

Life is full of decisions. Little ones.

Big ones.

Sometimes big ones become little ones. More often the reverse is true.

Some decisions when revealed simply stun. What is striking is not who took the decision to participate in this year's Iron Butt rally but conversely who did not.

Harold Brooks has completed more Iron Butt Rallies than any other rider on Earth. While doing so he has traveled the equivalent of more than two complete circuits around the globe. His friendly southern drawl and pleasant courtly manner are an integral part of the Iron Butt experience. Always a fierce competitor, this colorful character, this southern gentleman chose not to ride this year's rally.

Richard Frost had entered the 1988 Iron Butt Rally. He planned to ride a 1953 Indian Roadmaster.

The 1988 rally was cancelled. Richard's ambition to ride was not.

He was granted an entry into the 2001 rally but did not realize that the type of run he was contemplating was not in keeping with the present day rally's spirit of individual competition. Richard's friends had planned to follow the Roadmaster with a fully equipped mobile machine shop to insure the old Indian's success. When Richard learned of fellow Indian owner Leonard Aron's fourth consecutive individual attempt to complete the rally as a team of one, he made a decision. Not all decisions are easy, even those that are clearly apparent. Richard and his crew decided to throw their support behind Leonard's solo attempt. They announced their decision to withdraw from competition at the starting banquet. Leonard received Richard's team's custom 2001 rally tee shirt while Richard and his crew were presented with a standing ovation from the starting field. Even before the rally began it was clear that there would be more than one winner.

In an effort to improve a rider's decision making skills, a new provision in the rules was announced whereby a rider's at-fault accident would result in disqualification from participation in the next rally. The consequences for a bad decision would linger long past the healing of the rider and the repair of his machine.

The real reason for the rider banquet was not pot roast and potatoes and, after their quick dispatch, it was on to the more important task of quenching this assembled group seemingly insatiable appetite for miles. Lots of miles. Menus and meal tickets were about to be distributed.

To the refrain of "I can see clearly now" the theme for IBR 2001 was to be revealed. No more Mr. Nice Guy, Mike reentered the room cloaked in a hooded cape clothed as if a wizard. He was no wizard. He was evil Lord Kneebone.

The evil Lord asked all those riders who would consider a ride to Prudhoe Bay Alaska (if it was possible) to gather on the right side of the hall. Shortly the room divided itself into either the ambitious or the cautious. For almost two years Mike Kneebone has been dropping not so subtle hints about incorporating sites in northernmost Alaska as possible rally bonus locations. Talk had swirled among the big dogs as to just how this trek into the Artic Circle could be squeezed into the time constraints of an eleven-day rally.

Mike went about assigning the rider's numbers. Special recognition was given to the first thirty riders who had distinguished themselves in the past. Riders received their rally flag, the rider ID tag and a sealed envelope containing the bonus locations for leg one.

Once the last rider's number was assigned Mike instructed the group to open their bonus envelopes. After a preliminary discussion of rules and procedures Mike unveiled the single most significant rally change. Riders could elect to forego the traditional loop of the United States and opt for a ride to Dead Horse, (Prudhoe Bay) Alaska and back within the eleven day rally period. It seemed as if the barking from the assembled ambitious big dogs suddenly turned into yelps.

The banquet over, the riders filed out to their rooms to ponder the contents of their bonus envelopes. They were filled with decisions yet to be made. Effectiveness of the mind game that is the Iron Butt Rally was so complete that late into the evening even Bob Higdon was seen huddled over his portable computer displaying a map squarely centered on Alaska.

Outside in the humid air of an Alabama evening Rally staff made final preparations for the morning start. A huge chalk arrow was drawn on the exit drive pavement labeled "TO FINISH". At the curbside a new signpost was erected besides the existing "DECATAUR 20". It simply read "PRUDHOE BAY 4400".

Decisions large.

Decisions small.

The ride of a lifetime is about to begin. It will include them all.