

Washington, D.C.  
9/8/99  
Day 9-10

Yes, it's a war out there, and with war comes fog, confusion, and the cold, dead hand of the censor. Some people received the Day 9 report. Others apparently didn't. It's just as well. There's nothing like a little rumor to fan the conspiratorial flames. This will be over soon, and few people will be happier about that than I.

Let's backtrack and get everyone on the same page again: When we last looked, the riders were studying their bonus listings for the final leg and wondering whether it was going to be worth it to go to southern California by way of White Plains, New York. Since the bonus north of the Big Apple was worth 13,456 points --- dwarfing every other bonus on the final leg --- the answer was "yes." If you could successfully make the wretched, backtracking ride, you had a chance to win the event; if you didn't, you almost certainly didn't.

Twenty-two riders rode north: Richard Bernecker, Jeff Fisher, George Barnes, Gary Eagan, Rick Morrison, Morris Kruemcke, Leonard Roy, Fran Crane, Gary Johnson, Berti Levi, Ira McFadden, Peter Hoogeveen, Harold Brooks, Manny Sameiro, Dennis Kessler, Eric Jewell, Bobb Todd, Bob Brown, Dennis Cunningham, Greg McQueen, Tom Loftus, and Eddie James.

The first twenty-one of those contestants arrived on Tuesday, September 7. Eddie James, hammered from his ride to Prince Edward Island on the previous leg, showed up the following day on an ailing bike. The chances of his making it to the finishers' banquet Friday afternoon are depressingly small.

We began receiving other dire reports:

David Bankhead rode to Lajitas, Texas to watch Clay Henry, a goat, drink beer. That, at 5,015 points, is the third most valuable bonus site on the leg. Lajitas is west of Big Bend national park, not far from the dark side of the moon. He crawled out of there in one piece only to have his bike crump in El Paso. There really is no justice.

Citing personal reasons, Gary Parece (12th in Florida), has gone home. Bob Mutchler, whose only missions in this rally are to rack up miles with his sidecar rig and to raise money for polio research, broke down on the way to Texas. He was towed to New Orleans for repairs. Then he rode to Oklahoma City to visit the memorial park at the Murrah Federal Building for a heavy bonus, not to mention many out-of-the-way miles.

George Barnes was thought to be near Fargo, North Dakota, running on three cylinders. This is ominous news. He had apparently been heading for both the geographic center of the U.S. in Rugby, North Dakota, and the geographic center of the contiguous 48 states near Lebanon, Kansas, a combination bonus worth almost 8,000 points. If he could hit both --- making this a 4,900-mile ride from Florida to Ojai in 88 hours --- the rally almost certainly would be his. But in the 1997 IBR George had a similar motor failure on the same bike while crossing from Florida to California.

With stunning rides from Maine to Florida, Tom Loftus (8th overall in 1997) and Peter Hoogeveen (2nd overall on every rally he's ever run and carrying the #2 rider plate this year) moved past prior IBR

winner Rick Morrison and Gary Egan into third and fourth overall respectively, within easy striking distance of Barnes and Eddie James.

James is now finished; Barnes may be in deep trouble. It is entirely possible that with just 24 hours to go Samoan Tom Loftus is now leading the 1999 Iron Butt, followed by . . . oh, no. Not again. Peter, is that you?

Bob Higdon