1100 through the gears, the big K-Bike's howl nearly as poignant as Jan's. As he hit fifth some quarter mile down the road I realized he was running completely without the benefit of his headlights. At that moment he and I were blessed with greater vision than anything Halon gas could produce.

Following his lead I chased him north, farther and farther behind, running with no light other than the huge and blindingly blue moon. The simplicity of the Iron Butt really came home to me, just then, pushing the R75 to its limits; long surpassing my own sensory limits there in the moonlit valley. Rejoicing as I was under a blanketed dome of limitless extent I realized that this is what one sought in an Iron Butt attempt. To reject and refuse limits, to force the box surrounding you to abandon definition, to ditch the boundaries which hold you to a pre-ordained absolute, that was the perfect answer to an Iron Butt test.

POMONA - THE END FOR ME

As my new friend Cherry Pie (I'm not kidding) closes the bathroom door I pause to reflect on achievements of three very different people.

The Pomona checkpoint was staged at Brown Motor Works, a BMW dealership. I had left Mansfield, Texas Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. Central Time, it is now Wednesday, 10:00 p.m. Pacific Time and I am

settling into the unsettlingly questionable bed at a reasonably priced XXX motel just down the street from Brown (the Vogue Motel - give it a try next time your in Pomona - ask Amieleo for the party suite package). I had ridden up through Zion National Park and streaked around through the desert out by Las Vegas and Amboy in search of points on my abbreviated attempt at the Butt. I'd made the 8:00 p.m. checkpoint, but not by much.

My thirty-six hour run covered just shy of 1,900 miles; three people, (including sixty-something Ardys Kellerman) made the suicide run to Pecan Island, Louisiana and actually got to the checkpoint on time. I am trying to imagine cramming another four-hundred miles into the last day-and-a-half, but that only makes my head swim; I should take my medication. My only sleep since Texas has been that 30 minute nap on my tank bag in New Mexico, seemingly a lifetime ago.

Out there in the Southern California gloom the Iron Butt competitors are roaring off into the night; for them this was just the first leg of six, one and one-half days into eleven. Some of today's front runners will end up back in the pack by the time they get to Spokane, Washington forty-eight hours from now. I know the Bayou three will be completely burned out by a manic, (and possibly counter-productive) run to Louisiana.

Many bench-racing tacticians will suggest a better overall strategy might have been to save yourself for later, when we know the bonus points will be higher, each mile more valuable. In his pre-rally briefing The Evil Lord Kneebone specifically warned riders against that first Bayou leg yet three people who are shooting for the win took the chance; and believe me, they each paid a pound of flesh for the privilege. Rather than Kneebone's warning I am sure those three were listening to another voice back in Mansfield, a voice from the steamy, turbid backwaters of Louisiana, a Tinkerbell's whisper straight from Hell. They heard the murmured, taunting questions and then made the only choice possible on the Iron Butt, they followed the voice that asked, "Can you do It?".

Did it make sense to go to Louisiana? Shit no, nothing surrounding the Iron Butt makes sense. They went there for just one thing: the pleasure of telling Tinkerbell to shove it up her pixie ass.