

## 1995 Iron Butt Rally Helix Ride

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I blame it all on Iron Butt Rally Chairman Michael Kneebone. Of course, I guess I could blame it on the brisk 10!F weather we were riding through in January of 1994 in search of the ultimate ice cream sundae. But more likely, it was Mike's twisted mind working overtime on a plan that would forever change my life. ""Ed, you have ridden way over a million miles in your life. You have been to Alaska, Europe, Asia and the Middle-East. It's time to do something with your life.""

I looked at him with fear in my eyes. I knew something was up, but figured, ""What could happen in the safety of my favorite ice cream parlor?"" At this point I should have walked out and tried to save myself. But noQI had to foolishly tell Mike about some of my motorcycle adventures and fuel his imagination. One of them was about a 72-year-old man that blasted by me on a red Honda Helix scooter during the 1992 SCMA Three Flags Classic. Mike's eyes lit up like a thousand candles. ""Brilliant!"" he said.

The look in Mike's eyes told me I was in deep trouble. I thought to myself, ""What could he talk me into that he hasn't already done before?"" Besides, I figured I had done pretty good in the last 30 years of motorcycle riding. I'm not always the smartest guy in town, and this was a moment I knew I would regret, but I asked anyway, ""So, what are you thinking?""

""Ed, you should break the record for riding the smallest motorcycle ever in the Iron Butt Rally! Better yet, why don't you do it on a Helix scooter?""

It sounded really stupid. Ride a scooter 11,000 miles in 11 days around the perimeter of the United States? But somehow I was hooked.

Within a few minutes my life turned completely upside down. I was going to be entered in the 1995 Iron Butt Rally on, of all things, a 250cc single-cylinder scooter. All of a sudden it hit me like a ton of bricks. I had never ridden a scooter in my life. I told this to Mike, and he inspired me with a sarcastic, ""So what's your point?"" And to insure that I did not back out of his idiotic plan, Mike immediately issued a press release to the entire planet.

With a year and a half to get ready and my phone ringing off the hook with calls telling me that it could not be done, I grew more determined by the minute to complete the rally on a Helix. I tried finding a friend who owned one. When that failed, I tried to rent one.

Then it dawned on me that a short test ride would not be enough, so I rode down to Complete Cycle Center in Chicago, Illinois, and purchased a low mileage used Helix and headed toward St. Louis for a bag of delicious homemade pretzels. The Cycle Center staff would be the first of many to laugh at me as I made it out of their parking lot. But the scooter and I soon became the best of friends during this 600-mile ride. I eventually named the scooter in honor of the employees of Downers Grove Yamaha who jokingly mounted my hood ornament, a Troll.

Mike soon decided that my weekly 600-mile jaunts to St. Louis were making me fat and lazy. He stated that I needed to get some real riding experience under my belt. In the 1991 Iron Butt Rally, I had found myself stuck on the side of a mountain in the middle of the night near the Mexican border on a nasty gravel road. Mike swore that I would be better prepared this time, should the rally take us to Baja.

I knew I was in trouble when Mike showed up for our training session on a BMW GS. This is one tough dual sport motorcycle. After 100 miles of nasty, back-country half-lane roads so narrow a compact car would send us headed for the cornfields Mike said it was time that we hit the dirt. Gravel isn't exactly my favorite surface to ride on. With the Helix's tiny wheels, I was a bit hesitant to follow Mike's lead on the big GS. Eventually the road gave way to a wheat field, but Mike pressed forward with me in tow. When we ran into a group of cows I finally asked, "Haven't we gone far enough? I think I can handle the dirt now."

Mike looked me in the eye and said, "There is just one more test and you'll be ready to rock and roll."

After all that he had just put me through, I didn't even want to know. There it was, a stream stood between me and a paved road. Mike said, "This is it! If you can make it across this stream, you can survive anything!" I still have nightmares thinking about it. I twisted the throttle, closed my eyes and went for it. Troll took over and we both made it! My confidence in the machine was finally total. With that crossing behind me, I knew that the Helix could take me anywhere I wanted to go.

Mike's enthusiasm soon spread like wildfire to his friend, MCN's senior editor, Fred Rau. Fred, a closet Helix fan himself, loved the idea and decreed that MCN would sponsor the project. His first decision was that I should have a brand-new Helix for the attempt. Within a matter of days, he somehow managed to convince the powers-that-be at Honda that this would be a great PR stunt to demonstrate the durability of their scooter. To their undying credit, and faith in their product, they agreed.

When the new Helix arrived, I wanted to find out all I could about it. Warren White, from River Oaks Honda, stepped up with a Helix service manual and some great advice to go with it. However, the manual did not have three key pieces of information: top speed, rpm at redline and horsepower. I called every Honda dealer in northern Illinois begging for someone who could find this information for me.

A few weeks later, Steve Blozis at Downers Grove Honda called and asked me to ride the Helix over. Thinking that Steve had the engine specs, I was surprised when he rolled the Helix into the shop, removed a Honda CBR900RR from their dyno, and put the scooter in its place. To say I was shocked was an understatement. Stunned, I asked Steve what he was going to do. He replied, "I can't locate the numbers you requested, Ed. The only way we are going to find out is to push this baby to its limit, maybe even a little past, and see what she'll do."

For the next two hours, the Helix was the center of attention. Everyone hanging around that morning found an excuse to take a look at this strange sight. After all, when was the last time you saw a scooter screaming its little heart out on a dyno? After what seemed like countless full-throttle runs, Steve finally shut the Helix down and handed me a computer printout with the results. The Helix produced a whopping 13.2 hp. It would run up to 9000 rpm before power shut off. According to the dyno, in theory, the Helix could run 84 mph.

The Iron Butt comes down to one simple formula. You have to ride a minimum of 9000 miles in 264 hours. That includes time to sleep, stop at mandatory two-hour checkpoints, maintenance, eating and

getting gas. Clearly, I could learn to do without sleep, but changing a tire takes a lot of time. The only area left to save precious moments was in getting gas. That was the problem.

The Helix's 3.2 gallon tank is great for city riding. However, with a safe range of only 150 miles and a small, flat gas tank design that hardly encourages Indy-style pit stops, I would be spending too much time getting gas to finish the rally on schedule. I turned to the pros at Reno BMW for the answer. I got it in the form of a five-gallon NASCAR fuel cell. This increased my effective range to 400 miles and, more importantly, it cut my number of fuel stops by more than half.

Brian Beck of Brian Beck Industries, who normally specializes in making luggage racks for Vincents, laughingly agreed to make a custom rack for the fuel cell and saddlebags. Brian also had to work within the constraints of the Givi mono luggage rack needed for a tail trunk.

Given that any serious delay would put me out of this rally, a tough decision had to be made regarding tires. As much as I loved the Helix, the reality is that the tiny 10" and 12" tires are difficult to find. If I destroyed a tire at the top of Mount Washington, I would be out of the event. That was not an acceptable option. Despite the bulk and added weight of carrying extra tires, I told Brian to make room for a set of Dunlops and the Willie and Max Adjustable Touring Saddlebags. He spent countless hours working with me and the finished product was a work of art. One look at the packed Helix in battle gear and the name became obvious. I would name this Helix, "Floppy the Pack Scooter."

Two months later I found myself in Salt Lake City, Utah, on the starting line of the 1995 Iron Butt Rally. The problem was, I had no keys or helmet. Fred Rau and Michael Kneebone thought it would be funny to steal them. As if the pressure of the rally wasn't enough, I had to deal with these two clowns.

*(Editor's Note: What Ed fails to mention is that he left the keys in the ignition and the brand-new XXXL helmet, graciously donated by Arai for this event, sitting on the seat overnight! Mike and I stole them to teach him a lesson!)*

At 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 29, 1995, Rally Master Steve Chalmers handed out the secret list of bonus destinations. I would have one hour before the official 5:00 p.m. start to figure out where to hang myself in route. The first checkpoint was in Spokane, Washington.

Why would a rally start at 5:00 at night? The answer is fairly simple. Steve thought that riding a motorcycle around the U.S. in 11 days was too easy. He wanted to make sure we lost a full day's worth of rest, too. These guys are really sick!

While the rest of the crowd headed 300 miles east to go north for a paltry 315 point bonus in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, I teamed up with Bob Honemann, who was trying to finish on a 1964 BMW R60/2. We decided that the Helix's powerful quartz headlight could help him make it through this vital first night, and headed to Montana.

All too soon, a flaw in my two years of planning became apparent. I had done all of my testing at or near sea level. I now found myself struggling up the mountain passes. Back in Chicago, the loaded Helix would easily pull 65 mph. At 4000' and running 6% grades uphill against a headwind, the overweight, overloaded Helix could barely make 40 mph. I expected power to be down, but never in my wildest dreams did I expect this loss of acceleration and top speed at altitude. I had to formulate a new game plan. My plans of averaging 60 mph were out the window. I would now have to give up my one Iron Butt

luxury; a motel room for a three-hour catnap every night. I would also learn a new skill. The art of drafting large semis and eating diesel fumes.

Despite this handicap, Bob and I pulled into Jim Plunkett's Tyre and Supply in Spokane two hours before the checkpoint opened! I could not believe the warm reception we received. All of a sudden, cameras were flashing and two spectators came up and asked me to sign their issues of MCN with the Helix announcement in it. Boy, was I surprised. Until then, I couldn't even get a police officer to accept my autograph on a traffic citation.

Perhaps the best feeling of all came from knowing that Mike had cleaned up in the ""Ed won't make it to Ogden"" pool. Although he said it was a joke, I couldn't help but notice the collection being taken from my fellow competitors.

Having ridden more than 700 miles in 21 hours "an easy ride" the Helix was in good shape as I changed the oil.

The next leg's bonuses sent riders on two different paths. You could go to San Francisco and then have to get across holiday traffic in Los Angeles and San Diego, or take a more direct route but suffer through the intense heat of Death Valley. I used my head and skipped both of them, opting to pick up some easy points back in Salt Lake City.

All was going according to plan until Bob's R60/2 started making nasty noises. Near Butte, Montana, we attempted a roadside repair, but it was hopeless, and I was way behind schedule. Knowing I lacked the horsepower to make up time, Bob made me leave him behind.

Traveling through Idaho, I almost made Iron Butt history. Nobody wants to see those flashing lights behind them, and I was a bit surprised to see them behind me! Pointing to a very long line of semis, the police officer was not amused. Thirty-seven mph is what the ticket would read. Not 37 over, just 37, period. As in 37 mph in a 65-mph zone. I was 8 mph below the legal 45-mph minimum; an Iron Butt first getting a ticket for riding too slow. It was almost worth getting the ticket, but I could not help myself. I put on my best face to convince the officer to let me slide. I pointed out that by riding with my four-way flashers on and staying in the slow lane, I was like any other underpowered, overburdened vehicle on this stretch of highway. The officer pointed out that this was meant for trucks. We compromised. He could live with the fact that the Helix with it's very large load (meaning me) was indeed a two-wheel truck and let me go!

The only way to make San Diego in time was to simply ride and ride and ride. When I was sick of riding, I rode some more. Finally, in Baker, California, when my mind and body could take no more abuse, I took a two-hour catnap. For the first time, I thanked the maker of what would later turn out to be my best friend, The Screaming Meanie Timer. A device guaranteed to get you thrown out of any motel in the world! It also does an excellent job of waking you up.

Just how far I went did not register. I was too worried about getting to San Diego on time. I made it into the checkpoint with only five seconds to spare not bad timing. Mike later told me that I had ridden 1057 miles in 22 hours and 11 minutes. He didn't know if that was some sort of Helix record, but decided I deserved something for doing it anyway. Little did we know, the Montana to California ride would be the first of three 1000-plus mile days.

On the San Diego to Fort Lauderdale leg, the bonuses started getting serious. The big points were up at Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. With 74 hours to make it across the U.S. and with the thought of mile marker 880 on my mind, Mount Rushmore didn't look that inviting. However, I did have bonus fever. I pointed Floppy toward the wrong ocean and headed southwest toward Mexico. Even though it sounds strange, it made sense to me, and I got to bag some very easy pints.

Not sleeping was bad enough, but the desert almost did me in. In Yuma, the gas station thermometer showed a blistering 123! F. The cashier said, ""Don't pay attention to that. It's only 114! F out there!"" That made me feel much cooler, but I still gulped down another half-gallon of Gatorade and took a 44 - oz. Dr. Pepper for the road. Within two miles I found myself longing to be back in the Montana cold that I hated so much just 38 hours before. For the first time in my life, I put on extra clothing to ward off the heat.

As I crossed into Texas and saw mile marker number one, my heart sank. I've been across Interstate 10 at least 100 times too many. The thought of having to spend the next 879 miles trying to reach Louisiana depressed me. Twenty miles later I would have something real to worry about. Headwinds of up to 50 mph. Although I never stopped during the next seven hours, I struggled to cover only 250 miles. I stopped and called Mike Kneebone for advice. He told me to stop complaining and get back on Floppy and ride.

A local, overhearing our phone conversation, was a little more helpful. ""Son, "" he said, ""sit a spell and have a cool Dr. Pepper. By the time you're finished, the winds should start to die down."" He looked like he belonged at the Betty Ford Clinic, but his advice sounded a lot better than Mike's.

Thirty minutes later the old man kicked me awake from a deep sleep and told me it was time to go. I couldn't believe my eyes. The winds had slowed to a manageable breeze. With this window of opportunity, I jumped on Floppy, thanked the man and high-tailed it nonstop into San Antonio for a midnight visit to the Alamo and some bonus points.

I needed to get some real sleep, but with the holiday weekend, every room in the whole state of Texas was taken. I finally had to check into the Iron Butt Motel near Houston. In this case, the motel was a picnic table at a rest stop shared with another Iron Butt rider. I was so tired, I can't remember who he was. For all I know, he might have been a mirage.

After what seemed like an eternity, I finally reached the Louisiana border at Interstate 10, mile marker 880. I stopped and spent a few precious seconds to record this event on film. In Mississippi, I met Scoot-Tour member Paul McDaniels from Long Beach. Paul and I had arranged to meet at exit 28 to help me with anything I might need to get to the next leg of the rally. Unknown to me, Paul had arranged for a local TV station to interview me about the trip. I looked awful and I smelled ten times worse because of the heat and lack of plumbing at the Houston Iron Butt Motel. The interview went well. Paul filled my cooler with Dr. Pepper, which was rapidly becoming my favorite drink and meal, checked over the Helix and sent me on my merry way.

Although I lost a valuable hour with the TV crew and Paul, I was shocked when I pulled up at the USS Alabama, a bonus destination in Mobile, Alabama. There I met up with four Iron Butt competitors along with 1991 Iron Butt winner Ron Major on his Honda ST1100. If I could catch up with Ron, I knew I could

make the checkpoint in Fort Lauderdale. I ended the day by treating myself to a cool motel room with a shower in Crestview, Florida. In four hours, I would be at it again.

The next morning, I pulled into a rest area and met Garve Nelson. Garve was attempting to finish his third Iron Butt Rally, a feat only two other riders have accomplished. Garve gives me hope about what middle-age can be like. At a young 72, he looked a lot better than I did. I was so in awe of Garve that I was willing to blow 20 minutes listening to his advice on ways of staying awake. Surprisingly, I made it into Fort Lauderdale with two hours to spare, to be met by a crowd estimated at more than 150 people; many of them scooter riders.

The Iron Butt rally draws a wide range of riders, from all walks of life. I met up with Dr. Michael Murphy, a Neurosurgeon from Belleville, Illinois. We didn't talk about the stock market or his latest patient, instead we talked about how our bikes were performing and how we were going to survive and then celebrate the finish of this rally! Everyone I met was the same way. Men and women from all walks of life from attorneys, television engineers, police officers, carpenters, boilermakers, salesmen and even people that operate nuclear power plants. All with one common bond; the love of riding outrageous miles.

My next stop was the American Motorcycle Institute in Daytona Beach, Florida. Head Honda Instructor Nathan Stophel and two of his Honda speciality students, Michael Harris and Alan Shultz, gave up their holiday weekend and opened the doors at 1:00 a.m. to service Floppy. I could not believe their generosity. Another Scoot-Tours member, Phil Hendricks, was waiting, camera in hand, to record this event while I slept on a sofa upstairs. During my all too short middle-of-the-night stay, the crew at AMI changed the oil, tires and sparkplug, and gave the Helix a tuneup. Although it was in excellent shape, as a preventive measure, they took the time to change the drivebelt. Other than oil changes, this would be the only service performed on the Helix during the entire rally, despite being grossly overloaded. Honda builds one tough scooter.

Seven hundred miles later in Norfolk, Virginia, I found myself hopelessly lost and stopped to ask a local directions to the big bonus points at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. This Chicago Bear linebacker look-alike firmly suggested that since the sun was setting, I ought to get out of this part of town fast. It wasn't even safe for him at night. With that, I revved up the Helix and tried to get back on track, only to find myself cruising the streets of Hampton. I had crossed a bridge alright, the only thing was, it was the wrong bridge. There were no points in that, so I turned around to risk the streets of Norfolk again to try and find the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. One hour later, I finally crossed the bridge and rode north into the cool night air in search of additional points.

In Salisbury, Maryland, I needed a break, so I checked into a Super 8 motel. I told the desk clerk, a school teacher in her real life, that I needed a wake-up call in two hours. ""Are you sure there aren't two of you on that motorcycle?"" she asked. It was a question I'd heard before. As near as I can figure, no one checks into a \$60 room for two hours without some hanky-panky in mind. I blushed and tried to explain what I was doing. At first she hesitated, but the story was bizarre enough that she cracked a smile and told me that she would do whatever it took to get me up in exactly two hours.

One hour and 50 minutes later, at 3 a.m. sharp, my Screaming Meanie Timer with its blaring dual alarms that are guaranteed to wake the dead, failed to stir me. Finally, the pounding from the irritated couple in the room next door to me got me to turn the stupid thing off. Of course, I did the logical thing and rolled over and went back to sleep. Fortunately, Ms. Thomas was a woman of her word. She rang the phone relentlessly. When that didn't work, she sent over the motel security guard with orders to kick me out of bed at all costs. That worked.

By the time I reached New Hampshire, the little Helix attracted the attention of several riders heading to the Maine checkpoint. With an escort of riders in tow, my spirits were lifted and the group of us arrived two hours before the checkpoint at Reynolds Sport Center in the little town of Gorham opened.

I was greeted by a Harley rider who said, ""Congratulations! You have ridden the scooter more miles before breakfast today than I have ridden in the last six years!"" He was joking, of course, but today I felt like it could be true. My ride inspired his girlfriend! If I could take the Helix around the U.S., she could ride just about anywhere. She went into Reynolds' showroom to check out a new Helix for herself.

After we received the last bonus list of the rally, I called Mike Kneebone for advice. This is what I was waiting for. The points were serious now, and I could move up on the roster. When he answered the phone, Mike was laughing hysterically. ""Points? You want more points? Are you nuts?"" Mike yelled. ""Listen Ed, nobody thought you would get this far. Point Floppy straight to Salt Lake City. Don't pass GO, don't collect any more points! Just get to the finish line!"" I knew Mike was right, so I followed the winner of the Run-What-You-Brung Rally, Morris Kruemcke, to a Motel 6 in Portland and booked my first real nights sleep of the rally. Seven glorious hours in a warm bed. What a treat!

Well rested, the miles flew by. Before I knew it, I was just five miles from my home in Chicago. For just a moment, I thought about stopping home to sleep in my own bed. But I knew what a mistake that could be. You can't be in this crowd and not know the story of Paul Persinger and his son—the first father/son team in the Iron Butt. They were running with the big dogs until they made that fatal mistake of sleeping in their own beds and never waking up. This year, it was newly-wed Kevin Mello. He would stop at home in Massachusetts never to be seen again.

West of Des Moines, Iowa, I finally hit the endurance wall. I could ride no further. My butt hurt so bad I couldn't sit down. Even laying down did not bring any relief. Only standing eased the pain. But that was nothing compared to the shape my head was in. Iron Butt types call this condition ""mush mind,"" and I had a real bad case. I kept telling myself over and over again that I only had to ride another 1000 miles. Nothing helped. As the clock ticked down, my spirits sagged.

A farmer in an old beat-up pickup stopped by to say hello. To my surprise, he was an MCN subscriber and knew all about the Helix story. He patted me on the back and said, ""I know you can make it to the end."" That was just enough to get me back in the saddle and out of that rest area. I'm not exactly sure why, but this unexpected pep talk made me feel that people really did care about what I was doing.

A couple of hours later, while crossing into Nebraska, I noticed a very big Lincoln Town Car approaching at a rapid clip. I thought perhaps I had done something wrong and they were out to get me. All of a sudden they pulled next to me, the windows were down and the businessmen types inside started yelling out the window, ""Two more states! Two more states!"" and gave me a thumbs-up. Needless to

say, I felt elated, and this encounter gave me the energy to ride into Grand Island for my last night of sleep.

With an easy 650 miles to go to Salt Lake City, I calculated I could squeeze in six hours of sleep. When I woke up with a clear head the next morning, I realized I had made a serious mistake. Salt Lake wasn't 650 miles away, it actually was 800. I had 14 hours to make 800 miles. That's not a problem on a Gold Wing, but riding into the mountains into an approaching cold front with heavy wind and rain on the last day of the Iron Butt Rally--that could be a problem.

At exit 333 in eastern Wyoming, I bagged my last 173 points by taking a picture of the Helix in front of a plaque describing the geology of the area. By now the clock was racing and so was my heart. It was nearly 11 a.m., and if I didn't make it to Salt Lake City by 7 p.m., a ride of over 400 miles, I would be out of the rally. All the thousands of miles I rode would be pointless.

The pressure of these last miles was intense. I could not relax and found myself fighting leg cramps. My butt stung so intensely it hurt to try and find a new position. I was so hungry and thirsty, I thought I would pass out. I had plenty of food and water, but I could not afford even a second to stop and get it. All I could think of was Rallymaster Chalmers with his time clock in hand. Earlier this year, Steve tossed his best friend out of the Utah 1088 for being three minutes late to the finish line. This was not going to happen to me.

At 5:22 p.m. on Saturday, September 9th, I pulled into the finish line. Arriving 22 minutes into the penalty clock cost me 110 points and two positions, but I didn't care. I had squeaked in under the wire with a cool hour and 38 minutes to spare. However, until you check in, the rally is not over. I had to push my way through the crowd to find Steve Chalmers and Michael Kneebone.

After I checked in, Mike looked at my odometer reading and burst out laughing. I had earned a Silver Medal and bagged position number 22 out of a starting field of 54 riders and 37 finishers! Mike said, ""Not too bad, Ed. You managed to finish ahead of Honda Gold Wings, ST1100s, a Yamaha Venture, BMWs, Harleys, an FJ1200 and a GSX-R1100. Heck, you even beat a ZX-11.""

""So what was so funny?"" I asked.

""Well Ed, it's like this. In the last Iron Butt you rode your cushy touring bike 9,232 miles to a 10th place finish. You just rode the Helix 9,361 miles for 22nd place."" Mike, who always knows how to ruin a party, added ""I guess we picked the wrong year to enter the Helix! Maybe next time we can. . .""

And with that, I ran out of the motel as fast as I could.

*This editorial about the Iron Butt Rally by Motorcycle Consumer News Editor Lee Parks also appeared in the same issue as Ed Otto's Helix story.*

Many sports have their ultimate test of endurance. In bicycling there is the Tour De France. In motorcycling we have the International Iron Butt Rally.

For those of you not familiar with the Iron Butt, it's basically a lap around the continental United States in 11 days. That equates to somewhere in the neighborhood of 9,000 to 11,000 miles. In other words, about 1,000 miles per day for 11 days straight. Add to this distance the time needed to eat, sleep, refuel



and do maintenance/repairs, and you're looking at a very special breed of motorcyclist who competes in this event.

While an average Iron Butt competitor does not look like your typical world-class athlete, these riders are indeed athletes in the truest sense of the word. According to Webster, an athlete is: one who is trained or skilled in exercises, sports or games requiring physical strength, agility or stamina.

As detailed in the Iron Butt Report, MCN decided to enter Ed Otto in the Iron Butt on a Honda Helix scooter. Nobody thought Ed would even be able to finish (not even us, at times). But Ed knew it was possible, and that was enough. A three-time finisher of the Butt, Otto had over 1,000,000 miles under his belt, but he still trained for the event like his life depended on it. And in many ways, it probably did.

Utilizing a computer mapping program and drawing on a lifetime of experience, Ed figured out that he could average no more than three hours of sleep a night just to finish. Remember, that's only three hours of sleep per night for 11 straight days!

Clearly, the human body was not engineered for such abuse. Therefore, Ed had to do more than just train his body...He had to muster enough mental fortitude to keep going even when his whole body was refusing to cooperate. This is not unlike a heroin junkie fighting off his body's desires by going cold turkey. Ask anyone who has ever gone through a similar process and you will begin to understand the amount of mental toughness this requires.

I am happy to report that, with superhuman effort, Ed Otto finished the rally and became my hero. He did what everyone said was impossible, and he did it with style. But doing the impossible is what heroes are all about.

""Congratulations Eddie! You achieved a real milestone in your career. We're totally proud of you"" I told him excitedly on the phone.

""It's really nothing,"" he replied, the Helix is the real star. It was like the train in The Little Engine that Could.

""Nothing?"" I said in amazement. ""You just circumnavigated the United States on a 250cc scooter in 11 days. You call that nothing? You're a hero. You're going to be famous.""

""Lee, you're telling me that I'm going to be famous for sitting on my ass with a bent wrist for a long period of time. What kind of a thing is that to be famous for? Nobody is going to be impressed by that."" he said.

""Well I'm impressed,"" I added. ""Not to mention all of our subscribers who got to see you in action and called us up to report on your progress. Or all of our readers who keep calling and faxing us wanting to know when the Iron Butt story is coming out because they can't wait to read it. Or American Honda who wants to display your bike in their corporate office. Do I need to go on?""

""I don't know,"" he continued, ""it just doesn't seem like a big deal to me. A big deal is how you racer guys drag your knees on the ground without falling off. To me, that's impressive.""

""I know lots of guys who can drag their knees on the ground. But there's only one person who ever completed the Iron Butt on a Helix, and that's you, Mr. Edward Otto,"" I said, sternly. I'm afraid you're just going to have to live with being my hero. And the more you try to tell me it's nothing, the more heroic you will become.""

When you really think about, motorcycles offer a unique accessibility to heroism. As motorcyclists, we epitomize the American independent spirit. It's easy to forget how lucky we are. There are millions of Walter Mittys living in quiet desperation out there. But how many people get to experience the freedom and joy we receive from riding?

When we ride, we're just doing what we love. To us, it is nothing special. It's just what we do an expression of who we are. But to an outsider, motorcycles are an unknown in their lives. There seems to be both an inherent fear and excitement that people experience whenever dealing with something new. Some lean more toward the fear side, while others are drawn toward the excitement. In either case, there is a tendency to look in awe at those things that we are either afraid of, or unable to do. Such is the stuff heros are mad of.

We are fortunate that the sport of motorcycling takes so many different forms, because we each have our own things that we are good at, and we can look to ourselves as each other's heros. This is why Ed and I can both be in awe of each other's ability as motorcyclists even though we are so different. And if either of us wants a new challenge, we can simply try a new form of riding.

So long as we just keep doing what comes naturally to us, we can't help but be heros to ourselves and others.

Because the best heros are those who are just being themselves.

Lee Parks

Editor

Motorcycle Consumer News

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