

Daytona Beach FL

8.28.97 Essential Kindnesses

When Manny Sameiro awoke yesterday morning, he dressed, automatically sticking the baseball cap on his head. The stitching reads, "Iron Butt Rally/World's Toughest Motorcycle Competition." They had been handed out to all the starters back in Chicago. Sameiro glanced in the mirror. A wave of disgust rippled through him when he saw his reflection.

"If I'm not good enough to finish this rally," he thought, "I don't deserve to wear this hat."

He sat down on the bed, reached for the telephone, and began to make some calls. His movements were deliberate. Gauze bandages covered both of his upper extremities from forearm to mid-biceps.

Manny had a few problems. The biggest one was that his bike was in ruins, the victim of a crash the afternoon before at a velocity the New Jersey attorney later described as being "somewhat in excess of the speed limit." He'd been hurrying to make the checkpoint at the Reynolds Motorsports checkpoint in Gorham. He didn't make the checkpoint. He did make the emergency room of the Houlton hospital, 260 miles north of his goal, with abrasions on both arms. His Tour Master riding coat had shredded.

He needed to get to the Reynolds dealership in a hurry, buy another bike, and somehow make it to Florida before the Daytona checkpoint closed. He'd already missed one checkpoint. If he missed a second, his rally was finished. He had about thirty hours to make everything work.

And he did. I don't know how. We may never know, but at 2:52:42 p.m. today Sameiro showed up at the American Motorcycle Institute checkpoint in Daytona Beach, took a 10,000 point penalty for switching motorcycles, received a 3,000 point bonus for making the Florida checkpoint, and now stands in dead last place with -7,000 points. It is the lowest, ugliest running total of any rider at any time in the history of the rally.

Manny Sameiro is too busy smiling to care..

Joan Oswald was dying. Indeed, if she could have found a cemetery to lie down in, she'd have taken it. But it was a small town in North Carolina, darkness had fallen, and she was well beyond her last legs. She saw an Amoco station. "Please help me," she told the owner. "I'm falling asleep on the bike. I need to find a town park or somewhere to lie down for ninety minutes. Do you know of anything?"

"Follow me," he said, leading her through a filthy storeroom. Joan shuddered. A door was shoved open. "This OK?" the stranger asked.

A bed, a shower, a lamp. A promise that she'd be awakened on time. It would do. It would do nicely, thank you.

Crossing the border into the U.S. from Canada can be a problem, especially when you're a British subject like Phil Jewell, have a resident alien status in the U.S., and are riding a motorcycle. But the problems grow a bit worse when you find that you don't have any identification because when you stopped for dinner an hour ago, someone stole your wallet out of your tankbag. The English have a word for it, but it's probably not printable. Somebody found the discarded wallet and called the cops in Atlanta where Phil lives. They called Phil's wife. She called Phil. Someone called Federal Express. I call it the blind luck of mad dogs and Englishmen. He zeroed Maine with a miss, crawled into Florida before the checkpoint

slammed shut, and is tied for 73rd place. But he's grinning from ear to ear, as usual. He's 10,000 points ahead of Sameiro.

Dennis Cunningham prayed nightly to make the cut for the starting field in this year's Butt. He didn't. Undaunted, he called Dave McQueeney, a guy who has major league clout with Mike Kneebone. "This guy will do anything to get in," Dave told Mike. "He said he'd even bring a sidecar." "He's in," Mike said.

The crab cakes were just settling down in Cunningham's stomach as he walked out of the restaurant in Ocean City MD yesterday. He was feeling pretty good. The rig was getting a steady 29 miles/gallon, the Ocean City bonus was hefty, and life couldn't be rosier. Well, maybe just a little rosier when the waitress came running out of the front door waving Cunningham's wallet.

"Hey, mister! Do you need this?"

The lives of Rider A and Rider B --- those are not their real names --- intersected along Interstate 95 last night at a photo bonus. Rider A, a rookie, was happy to see a fellow Butt. And Rider B is a big Butt, a pro. How nice, Rider A thought. A close encounter of the human kind, too often a rarity on this long, lonely event. "Are you following me?" Rider B snarled. Rider A sat back, momentarily speechless. "If you're not following me, what the hell do you want?"

"I just thought I'd say hello."

"Got no time to talk," Rider B shot back.

"And I was wondering if you knew if there was gas at the next exit."

"I'm not riding with you," Rider B hissed irrelevantly. "I don't ride with anybody. Understand?"

Rider A understood.

Rider B reached for his camera. One quick shot. Wouldn't take a second. Nail a few points. Rider A began to speak, but the words stuck somewhere south of the larynx. The flash went off and the Polaroid film oozed out of the camera. Rider B examined the picture, apparently approved it, stuck it in his tankbag, and turned back to Rider A.

"I told you not to follow me," he said angrily, popping his throttle. A moment later he was gone.

Nearly all bonuses that require a photo for proof of the rider's appearance at the location also require that the rider's identification towel, imprinted with the rider's number, be seen somewhere in the shot. It's an ingenious solution to a nagging problem. Without the towel in the photo, the opportunities for cheating are boundless. That's why the loss of a towel is nearly always a catastrophic event. A rider without a towel is often deprived of what would otherwise be an easy bucket of points.

Rider A was sitting at a photo bonus that required use of the identification towel. Rider B had forgotten to use his. He would later be reminded of his mistake at the checkpoint when the scorers would refuse to give him any points for the picture.

"In my whole life I have never once refused to come to the aid of a fellow motorcyclist," Rider A would later say. "I guess this time I just forgot."

You cast bread on the water. Sometimes it comes back wet. Sometimes a bread truck arrives at your doorstep. Blanche Dubois knew. In one of the indelible lines of the American stage, she says, "I have found that I can always rely upon the essential kindness of strangers." I think that was in one of Tennessee Williams' plays, "A Motorcycle Named 'Desire'."

Florida Standings Riders hoping for an early snow to stop Canadian Peter Hoogeveen were disappointed today. It was in the low nineties in Daytona and Hoogeveen increased his lead slightly over the unflappable George Barnes. Morris Kruemcke, claiming to be taking it easy in preparation for the ride west, dropped to fifth, just behind the fast-rising Ron Ayres and Fran Crane. Shane Smith, a rookie from a town in Mississippi so small that even residents can't remember its name, rode in lockstep with Crane, something I wasn't aware that anyone below the master rank of Hot Zoot could accomplish. He came out of nowhere to take over ninth place. The biggest points grabber of all on the leg was the human bear, Gary Johnson.

Bonus locations literally were to be found all over the map. Some riders went to Provincetown at the tip of Cape Cod. Others were seen at the Montauk lighthouse at the end of Long Island. A group of riders took the ferry south from Cape May. Three others --- modesty forbids me from naming them --- actually showed up at the infamous Gary Hart townhouse on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., the place where Hart's dreams during the 1987 presidential primaries for occupying the White House evaporated in erotic, hypocritical smoke.

Many of the current leaders headed instead for locations in south Florida like the Kennedy Space Center and the biggest bonus spot on the leg, the Miami houseboat where spree killer Andrew Cunanan committed his final sin. The Iron Butt organizers love ghoulish sites --- the ashes of the Branch Davidian compound had barely cooled before riders were heading for it in 1993 --- and if they can't find an actual murder scene, they'll take a fictional one. In an alley in San Francisco, there's a memorial to mark the spot where Sam Spade's partner was shot in "The Maltese Falcon." Yeah, they've been there, done that.

Bob Higdon
<http://www.ironbutt.com>

The Top Twenty as of Florida (73 total elapsed hours):

Rank	Rider	Miles	Points
1	Hoogeveen, Peter	3,710	10,771
2	Barnes, George	3,729	10,260
3	Ayres, Ron	3,502	10,115
4	Crane, Fran	3,572	10,092
5	Kruemcke, Morris	3,500	10,085
6	Johnson, Gary	3,546	10,066
7	Anderson, Herb	3,692	10,043
8	Hatton, Ken	3,536	9,924
9	Smith, Shane	3,339	9,891
10	Johnson, Mary Sue	3,593	9,850
11	McFadden, Asa	3,499	9,700
12	James, Eddie	3,160	9,678
13	Major, Ron	3,427	9,565
14	Young, Boyd	3,383	9,564
15	Morrison, Rick	3,213	9,548
16	Hogue, Brad	3,132	9,522
17	Ferber, John	2,867	9,485
18	Keating, Keith	3,028	9,462
19	Ray, Bob	2,862	9,453
20	Brooks, Harold	3,182	9,388
20	Clemmons, Jerry	3,145	9,388