

Washington, D.C.
9/2/99 - Day 4

Flushed with overwhelming victory in our brief war with the Chicago Tribune, we now find ourselves immersed in some pathetic argument I don't understand with an on-line motorcycle web site. We thus go metaphorically from battling Vasectronia, Destroyer of Worlds, to being bitten to death by a duck. Two years ago this little rag loved us; now we're just another bunch of psycho-bikers from Hell. I knew they'd never respect us in the morning.

Mike Kneebone received a call before dawn this morning from Herbie Saint. The king of the Tarbutts was at the border of Idaho and Wyoming. His bike had been fixed and he was heading for Maine. This is wonderful news for Herbie's many, many fans. Taking a miss at Washington and not being able to pick up bonus points on either of the first two legs guarantees that Herbie will finish toward the bottom of the field. But pressing on in the face of utter hopelessness is part of the Iron Butt tradition. Naturally that kind of behavior doesn't make a grain of sense; nothing in this event makes sense. You have to love something so cruel.

Just as Herbie was crawling out of the mire, Ken Hatton's 125cc Suzuki was crawling into it. The bike had been giving him trouble all day, as one might expect from a machine that had been running near the red line for three days. Hatton had no choice. The bike was so slow that it probably could not legally be ridden on interstate highways or in some Wal-Mart parking lots. Cranking it up to the max occasionally produced a heady 50 mph downhill, but the stress to the engine was predictably high. In Laramie, Wyoming, after yet another mechanical seizure this evening, Ken took the bike behind a shed and put a bullet through its crankcase. Sic transit gloria mundi.

Of the three possible paths from Washington to Maine, the mildest led through Chicago. The big bonus there was to have a burrito with Ed Otto, the demented pilot of the 250cc Honda Helix that had Iron Butt followers holding their collective breath in 1995. Roger Van Santen, Richard Smith, Jeff Lambert, Ed Farrell, and Australia's John McCrindle (closing in on an IBR record for perpetual smiling) all had visits with Otto this evening. One of the riders reported that John Laurenson had been stopped short of Chicago with a bad flat tire.

Reports began filtering in from Ron Ayres' home in Plano, Texas, a Dallas suburb. A visit with that Iron Butt vet was worth a mammoth 5,701 points, more than all the bonus points available on the first leg of the event combined. Fran Crane had been the first to show up. She was followed by Richard Bernecker on a bike he calls the Rolling Bordello. That he has made it this far into the event is a wonderment. The day before he was scheduled to leave Virginia for the ride to Ojai and the start of the rally, his K1100RS was diagnosed with drive shaft crud. No one knew when the part might croak. Tomorrow? Maybe. Next year? Maybe. Bernecker decided to chance it. Then in Texas a fuel problem developed. Every 200 miles the bike would wheeze, stop, and take a ten-minute break. That problem too was a mystery. It has now cured itself and the Bordello raucously rolls on, squealing happily.

After Bernecker other big dogs began lining up on Ayres' porch --- McFadden, Shane Smith, Barnes, Hoogeveen, Eagan, Morrison, Ray, Holland, Cunningham, Bob Brown, McQueen, Todd, Loegering,

Taylor, Parece, Pipes, Moses, Terry Smith, Ulrich, Austin, Roy, Brooks, Sameiro, Kugler, Kruemcke, Mutchler, and great-grandmother Ardys Kellerman.

That is a roster of some truly heavy hitters. It includes everyone who has a reasonable shot at winning this rally, right? Yes, it does. Almost. But it doesn't include the two guys who were in front of the pack at Kennewick, Phil Mann and Eric Jewell, nor does it include a couple of top ten finishers in '97, Eddie James and Tom Loftus. Is it possible that these riders have actually taken off for Alaska?

We should know tomorrow morning. It is 1,900 miles from Ayres' house to the Maine checkpoint via Dollywood in Tennessee, a bonus stop that they can't afford to pass up. That is a trip of at least 31 hours on highways that will be packed on the last summer weekend of the year. If they're not pulling out of Ayres' driveway by 0600 CDT tomorrow, they're either not going to make Dollywood or the checkpoint or both.

Bob Higdon