

Washington, D.C.
9/3/99 - Day 5

NO TAKERS FOR ALASKA?

After the Day 4 report went up on the IBA web site last night, Ron Ayres had a few more stragglers appear at his bonus stop in Plano, Texas. Eddie James, Tom Loftus, Eric Jewell --- three of the four riders that we thought might have ridden to Alaska --- showed up during the night, along with Bob Grange and Alan Barbic.

Jewell's co-leader in Kennewick, Phil Mann, probably took the straight shot route to Chicago. One bonus location worker in the Windy City said that "the guy with 113,000 miles in six months" came through, but without any better identification of rider or bike, such a report barely rises to the level of rumor. The truth is that we don't know where Phil is. We hope Phil knows where Phil is.

With the dust now having settled in Plano, we note in passing that better than one-third of the starting field of 98 bikes looked at a map of the United States and concluded that the best way to ride from the state of Washington to the state of Maine was through the middle of the state of Texas.

The motorcyclists who made that long, lonely ride are different from you and me. They really are.

WE WIN SOME; WE LOSE SOME

David Bankhead's wife relayed a note to the long-distance rider internet list last night that her favorite Butt was up and running again. The message wasn't clear --- well, it wasn't clear to me --- but it appeared that Dan Drom, the service manager at Wild West Honda in Katy, Texas, had something to do with the solution to the problem of the oil leak, if it really had been oil and if it really had been leaking. The part about Dan made sense. He's good. I have had more work done on my bikes at his dealership in the last six years than everywhere else combined. All I have to do to make my appointment is ride 1,900 miles, but I'll take six days to make the trip, not twenty minutes.

As soon as one contestant rises from the ashes, another plunges into them. Marsha Roach called me at noon today. Her Panzer, a Harley knock-off, was breathing again, having survived two electrical failures. She had done over 1,000 miles in the previous 24 hours. I asked where she was. Lincoln, Nebraska, she said, a fine ville but in the middle of nowhere.

"You're heading to Maine?" I asked.

"If I can make it," she replied, ever the optimist.

"I don't think you can," I said, ever the pessimist.

I took her cell phone number and promised to call her back in five minutes. Then I ran three mapping programs on the computer. They all said the same thing: Marsha was doomed. For a fresh, wide-awake, skillful rider on a reliable motorcycle heading toward high-speed western interstates, covering almost

1,600 miles in 28 hours is not really a big deal. Marsha is skillful. That was the only thing in her favor. At that moment Mike Kneebone called me. I relayed the gloomy picture to him.

"Do you want me to give her the bad news or will you do it?" I asked. He said he'd do it and he did. Suggesting that she turn back home to Colorado was the only realistic option. She'd missed one checkpoint and was virtually certain to miss the next. Two misses constitutes an automatic DNF. She decided to turn around.

A few minutes later I picked up e-mail. Doug Jacobs reported that he and Kevin Chase, having experienced some terrible wind on the Pacific Coast highway on the first leg, were being battered by even more bad weather. They were holed up in a motel in Fargo and were trying to catch a little sleep. He thinks their chances of making the Gorham, Maine checkpoint are at the trace level.

At this juncture you might be thinking, "Ah, the wimps. What's a little weather? They're bikers. They ought to expect it." For most of the machines in the IBR, that point is well-taken. These motorcycles by and large are behemoths --- 800-pound monsters with barn door windshields and fairings --- that insulate riders from anything up to and including earthquakes, typhoid fever, and Jerry Springer reruns. But Jacobs and Chase are on bikes that are more than 25 years old, BMW R75/5s. They don't have windshields. They barely have motors. Sure, they were chic when they were new but they're creaking pigs now --- beautifully restored, I admit, but oinkers for their current job. I used to have one; today I wouldn't trust it to take me to the corner. Still, it'd be fun to see what happens to anyone dumb enough to call Doug Jacobs a wimp.

At this stage of the '99 IBR, 110 hours into the event, the status of The Can is:

DEFINITELY IN THE CAN:

Mary Sue Johnson

Al Holtsberry

Ken Hatton

Marsha Roach

HEADING FOR THE CAN:

Peter Withers

Doug Jacobs

Kevin Chase

EMERGING FROM THE CAN:

Herbie Saint

David Bankhead

My guess is that The Can will be a little more full soon.

Bob Higdon