

AGAINST THE PAVEMENT

by Manny Sameiro



This is a tale about one terribly shattered dream. Each of us face, sooner or later, moments in our life where the best made plans fall apart. In my case, that occurred on Tuesday, August 26, 1997, in a small town in the northeastern corner of Maine. Before I can even begin to describe this awful moment, I must explain the circumstances which led to that horrible day. Once upon a time, in the spring of 1994, I learned about the infamous Iron Butt motorcycle rally. In a well known bike magazine was an article about Steve Attwood's stunning, first place win in the 1993 running of this event. As most of you Butt fans know, Steve brought a standard, 1983 Motto Guzzi cycle from his home in England and managed to out-smart, out-ride and out-last many Americans on this grueling, cross-country rally, without the benefit of a top-notch motorcycle, fancy computer map programs, or an intimate knowledge of our American roads. Mr. Attwood arrived on our soil with guts, determination and a will to win. I was immediately impressed.

After reading this article, I knew I wanted to enter the Iron Butt to see if I, too, could make as impressive a showing in this cross-country, motorcycle contest. I eventually called Mike Kneebone (photo), chairman of the Iron Butt Association, to inquire about an entry in the 1994 Rally. To my dismay, I was told that the Iron Butt is held every other year and that the 1995 candidates were already chosen. Mr. Kneebone readily assured me that I would get an application for the 1997 Rally and be placed on his mailing list. So I waited.

Ben Franklin was right: patience is a virtue. After many, many long months, I was finally accepted as a contestant for the 1997 Rally. On Saint Patrick's Day of 1996, I got the notice that changed my life - I was then officially entered into the 1997 Iron Butt. Fantastic! Now what do I do? With over ten years of riding experience, and a 1986 Suzuki Cavalcade at my disposal, the answer was simple. It was time to get ready. And that I did.

In the 17 months after I was chosen to compete, I overhauled my tour bike and installed all the necessary Rally equipment (auxiliary gas tank (photo), extra lights, dual timers, c.b. radio, and a drinking container). In addition, I upgraded my suspension system with Progressive shocks and springs since my motorcycle always had an annoying, front-end wobble at higher speeds. Tires, rims and bearings were not the source of this problem. I then practiced my long distance riding as much as time permitted.

The closer I got to the August 25, 1997 start date, the more confident I became. Not regularly accustomed to failure, I dreamt that I could win this event if I just kept my cool and rode long and hard. Of course, as we all know, dreams seldom come true.

On August 23, 1997, I rode into Lisle, Illinois - the starting point of the 1997 Iron Butt - after spending 11 hours on I-80 all the way from my hometown in New Jersey. The bike was handling well and my adrenaline level was in check. When I got to Lisle, I was introduced to many of the riders although some of them I had met before, either through the Internet or in person at informal barbecues in Virginia and in New Jersey. Boy was I feeling lucky to be a part of something that I had been waiting for so long to happen.

With two days of socializing and rider check-ins behind me, it was now time to start the Rally - time to see how I would fare. It was August 25 and I was raring to go. After a full breakfast, I assembled with the others in the Hilton parking lot waiting to embark on the longest motorcycle journey of my life. Nothing could go wrong at the starting line, right? Not! A corroded CB wire, discovered just thirty minutes before show time, was all that it took to really test my patience. With much thanks to fellow contestant Rick Williams (photo), who stood next to me with a roll of electrical tape and a soothing voice, I patched the strands together. Was this a foreshadowing of events to come? After the CB was repaired, I rode out in my quest to conquer the Iron Butt Beast.

The object of the Iron Butt Rally, for those of you unfamiliar with the rules, is to circumnavigate the United States in eleven days and accumulate as many bonus points as possible. Riders are required to appear at five checkpoints at a certain date and time. Failure to appear at any one checkpoint within a two hour window means instant bonus disqualification for two legs of the rally, plus a substantial point penalty added for good measure. Missing two checkpoints means you go home to your family and friends a loser, wearing the "DNF" ("did-not-finish") badge on your chest like Hester Prynne. In the 1997 rally, the checkpoints (in this order) were located in (1) Gorham (near Portland), Maine, (2) Daytona, Florida, (3) Orange, California, (4) Yakima, Washington, and then back to (5) Lisle, Illinois. The winner of the Rally is the person who makes all 5 checkpoints bringing back the most bonus points. Bonus points are generally greater the further away from the most direct route between checkpoints you have to go to acquire them. They are collected with photos, receipts, etcetera, in some pretty far-off places throughout the country.

From the starting line, I chose to grab a big bonus in Madawaska, Maine, which meant traveling through Canada to reach this famous, most northeastern point of our country. There were other bonus points along that route, the most comical one being in "Hell," Michigan, which was the first to obtain on this path (the Rallymaster, Ed Otto, definitely had something up his sleeve when he came up with this one!).

Despite being far away from Gorham Maine, where we had to be just 30 hours from the start, going to Madawaska did not initially concern me for one very important reason. Months before the start of the Rally, Madawaska was listed as a bonus site in a sample Rally packet which was distributed to every contestant. During the actual Rally, bonuses are not given out in advance, making it difficult to plan any well-calculated route. Instead, they are distributed at each checkpoint minutes before the start of the next leg. In this case, however, all of us knew about the possibility of Madawaska as a bonus destination since it was mentioned in the sample listings. Taking advantage of this information, and consistent with my efforts to prepare for this event, I took a ride from Lisle to Madawaska (photo) to Gorham in July,

just one month before the start of Rally. Having made this trip under 30 hours (with 4 hours sleep at a Canadian rest stop), I knew I could do it again.

As I traveled to Madawaska, I went to Hell (photo) and a few other places along the way, through Canada, when I finally stopped in Drummondville (Quebec) for a few hours sleep. I was ahead of my schedule and knew that I could sleep there for 4 hours and still make it to Gorham on time. Unfortunately, I was too wound up to get any meaningful rest so I got up after less than two hours of sleep on my sleeping bag.

After I woke up, I made it to the Madawaska post office and got my valuable bonus receipt. I had plenty of time to make it to Gorham from there but I was feeling punchy due to my lack of sleep. I decided to take a leisurely ride down U.S. Route 1 to connect with I-95 instead of making that connection via a much faster Canadian interstate. In need of gas, I pulled into a "mom-and-pop" filling station in Van Buren, Maine, which would forever seal my fate as far as any hopes of winning this Rally was concerned.

What I am about to explain next is not easy for me. Most riders are just too damn proud to admit their mistakes. And some, I have discovered, will even lie or make excuses to cover up their errors, assuming no one will challenge their account. As much as I'd like to omit this next, embarrassing detail from my story, I just can't do it; candor compels me to be as complete and accurate about this episode as my memory will permit. Since there is no way I will ever forget what followed, I'd better 'fess up now before it's too late!

As I pulled into this small gas station, I could see clearly that there were just 3 pumps in 1 center island. When the bike came to a stop, I was next to the furthest one which was labeled "Premium." Instinctively, I rolled the bike back 2 pumps to fill up my dual tanks with 11 gallons of "Regular," passing by what I thought was a pump for "Plus." I had made it to this station on fumes and was happy to know that I did not run out of gas beforehand.

When I reached for the nozzle, I did not notice anything strange. I put the spout into both of my tanks and wondered, however, why this gas was pink and had so many bubbles in it. When I went to pay "mom" for the fuel, she told me that she had never seen a bike before that ran on diesel. "DIESEL??!!," I remarked. Yes, "diesel," she replied. When I turned around, I saw the inconspicuous markings on the pump and I just wanted to kill myself. Actually, if I had a handgun, I might have shot her before turning the gun to my own head as I asked myself: "why didn't she just stop me?" Of course, the fault was all mine and now I was stuck with this major problem and not much time to spare.

Immediately I rolled my bike to the side and began the slow process of draining both of my tanks. The auxiliary one was simple to drain because of where it sat and the exposed fuel line connections. The main tank was a bit more difficult to clear since I had to remove one side panel and gravity was not in my favor. After about 20 long minutes, I thought I had emptied my tanks completely as I was anxious to put in 11 gallons of real gas this time around.

I went to the right pump this time and filled up the tanks. When I compared the gallons on my diesel receipt to the pump totals, I knew I was still in some trouble because I had about two less gallons of gas in the bike than I expected. I now understood that there was still some diesel in my main tank. The next decision that I made crucified me. I figured that "some" diesel mixed in with gasoline would not be a

problem so I decided to turn the bike over to see what would happen. Well, I did, and that came in the form of white clouds and a stalled engine. Now my goose was really cooked.

After roughly 2 hours of properly draining my tanks, cleaning the plugs and carbs, and putting everything back together, the bike started again. However, I now believed that I could not make the opening time of the Gorham checkpoint unless I made a serious effort to get there quickly. In a huff, I rode that tour bike some 60 miles on Route 1, a two lane highway, like many sport riders do on there Ninjas, GSXR's, etc., and, unlike I had ever pushed this luxury tour bike before. When I got to Houlton, Maine, where I-95 meets Route 1, I had about 2 1/2 hours to go another 250 miles if I wanted to make the checkpoint on time, but up to 4 1/2 hours if I wanted credit for just getting there (losing 5 points for each minute I was late). In the next few minutes I suppose I forgot about the real, 4 1/2 hour deadline so I tried in vain to get to Gorham sooner. If one could ever combine these two descriptive terms, what occurred next was truly "tragic" and "miraculous" at the same time.

Not one mile on I-95 my Suzuki began to dance, although no one was playing any music. As I was accelerating on this very straight stretch of highway, my front-end started to wobble. And man did that tire tremble, like I had never seen before. For various reasons, I am not too clear about the actual speed I was going at this time. Suffice it to say that it felt like I was moving over 100 miles an hour as my front-end shook and rattled. After the "shake" and "rattle" came the "roll," right into the median strip as I was simultaneously flung from my bike onto the paved shoulder. Moments before I landed against the pavement I tried desperately to straighten out my bike, but to no avail. Like a slow motion picture, the following images often replay in my mind regarding this accident, which was my first aboard a two-wheeled vehicle.

Feeling like I was flung from a stubborn bronco, I managed to stay clear from my bike as I executed several perfect spins, cartwheels and one long slide on the shoulder before everything came to a stop. I know that I am not made of rubber, but, I felt like Gumby bouncing along the highway. When the dust settled, I realized what had just happened as I quickly sprang to my feet. No longer feeling punchy from my lack of sleep, I could not believe that my motorcycle was in a ditch, twisted out of shape, as I stood there in awe while sensing no immediate pain. After a few minutes, a Maine State trooper arrived at the scene, followed by a wrecker and then an ambulance. It was during these terribly long moments on the side of the road that I realized my Iron Butt dream had just turned into a tragic nightmare.

As the paramedics approached me, I stopped gazing at my deceased motorcycle. They took my blood pressure first and it was 120/70 (honest!). They also asked me if I was in pain as they told me about the blood they saw dripping from gaping holes in my outer garments, specifically on my elbows and knees. I was not wearing protective pants (a decision I would later regret) but I was wearing a Gore-Tex, Tour Master Jacket. The jacket did more to protect me than a t-shirt, however, I was not happy about how the inner elbow pads spun around, leaving only the fabric to insulate me from the pavement. Like my knees, my elbows (photo) were also in bad shape, so I went to the hospital to deal with all this road rash. At the time, my chest was also sore. Despite all this, I was still feeling relatively little pain as I let the paramedics further examine me. I was alive without any broken bones, missing limbs and had plenty to be thankful for, if I could be thankful about anything. Since I walked away from this accident without any further, serious injuries, despite the circumstances, I can now accept that in some way I was also blessed with a miracle in Maine on that fateful afternoon.

At the hospital in Houlton I was treated to some of the finest emergency medical care I have ever received. Since I have been in emergency rooms before (too many times to mention), I know that the nurses and doctors who saw me were top notch. Now, seated upright on an examining table, I knew what I had to do next - call the Rally officials and tell them I was out of the Iron Butt competition.

When Mike picked up the phone I hardly knew what to say. There I was, in northeastern Maine, in a hospital, wearing Iron Butt underwear (there is a reason why your mother always insisted you wear clean shorts!), telling this motorcycle icon that I, you know, screwed up big time! I never told him about the "diesel incident" because I was too ashamed of my initial mistake. Instead, in a fit of logic, I told him about the crash and said: "I am out of the Rally." He hastily shared his regrets as he went back to his score-keeping (later calling me to spend more time on the phone), but before he hung up, he coyly asked: "Why don't you get another bike and finish the Rally." In response to this seemingly half-cocked, rhetorical question, I said: "Mike, where am I gonna get one up here . . . besides, I can't afford another big bike right now." After I hung up the phone all I could do was hold back the tears as I knew the Rally was over for me. Eventually, the nurses and doctors did what they had to do and I was discharged, with bandages on my arms and legs, after all the X-Rays came up negative. With no place to go, I checked into a local motel and purchased a six-pack of Molson Ice to keep me company for the night.

Before I got the motel room, I did make several attempts to get home. No one would rent me a car, one way, out of Maine, and public transportation did not exist. Even an effort to hitch a ride at a nearby truck stop was unfruitful. So, when I checked into the motel that night, it was with the understanding that I had to find a way home the next day.

When I woke up, the aches all over my body hit me like a freight train. I was sore everywhere, especially in my chest area. Furthermore, the bandages on my arms and legs did little to absorb the bleeding during the night. I had to explain to the desk clerk that no one gave birth on their bed; what a bloody mess I left the cleaning staff that morning! Interestingly, the attendant did not blink an eye when I apologized to her for leaving all the blood which soaked right through the sheets and mattress cover. She told me that they were "used to that." To this day, I regret not asking her to explain what she meant by that. In any event, I really felt miserable that morning but knew that I had to get out of there, somehow.

Notwithstanding all my discomfort, which did not prevent me from walking, talking, and thinking straight, after awhile I began to consider Kneebone's suggestion about getting another motorcycle. I knew that if I got another bike and continued in the Rally, all I could do was hope to finish since I would be greatly penalized for the failed checkpoint and also switching my bike (more penalties are assessed for that, too). Assuming I could get to Daytona on time, if I got another bike and completed the Rally I would not be labeled a "DNF" rider. "Do I really wanna go for it," I thought?

As I was getting dressed, ready to have some breakfast next door, I put on my Iron Butt Rally baseball cap; one that is given to every rider at the start. Just above the brim is the Rally's official logo: "World's Toughest Motorcycle Competition." Seeing these words reflected (albeit backwards) in the mirror, I wondered if I could ever wear this hat in public if I didn't at least try to finish this grueling event. I then thought, "what should I do?" Well, the answer came to me immediately. I then opened the Yellow Pages in the room and found the only motorcycle shop in town. Called "Tidd's Sport Shop," this is where I would look to find another bike and finish the Iron Butt. All of a sudden, the pain in my body didn't seem to bother me anymore.

After convincing the friendly tow truck operator to give me a ride to Tidd's, I got there around 10:00 a.m. on August 27. As I walked into the showroom floor I knew that buying the right bike there would be difficult since this shop sold mostly snowmobiles and ATVs. They had a few new bikes in the shop, but I really couldn't afford any of them. After some hurried discussions I was shown the only two, used motorcycles that were for sale: a rusted-out, 1976(?) Honda CB750 (\$500) and a clean, 1983 Honda VT500 Shadow (\$1199). I purchased the Shadow for \$1100; it had new tires, shaft drive and only 11,000 miles. Except for the 3 gallon gas tank, it seemed interstate capable, even though it was a bit small for my 6' frame. I bought the bike with my credit card, called my insurance agent for coverage (with a short explanation why I needed it) and was on my way in no time. Before I left town, I made a brief stop at a local Wal-Mart to get 2 duffle bags to carry some of my gear. I left Houlton around noon time and headed south, straight to Gorham.

It only took a few miles for me to realize that riding this bike around the country wasn't going to be easy. With road rash still stinging my knees and elbows, this tiny Shadow did little to ease my pain. Having my knees rise close to my chest, the pressure on my leg wounds was difficult to ignore. Furthermore, the spring suspension barely absorbed the bumps on the road, adding more displeasure to my ride. Whenever I was able to settle into a relatively comfortable, riding position, it was time to refuel, meaning I had to dismount this Shetland pony and feel the road rash tearing apart before any scab could properly cover my wounds. This process happened too often since refueling took place every 75 to 100 miles depending upon how fast I was traveling. By the time I got to Gorham, I wondered if I made the right decision.

Once in Gorham, I quickly pulled into Reynolds' Motorcycle Shop, the site of our first checkpoint, at around 5:30 pm. When I walked inside and told everyone who I was, I got some immediate attention. Needing proof that I actually made the first checkpoint (though 24 hours late), I asked for an oil change, with a receipt. I felt like Richard Petty at a pit stop. The staff at Reynolds stopped what they were doing, wheeled my bike into an open service bay, and gave me the fastest oil and filter change I have ever gotten.

Moments later, with a paid receipt in hand, I asked several mechanics how long they thought it would take me to get to Daytona. Two of them said they each did the trip in twenty and twenty one hours, respectively. With only twenty-three hours until the checkpoint closed (minus 2 hours for the opening time), I felt somewhat confident that I could also make the trip, even though it would mean 24 more hours without sleep. Thanking these guys for their help, I left Gorham before 6:00 pm and headed to the next checkpoint, which was about 1150 miles further south.

Riding my "new" Shadow for the next 21 1/2 hours proved to be a real challenge. As I repeated the refueling process every hour, I soon realized that I could not do more than 50 miles within that time frame. Therefore, I settled on a moderate pace to conserve fuel and give me more time on the road.

As I traveled south from state to state my confidence in reaching Daytona on time began to wane. Since I didn't have enough time to periodically check my map and determine the remaining miles to go, I would ask the toll and gas station attendants how far it was to Daytona from wherever I happened to be. Oddly enough, I was always given a figure that was outside my deadline when I factored in my slow, 50 m.p.h. rate of travel. None of these answers deterred me, however, in my effort to reach the next checkpoint.

Skipping lunch and dinner that day also didn't seem to bother me on the road. I grew fond of Mountain Dew and Snickers Bars as these were the only sources of nourishment I could muster up quickly. Unfortunately, all the caffeine in the Mountain Dew I drank that night did little to keep me from being pulled over by a fine, southern Trooper in some state just south of Jersey. On the side of the road, with an accent better (or worse?) than fellow rider Harold Brooks, this conscientious law enforcement officer asked me why I was weaving from side to side and unable to hold a steady pace. I didn't give him a full explanation, but said that I was tired and ready to pull over to get some rest. He gave me that opportunity as he directed me off the next exit. Miraculously, I felt refreshed 5 minutes after he left and continued my journey, never ever coming into contact with a law enforcement officer throughout the rest of the Rally.

Just as I was getting my second wind, I was traveling through South Carolina when I forgot to reset my fuel petcock switch after one particular fill-up. Of course, that meant when the bike began to stall some 80 miles later I didn't have any reserve fuel left. That was okay since I needed the exercise and an opportunity to break open my road rash scabs some more. Luckily, the nearest fuel station was within 1/4 mile back UP the road and the bike was light enough to push. Within 30 minutes I was once again headed south on I-95. It was at this point that I seriously thought I was not going to ever finish this rally, but committed nevertheless to keep on going.

The next several hours were very depressing as I wondered if I would ever make it to my destination on time. Eventually, I rode into Florida where the milepost signs were now more useful to calculate how much time I had left. As I did that, I was amazed to discover that I barely had enough time to get to Daytona before the checkpoint opened. WOW!! I'm gonna make it just like the servicemen at Reynolds' shop predicted. I rode the rest of the way with faith in my course; a feeling that had been lacking the last 15-20 hours on this unforeseen journey.

When I pulled into the checkpoint grounds, approximately 30 minutes ahead of time, I noticed an ambulance with its lights on. "Deja-vu all over again," I thought! Why was it there? For a moment, I wondered if the Rally crew had called this meat-wagon for my anticipated arrival, thinking I might need some aspirin or a fresh bandage or two. Instead, I quickly learned that Rick Schrader, known to most of us as the "Swamp Thing," did what he hoped would never happen again - crash while competing in the Rally.

Rick got his nickname from a previous Florida encounter in the '95 Rally when he rode into the Everglades swamp and sank his motorcycle. He was unable to finish. He crashed in the '93 Rally also and received, for the first time, the not-so-coveted "DNF Award." I, perhaps, more than most competitors, understood how Rick must have been feeling as the Daytona ambulance crew took him away. He was close to the checkpoint when he came into contact with a trailer and damaged his leg pretty bad. Showing his infamous perseverance, Rick managed to coast in on his tour bike thirty minutes after his misfortune, dealing with a leg that eyewitnesses said was bleeding quite profusely. Unfortunately, Rick never finished the rally. All of a sudden, it was quite clear to me that I wasn't the only rider the Iron Butt Beast would try to victimize.

As soon as I arrived in Daytona I dismounted the Shadow and headed straight to the refreshment table to satisfy my appetite. The scene at this checkpoint was very surreal. There were dazed riders milling about, talking to each other, escaping the heat as best they could, all wondering what lay ahead for the

next and longest leg of the Rally - the three day trip to Orange, California. As for me, I was just glad that I could make it that far and all I could think about was where I was going to sleep that night.

It was in Daytona that I experienced the next in a series of kind acts bestowed upon me by a fellow rider. Tapping me on the shoulder, Harold Brooks (photo), the Virginian who was riding in his record fifth Iron Butt Rally, handed me his hotel room key and said: "Go ahead, take it, you can sleep there tonight; the room is paid for." Harold didn't have to read my mind to understand I was desperate for sleep. Without hesitation, I accepted his kind offer and went to his room, where there I would find Harold and his partner, Jerry Clemmons (photo), already planning which bonuses they would grab during Leg 3. I got about 8 hours of solid rest that night, woke up, and found a Gold Wing t-shirt and pair of blue jeans that Harold left behind. Figuring he forgot to pack these items, I brought them with me for the rest of my trip, intent on giving them back to Harold. I also packed my own stuff before I headed to California early on August 29.

What followed in the next three days can be summarized in a few, short words. Ride the Shadow west on I-10. Re-fuel the bike after 75 miles or more. Repeat that process ten to twelve times. Eat some junk food every now and again. Then, get some sleep in a hotel around midnight. Wake up about four hours later and do that 2 more times. Pretty simple, right? Well, maybe.

Without a doubt, Leg 3 of the Rally was half the challenge for me as it was just getting to Daytona. There was one exception, though, during this portion of my trip that made this long ride seem ever more torturous: the pain to my body began to gradually increase over time. Frankly, the never healing road rash and chest injury could best be described as major discomfort, not crippling pain. If it were more than that, I would never have been able to continue. But, the muscle tension and various abrasions on my body were very annoying to me, requiring that I find hotel rooms with bath facilities so I could soak my body in warm water each morning before I got on the Shadow. Despite the discomfort, I managed to get two, very minor bonus awards for photographs taken in Texas (milepost 880 sign) and Arizona ("Hi Jolly" grave site - photo) which I obtained just to keep my spirits in check.

When I arrived in Orange California, things were different. As I pulled inside Irv Seaver's BMW dealership, the site of the third checkpoint, I wondered why there were people following alongside me on foot. Several strangers all asked if I was the "Manny Sameiro" who crashed in Maine. Embarrassed to answer this question, I did admit that I was him. What happened next really surprised me. These same people congratulated me on my riding effort. All I could think about was how I totally screwed up in Maine and would never have a respectable showing in this Rally, assuming I could still make it to Chicago (which wasn't a guarantee at any point). Why didn't these same people see it that way, I pondered. After all, the best that I could hope for was to finish. Since contests are created to see who wins and not who loses, I didn't understand what all the fuss was about.

As I got off the bike and mingled in the crowd, I realized that no one else shared my view about the Maine mishap. In fact, before I officially checked myself in, I noticed a bulletin board with Internet postings and a little paragraph written by Bob Higdon, which he published on the Iron Butt Home page, about my ride to date. It was very complimentary and certainly made me realize why this ride of mine was getting attention. Now I understood why the strangers had previously greeted me upon my arrival.

I then moseyed up to the check-in table and was greeted by Mr. Higdon (photo) himself. Given the fact that rally rules made it unnecessary for me to go through this process in Daytona (since no bonus credits

were available to me on that leg), this would be my first attempt to secure some points for the two locations I visited in Texas and Arizona. When I explained all of this to Mr. Higdon, he promptly asked me to produce my bonus sheet. I didn't have it. I lost it somewhere along the way but I still had the bonus photos, date/time/mile statistics relative thereto, and my bonus towel and camera to get even more bonus points in the days to follow.

Bob was not pleased. Actually, he seemed pretty pissed-off at me! At first, he said I couldn't get the bonus points without the score-in sheet. I asked him to show me what Rally rule he was relying upon since I had the proper photo and mileage statistics in my hands. We went back and forth a few times about my bonuses which, in hindsight, was very amusing to me. There we were, two attorneys on a vacation of sorts, arguing about what the sacred Rally rules said or didn't say. I managed to win this battle and get my precious points after all. I later understood that Bob was really annoyed about not having the appropriate code from my sheet to enter all my information in his computer. Oh well, he got another score sheet (with the codes) and I wasn't upset with him. After all, he had written such a nice paragraph about my ride that I had nothing to complain about. He then wished me luck and I went outside to mingle with some people; something that I had not done for three, long days.

As the socializing became more intense, the Rally crew assembled to distribute the bonus packets. This was an endurance rally, after all, so I expected the chit-chatting would have to come to an end soon. When I got my packet, I figured I could be a little more competitive this time and strive to obtain bigger bonus points. I was feeling better, physically, than I was in Daytona. "What the hell, why not give it a shot," I said to myself. Accordingly, I found a quiet place nearby, unfolded my map, got out my colored markers, which were yet unopened, and charted a course to Santa Rosa where a large but simple-to-get bonus was to be found at yet another motorcycle shop. As I was plotting my course, Ed Otto, the Rallymaster, approached me and tried to talk me out of my game plan. Ed really wanted me to finish and not risk missing another checkpoint which would mean instant disqualification. I explained to him that I wanted to get enough points to be above last place and that he shouldn't worry about me. After all, I paid my entry fee, just like everyone else, so I wanted my chance to compete. Shaking his head, Ed left me alone and I soon scurried off to get the Santa Rosa bonus, which was only available the next day from 7 to 11 a.m.

When I arrived there, I met some other riders that I knew, including Bob Ray (photo), a then college professor from Alabama who now has is Ph.D. in computer science and is working for a national, defense contractor. Bob is one helluva guy. Witty, entertaining, and a man of integrity, Bob and I soon began talking about the ride before us. It didn't take me long to ask him what bonus points he would be going for atop his Honda Pacific Coast with auxiliary gas tank. Curiosity was the basis for my question. Compassion was the foundation for his answer; Bob told me he was going to Stewart's Point and that I, on my anchor of a motorbike, should tag along with him. Amazed that he would invite me to follow, I accepted his offer as I apologized, in advance, for what would be my slower pace due to the many fuel stops I would be required to make. Bob didn't seem to care too much; he was apparently more interested that I get something out of this Iron Butt besides a long and boring ride.

After Bob solicited the help of local rider Mike Heran (photo) as a volunteer guide to reach our coastal bonus point, we sped off. What followed next for me was, without a doubt, the most enjoyable segment of the Iron Butt Rally. Riding shotgun behind two very skilled and experienced riders, I rode my newly

acquired Shadow on some of the best roads in America, on one of the finest weather days of the year, and all the while in the midst of a national, endurance competition that I had waited years to enter. For the next several hours, there was little, if any, pain slowing me down. As the bikes took one tight turn after another on the famous Pacific Coast highway, I questioned whether I would ever have another opportunity to ride this magnificent road again.

Eventually we got to Stewart's Point (photo) and we took our photo bonus. Shortly thereafter, another competitor arrived and did the same. I was asked by this person, rhetorically I suppose, if I was still "putting around in that little bike." Taking that as a back-handed compliment, I did not remind him that I had "putted" there before he did on his brand new BMW! Anyhow, I finished my Power Bar, Bob finished his cigarette, and the two of us set out north to some Redwood forest site in northern California for more bonus points while our Beemer buddy got out his camera to take his own picture.

Riding further north in California proved to be fantastic. As we approached our bonus location we noticed another competitor, Ron Ayres, was off his bike reading some sign along the highway. When we stopped to say "hello," we could tell that he was very tired but persistent in his efforts to reach the same bonus location that we were also headed for. Bob and I got to the site (photo) shortly before Ron, took some more pictures again, and then saw more Iron Butt riders, including Mike Stewart, arrive as we were prepared to leave. I started feeling better as I could see that I was keeping pace with some of the lead contenders, even though I had no shot at rising above the pack in terms of point values. After Bob smoked another cigarette, and I ate another Power Bar, we left, still hoping to get to Crater Lake which is located in southern Oregon. Dusk had set in and we had almost 20 hours to reach Yakima, Washington, by mid-afternoon the following day.

As Bob Ray and I rode towards our destination it was becoming more and more clear to me that I needed to find a bed to sleep in. The physical discomfort was creeping back and I was finding it difficult to navigate my motorcycle on strange, winding California roads in the middle of darkness. When I discussed this with Bob, I urged him to go on without me and get that Crater Lake bonus he wanted. He refused to leave me behind, proving to me that this was someone you could count on in a pinch. Bob made a very selfless choice by staying with me as we rode to Crescent City, California, to find a hotel for the night. When we got up the next morning, it was apparent to us that getting the Crater Lake bonus would be nearly impossible (at my pace) so Bob and I rode directly to Yakima with little time to spare. Bob gave up this bonus point to ride with me and eventually lost 12 spots in the rider rankings as a result. My respect for him, obviously, was growing larger by the minute.

As fate would have it, Bob and I did not ride together to Yakima. Near Portland, Oregon, I made a mistake and went the wrong way on an interstate that suddenly split. I had enough time to wave to my companion as we both realized it would take me some time to get back on track. Disregarding the lessons I had learned about fuel economy, I rode fast to catch up with Ray, who was now riding with Brad Hogue after we all met at a previous filling station. When I finally caught up with them, I desperately needed some fuel so I shrugged my shoulders as I pulled off into another station. At this point, we were all trying to make the starting time without being penalized for a late arrival. Finally, Bob (and Brad) took my advice as I gestured to them to continue. I did not want their penalties on my conscience. Ironically, I got to the checkpoint a few minutes ahead of schedule but they were nowhere to be found. Bob and Brad arrived shortly thereafter. I suppose we were all grateful to be in Yakima (photo) with just one more leg to go in the Rally.

Unfortunately, the mood at this checkpoint was grim. All of us riders learned that Ron Major, a veteran endurance rider, passed away in an accident in Arizona. We knew something was wrong in Orange, California, where we first learned that Ron was missing; his damaged bike having been discovered in the desert without any trace of him. Speculation about this tragedy ended in Yakima as riders mourned the passing of Ron Major. As a symbol of this loss, many of us placed a small piece of black tape on our windshields to remember our fallen colleague.

The Rally continued. When it was my turn to check-in and collect my bonus points, I was met by Bob Higdon, again, as he sat behind the table next to Mike Kneebone; the two of them working very hard to make this Rally possible. With a wide grin, I gave Bob my photos and receipts. He asked me, once more, for my score-in sheet. I told him that I didn't have it with me. Before I could explain that I left the form in my saddlebag (and it wasn't "lost" like the one he asked for in California), Bob threw up his hands and seemed ready for another friendly, lawyer-like battle. Unfortunately for him, I simply told Bob to wait and that I would be right back with the document. Bob (photo) never got his chance to harass me, but I knew he was still having fun, just like the rest of us.

Soon, it was time to leave. 60 hours to Chicago and the Rally would be over. I got on the bike, convinced I would make it to the finish line, and set out for what would be an uneventful ride. This time I followed Ed Otto's advice and did not try to collect bonus points that were not easily obtainable along the way. I went to Custer's grave site (Montana), Wall, South Dakota, and took the Badlands Tour (also in South Dakota), since these locations were basically alongside I-90, the main route back to Chicago. Unexpectedly, somewhere along the way, at a gas station, I bumped into Kneebone and Higdon, who were traveling to all the checkpoints by automobile. After a brief discussion concerning my yet unhealed road rash, we left the station and were soon together, the next morning, in Lisle, Ill., at the finish of this most enduring competition.

When I got to Lisle I was, of course, happy that I had just finished the Rally. Tired, I took a short nap, got a quick shower and went to the Rider's Banquet. Sitting next to Harold Brooks, with his wife Jean, and also Bob Ray who was with some of his family, I waited to see if Peter Hoogeveen would finish first. Pete, a veteran Rallygoer from Canada, had been cursed in previous Rallies with consecutive, second place finishes. Everyone was wondering if that was going to happen again. It did. This time, another Rally veteran named Rick Morrison won the competition after an impressive showing in the last two legs of the rally, where the aggressive riding counts. Pete, who was in the lead most of the way, accepted his second place finish with true sportsmanship.

As for me, I was very much surprised to receive my own trophy, dubbed the "Manny Award"

(photo) which was actually the Rallymaster Award in disguise. This award recognizes a particular rider's perseverance during the Rally. Crashing my motorcycle, checking out of a hospital and buying a new bike to continue gave Ed Otto a reason, I guess, to bestow that honor upon me. If my misfortune seems unique, then you can believe lightning strikes twice. Ed Otto gave a similar trophy to fellow rider Dwight Hagemann (photo), who also crashed his bike, got some stitches, and purchased another bike to finish. Because I was lucky enough to wreck my bike before Hagemann, the trophy was not called the "Dwight Award." With some mixed emotion about my last place finish, I humbly accepted the

trophy. Since 17 other riders, out of 78, did not finish the Rally, I began to accept my last place finish with some degree of pride.

After the Rally banquet was over, I started thinking about my ride back to New Jersey. Before we all departed from Lisle, I tried desperately to give Harold his clothes back, but he didn't want them. He told me that he threw them out in Daytona because his wife, Jean, was tired of seeing him wearing those rags around their house. Unlike the Brooks', I felt somewhat differently about those "rags." I held onto Harold's t-shirt as a memento of his participation in the rally and of his act of kindness to me.

The rest of this story is uneventful. I stayed in my Lisle hotel room for one full day and then rode home to New Jersey. When I returned, I accumulated over 10,000 miles of highway riding in just two, short weeks. The next day my profession called and it was back to the same old grind, but this time, there was no Rally to dream about. This time, all I could do was wonder about what might have happened if I hadn't gotten that diesel in my tanks, or, if I hadn't gone perhaps a little faster than I should have just before I crashed. Interestingly, when I came home, and recounted these events, many of my friends actually told me that my calamity in Maine makes for a better story than anything else which I could have experienced during the Rally. I don't know how accurate that is since my dream of winning never came true. I did have lots of fun, however, and made several friends who share my passion for long distance riding. What a trip! Maybe someday I'll put all of this into its proper perspective, I suppose. As for now, let me assure everyone that my road rash and chest pain went away. I'm feeling better about my last place finish, too. Hopefully, I'll do better in my next IBR attempt.