

Leg Three: Washington to Maine or ?

One hundred twelve had entered.

One hundred now remained.

On Labor Day eve 2001, if you were among the one hundred and were intent upon winning the mind game that is the Iron Butt Rally, you had already made one major decision.

You were now well along on one of two paths.

The first had you headed directly north to Alaska from Alabama. You were betting that the weather would hold. You also hoped that a larger bonus yet to be announced could not be claimed later. If it were, it would diminish your own heroic Herculean ride northward.

The second potential winning path found you riding your own ride, aggressively collecting bonus points, while pacing yourself to later seek that even bigger unknown bonus to an equally remote destination. Of course, who knows where that lay and what the weather would be?

Entrant Dick Fish had argued in Madison that there was just no road on this continent equal in difficulty and remoteness to the Haul Road to Prudhoe Bay. He reasoned that it would be absolutely impossible to have an equally remote and difficult bonus. Fish overlooked the possibility that the exact same bonus location was the one sure exception to his line of reasoning.

At Sunnyside, Prudhoe Bay was re-offered as a bonus as were a number of other Alaskan locations. The easiest to achieve, as if any site in Alaska is easy, was Hyder. Hyder was the terminus of Ron Ayers record setting forty-nine state ride. The Sealaska Inn has become one of those long distance rider shrines like Bruno's in Gerlach, Nevada that are entrenched in Iron Butt legend and tradition. If you elected to go to Hyder you were not excused from the ride to the next checkpoint in Gorham, Maine.

Once again it was decision time for the riders at the Sunnyside checkpoint. The twenty-two other Alaskan bound riders had already elected the straightforward strategy and sole focus; ride to Prudhoe Bay, 4800 miles distant, collect five hundred thousand points and return.

Prudhoe was the big one. Could it be done? Could anyone reach Prudhoe from Madison? That question had already been answered in the affirmative. But could they return in time? Five hundred thousand points hung now in the balance.

Could it be done from midpoint in the rally and would anyone return in time? A million point bonus would be rewarded to the rider answering that ultimate Iron Butt challenge. Both questions will remain unanswered until the rally's conclusion. Both questions are really the same. Could it be done?

At the Arctic Caribou Inn in Deadhorse, Alaska, Innkeeper Rick Schindler remarked, "It's the best day that I've ever seen since I've been here". Nine of the twenty-two first wave travelers who had reached the Prudhoe Bay hotel felt the same. They included Shane Smith, Alan Barbic, both on ST1100s, Chuck Pickett aboard a Gold Wing, Peter Hoogeveen riding his CBR1100XX, Dick Fish and his K1100LT, Dennis Kessler on a Triumph Tiger, Phil Mann Jr. aboard a K1100RS, Paul Taylor riding a R1150GS and Asa McFadden on his K1200LT. Seven of the nine were on street bikes. The GS and Tiger were the only "adventure" tourers but all the riders were true adventurers.

ST1100 rider Shane Smith was the first of the gang of twenty-two to reach Prudhoe Bay. One could only guess what went through Shane's mind as he saw other motorcycles from the second wave headed north to the frigid haul road as he was riding south to balmy Key West. Convinced that he had grabbed the gold and in a celebratory mood, Shane called Mike Kneebone's cell phone singing the refrain "I can see clearly now". Perhaps so, since riders Bob Hall, Eric Jewell and George Barnes were not yet in sight, riding hundreds of miles behind him with a potential half-million point advantage. Nevertheless, Shane had been, and for all of time will be, the first.

Bob Hall always seemed to find himself stuck in second place in the previous endurance rallies he entered. He was suffering what has come to be known as Hoogeveen Syndrome. Once again he was second in the standings at Sunnyside. 1999 IBR winner George Barnes held a mere 66-point lead. If Hall was to remain among the point leaders he needed to ride to Prudhoe Bay. For surely George was, as was BMW rider Eric Jewell on a R1100RT and certainly Rick Morrison.

Ohioan Hall aboard a BMW R1100RT was the next rider to check in at the Arctic Caribou. He was first to stake claim to the million point bonus coded "Winner". He had done what others thought undoable. Under clear skies in the crisp thirty-five degree Alaskan air, he also could see clearly now. His vision was first place.

Rick Morrison and Eric Jewell were in a similar situation to Bob's at Sunnyside. Morrison, the 1997 IBR winner and Jewell the first place finisher of the Butt Lite, had only one option for a top-level finish. It was to join George Barnes in the second wave of Alaska bound riders. Unfortunately the last remaining ugly "ducling" was last seen mired in mud on the Alcan Highway. Rick had been sucked in.

Peter Hoogeveen had reached Prudhoe Bay, but the CBR1100XX was somewhat worse for wear. The bike, leaking anti-freeze, brought back visions of the 1997 rally when the Blackbird crossed the finish line leaking every fluid that the bike carried. Peter had returned south after hooking up with Joe Zulaski and Seamans "Jack" Jones who both had been unable to overcome the rain and mud. Even on a good day the 480 miles haul road from Fairbanks was 430 miles of dirt and gravel. One can only guess what was going through Seamans' mind as he headed back south to Alabama where he had to contemplate yet even one more ride to his home back in Alaska.

Jeff Jones another of the original twenty-two Alaskan adventurers, steered his road worn ST1100 in HIPY Motorsports at Sunnyside. He changed tires for the return trip south and east to Alabama. Jeff who had trained for the Iron Man Triathlon found this Iron Butt competition every bit as difficult. The rigors of traveling Alaska roadways had claimed the bike's fork seals and left multiple bodywork badges of honor on the ST. Terry Smith and Peter Withers were both reported seen headed south in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan after also stopping in Hyder. IBR veteran Kerry Wiley aboard a Yamaha Venture saw them both and called from Moosejaw to mention that he might himself be a tardy arrival in Maine.

Dennis Cunningham, a San Bernardino fireman and EMT, struck a deer while in crossing Canada. Will Lee pulled his K1100LT over and stopped to assist while Harry Kaplan stayed behind to also help. Dennis, who was later checked out at the local hospital, was found to be OK. He fared much better than the either deer or his BMW K1200RS. It's a long walk back from Moosejaw.

Phil Mann Jr. aboard his K1100RS bagged a buffalo and broke a couple of his own bones in the process. Chuck Pickett aboard a Goldwing stayed with Phil thereby earning him self the second IBA Valor award and an entry in the next rally. Chuck and Mike Smeyers the only two riders now guaranteed a place in the 2003 rally. "Buffalo Phil" was doing OK and arranging to rent a truck to return his bison banged BMW. Chuck mentioned that even with all of the obstacles that this had been the "best ride of my life". Phil couldn't be reached for comment.

Edwin Phelps called from North Dakota to report that he would be unable to make the Maine checkpoint within the available time window and would rejoin the group later in Madison.

Bryan Moody was on his way back from Denali, traveling through North Dakota when the engine of his Kawasaki Concours suffered a simultaneous loss of oil and power. Bryan was arranging shipment of his Kawi back to North Carolina and arranging transportation for himself to the finish line in Madison Alabama.

One hundred forty miles north of the Artic circle on the haul road to Prudhoe Bay; Eddie James discovered that his tires were badly shredded. He decided to return to Fairbanks to source replacements for a second attempt at Deadhorse. Time now short, Eddie's points total may also be headed for the shredder.

Bob Ray was riding the newest bike in the rally, a 2002 Honda Reflex, to Denali National Park in Alaska. Although certainly an extreme distance and subject to all the vagaries of iffy weather along the Alcan Highway, he did have the advantage of traveling over all paved roadways. At least that's what the maps said. Along his journey he had to stop at Watson Lake to replace the scooter's drive belt. Later Bob came upon the buffalo carcass that was the handiwork of Phil

Mann Jr. On his way back south through Canada the little scooter broke down once again. Bob was about to tear down the Reflex for a roadside repair when he noticed a grizzly observing the process from the forest. Since the big bear was not as curious about the new 2002 model scooter and really more interested in doing lunch, Ray decided to call for assistance and have the Reflex towed to a nearby Honda dealer in Fort Nelson, British Columbia. Every rally entrant was rooting for Bob's timely arrival, as a finisher's party was scheduled at his home in Madison on Friday evening. It is always polite to be in attendance at your own dinner party rather than to BE the dinner at someone else's.

The wrongside riders were now riding as a team. Eversfield from the UK, McCrindle and Sutton from Australia had made it to Denali from Sunnyside and were returning to Alabama after a seven-hour rest bonus at Haines Junction, British Columbia. They now needed to concern themselves with only one final checkpoint in Madison for an assured gold medal finish. One can only wonder if McCrindle sent a postcard from Denali to the Harley dealer thanking him for that unlimited mileage rental of the Tour Glide.

The Alaskan bonus option originally appealed to Bill Weyher. If he elected to gather points in Denali and then return directly to Madison Bill wouldn't have to deal with the traffic in the east from Maine to Alabama. He was in Bellingham, Washington for a few hours rest. When he awoke it was pouring. The rain was successful in diluting his desire and decided that Maine was more inviting after all. Besides, Bill was still experiencing problems with the sidestand on his K1100LT. They are much harder to put up in the rain.

Paul Meredith had already completed a Saddlesore 1000 and was well into a second consecutive 1000-day ride when in Minnesota the diminutive Cagiva Mito's engine died. Earlier the tiny Cagiva had a piston replaced in Sunnyside but evidently that wasn't enough. The lower connecting rod seized. Paul's engine was frozen in Frazee. Paul had planned for this eventuality and had a spare engine waiting in Chicago only an eight-hour drive away. Fellow IBA member Jon Diaz drove the engine up to Paul.

Frazee, MN is the site of the world's largest turkey a 456-point rally bonus. Local motocross riders discovered Paul. The Fett brothers, well known snowmobile riders, took him to their fully equipped shop where the engine would be swapped.

Paul Pelland lost a pushrod in Wyoming and was blazing a whole parcel of creative new applications for JBWeld and old coat hangers to keep the new URAL in the hunt.

Leonard Aron lost his wallet at a Chevron station in Boise, Idaho. He discovered his loss near Salt Lake City a couple hundred miles further down the road. Unfortunately by the time Mike Kneebone had arrived to do search and recovery, the wallet had already found a new home. The Indian putted on to Maine running a bit less rich.

The Bailey's Cagiva Gran Canyon threw a chain in Montana. This after earlier having George Barnes' K1100LT throw a brake pad at them. The Baileys riding with IBR veteran Greg McQueen were all startled when, while braking approaching a turn, George's bike flung a front pad whizzing past their helmets. Unfortunately they were unable to source a chain during the holiday weekend and because of the delay were heading directly to Madison.

Greg Roberts was able to limp from Sunnyside to Kirkland, Washington where the service department of Cascade BMW was able to repair the rear end of the K1100LT. Since Greg was barred from collecting bonus points on the leg to Maine he decided to stop in Enterprise, Oregon to assist at that checkpoint of the annual Three Flags Rally by the Southern California Motorcyclists Association. He then planned to continue on to the checkpoint in Maine and eventually qualify as a finisher.

Radisson, Quebec is as far north as you can travel on a paved road in Quebec. It is so remote that it isn't even shown on most maps. Yvon Gauthier had considered piloting his R-1150GS to pluck these points in his home province. Fellow Canadian Thane Siliker's earlier rear wheel bearing failure on his Green Honda ST1100 was caught in California at Pat Widder's and was repaired. He hopes to arrive without further incident in Gorham, Maine.

Finally getting back into the ride was Martin Hildebrandt. After arranging shipment for his broken 1938 R51 Beemer back to it's fatherland, Martin had leased a CBR1000 Hurricane from HIPY Motorsports and started a whirlwind ride to Maine and to once again overtake Bob.

Now just past midway in the rally the branches of this mind game were about to bear fruit. The Alaskan adventurers had plenty to think about. Time management, contingency planning for equipment and route, weather, road conditions as well as a whole host of variables that silently lurked, waiting to crush their high hopes for victory. No less a mental burden was the task for the remaining riders. Bonuses remained yet to be claimed during the waning hours of leg three. It was not yet clear whether they could make the difference.

One hundred and twelve had entered.

Ninety-two now remained.

Checkpoint three awaited.

A mind game yet to be rewarded.

(c)2001 Warren Harhay Boulder City, NV USA