

Gorham Maine

8.26.97 A Good Start, Eh?

The eight Canadian male riders in the '97 IBR represent just 10% of the starters but 50% of the top four places at the first checkpoint in Gorham ME. This isn't a novel position for our friends from the Great Frozen North. In 1986 Ross Copas of Cornwall, Ontario, arguably the greatest of all endurance riders, took the lead at the first checkpoint and never relinquished it. That was the usual Copas style in his heyday. If he entered an event, he won it. To competitors, Copas must have looked the way Babe Ruth did to American League pitchers in 1927.

It's the short riding season, I think, that accounts for the Canucks' remarkable success rate, a season that usually starts in the second week of July, when the spring muds recede, and continues until the first snowfall about ten days later. But for those ten days the guys with the maple leaf license plates are pure hell on wheels. My guess is that some of the U.S. hopefuls in this year's Iron Butt will be praying for some snow soon. It may already be too late for such divine intervention, however: the rally is now on its way to Daytona Beach for checkpoint #2 on Thursday. August blizzards in Florida, I'm told, are not common.

Mike Kneebone and rallymaster Ed Otto designed the course for this rally. They are fond of setting up different routes from checkpoint to checkpoint, forcing the riders to choose among visiting different bonus sites. The first leg from Chicago to Maine consisted basically of a Canadian section, a northeast U.S. section, and a throwaway ride with bonuses in the midwest and Alaska, a choice that no one in his right mind could take and, as it turned out, that no one --- not even Ken Hatton --- did.

This style of rally construction is similar to eating in a Chinese restaurant. If you like the egg rolls in Column A, you can't have any wontons in Column B. A rider opting for the ride through Canada can pick up bonus points only from that route. And if, along the way, he came within ten feet of a staggering bonus belonging to the U.S. route section, he'd have to pass it up. The contestant is forced to make difficult choices about route planning before leaving the checkpoint, knowing that a minute spent looking at a map right now could save two hours tomorrow. It isn't easy. It isn't supposed to be.

Sometimes a poor choice made in haste can make or break a rider. That wasn't the case on this rally's first leg. The potential bonuses on the Canadian and American sections were roughly equal, but the presence on the Canadian ride of a 700 point bonus in Madawaska at the northernmost tip of Maine was alluring to nine riders. Those who took that route now occupy the top nine positions on the leader board today.

But the score differential between them and the riders who follow isn't much. Indeed, the gap between the top and bottom finishers on the first leg is just 1,241 points. That might seem substantial, but the fact is that the bonuses will increase in value with each leg. On the final run from Yakima WA back to Chicago next week, there could be bonus sites that will make Madawaska seem like child's play.

Still, if you want to make a statement about your intentions, Leg #1 is the place to do it. You guarantee that for a couple of days at least you are the one to be chased. That day arrived today for Canadian Peter Hooegeven, one of the finest riders never to have won a major endurance contest. Not that he hasn't come close. He finished second in the '91 IBR, missing the winner's platform by two points. This

year he lost the Utah 1088 by not much more. So heartbreaking have these losses been that stories about Peter's ability to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory are the stuff of Iron Butt legend.

This could be his year. He has the machine for the long haul, a Honda Blackbird, the fastest street motorcycle ever made. He has the sponsorship, judging by the decals that are plastered over the bike's bodywork, of every motorcycle dealer east of the Canadian Rockies. At the rider's banquet last Sunday night, I said to him, "Not that this should be much cause for pressure, Peter, but it looks as if the national pride of Canada is hanging on your success." He just smiled.

Behind Hoogeveen, tied for second, are Colorado's George Barnes, winner of last year's California 1+1 and the Utah 1088, and Texan Morris Kruemcke. Canada's Herb Anderson, the victim of a 150 point lateness penalty that knocked him from second place to fourth, survived a broken sub-frame on his BMW. He said that he could have lived with the bike's abnormal flexing, but when the broken end of a large diameter pipe began burrowing through the bike's seat and into his own --- thus giving new meaning to the expression "Iron Butt" --- then it was time to find a welder. That took some doing in rural Quebec. Anderson spent more time finding someone who spoke English than the welder did gluing the frame back together.

The rally packets for the Maine-to-Florida leg were handed out at 2000 Tuesday night. There are two alternatives, a straight shot down to Florida or a more circuitous route to Daytona by way of Springfield MO that is possibly doable by anyone willing to take a real chance of being time-barred in Daytona. Upon receiving the bonus packages, rallyists normally sit down with a large map, a Magic Marker, and any support crew they might have on hand to assess the route's possibilities. Karol Patzer, the top female finisher in 1995, huddled with a couple of her backers from Minnesota. And Peter? He was seen consulting with Ross Copas. If you are going to ask for advice --- there's no prohibition about receiving such assistance, since the entrant still has to ride those pesky miles --- it can't hurt to take it from The Man himself, eh?

Oh, Canada . . .

Bob Higdon

The top twenty at Checkpoint #1 (30 elapsed hours of 264 total):

Rank	Name	Miles	Points
1	Hoogeveen, Peter	1,654	5,241
2	Kruemcke, Morris	1,614	5,107
2	Barnes, George	1,639	5,107
4	Anderson, Herb	1,711	5,091
5	Ayres, Ron	1,721	5,084
6	Hatton, Ken	1,619	5,020
7	Gottfredson, Gary	1,644	5,006
8	McQueen, Gregory	1,655	4,888
9	McFadden, Asa	1,599	4,748
10	Morrison, Rick	1,588	4,694
11	Major, Ron	1,494	4,586
11	Crane, Fran	1,414	4,586
11	Hogue, Brad	1,390	4,586
11	Young, Boyd	1,477	4,586
11	Johnson, Mary Sue	1,488	4,586
11	Stockton, Michael	1,489	4,586
17	Keating, Keith	1,377	4,541
18	Johnson, Gary	1,394	4,485
18	James, Eddie	1,395	4,485
20	Mann, Philip	1,734	4,471