

Lake City, Florida
August 15, 2003
Day 4

Road Trip

I think this is true: On Thursday morning at 8:00 a.m. we were eastbound from Albuquerque, New Mexico in Moron, the van from Hell. That was the day I thought I'd left my cell phone in the motel room, but it turned out instead to be buried under 40 miles of wires and connectors, 12-volt inverters, a surge protector or two, liters of diet cokes and bottled water, clothes that haven't been washed since the Crimean War, and a few pounds of pistachio nuts.

Twenty-seven hours after leaving Albuquerque we rolled into the Holiday Inn in this hot, incredibly humid town in north-central Florida, a certified cross-country-all-nighter accomplished by four people who are clearly old enough to know better.

As I said, I'm hazy about those details, but this I know for certain: I am beginning to remember how miserably tired I was during the 2001 Iron Butt Rally, a sort of fatigue that leaves scars on the soul. Still, Moron beats any motorcycle ever made on a day when the heat is setting the highway afire.

I don't know how they do it, these crazy riders. I really don't.

The Red Guys

Thirty-three had chosen the red route package out of Las Vegas, had all completed a tough ride into the western Sierras, had all showed up for the last bonus at Pat Widder's house, and were now deciding whether to ride to Canada or back to Florida. If they went north, they could skip the checkpoint in Florida and rejoin the rally in Maine. If successful, they would be at the head of the pack with only the final leg back to Montana remaining. If they opted for Florida, they'd at least be ahead of the blue route riders and more rested than their friends on the red route.

Leonard Roy was the first to call late Wednesday night. "The rules require that I notify you if I will miss a checkpoint," Leonard told rallymaster Lisa Landry. "I hereby announce my intention to miss Florida. I will bring you a post card from Bella Coola when I see you in Maine." Alan Barbic and Dick Fish called a short time later to advise that they too were skipping Florida. They didn't say where they were headed, Bella Coola or Goose Bay, but for Fish it can't be anywhere but up. For losing his rider's card during the first leg, he sacrificed all the bonus points he'd earned during that section. His score in Primm stood at 0. That put him about 3,500 behind the leaders but 10,000 points ahead of Sparky Kessler.

Other riders bound for Canada began calling in: Will Outlaw, Peter Hoogeveen, Paul Taylor, Mike Hutsal, Lee Myrah, Mark Kiecker, and Marty Leir. Landry received a garbled message that we think might have been from Bob Hall, the 2001 IBR winner. If others intend to skip Lake City, we haven't heard from them yet. At least three riders we had thought would be northbound --- Eric Jewell (the first-round leader), Eddie James, and Tom Loftus --- decided instead to point their bikes to Florida.

The Attrition Continues

On Thursday morning Kyle Crippen's rear-tire went to heaven. He was trying to find a tow. He may not make the Florida checkpoint. In such a case the rider, unless he wants to give up completely, must ride to the checkpoint city, obtain a receipt that proves he was there, and arrive at the following checkpoint on time. If he makes it, he still loses all bonus points on both legs and receives no points for making the first checkpoint. For scoring purposes, the only thing worse --- aside from a DNF --- is switching bikes.

The bike-swap penalty is informally known as "Taking a Manny," after Manny Sameiro, who wrecked his Gold Wing on the first leg of the 1997 rally and finished on a Honda 500cc Magna. For those of you not familiar with these machines, it's comparable to moving from a Ferrari to a Dodge Neon. Sure, they're both cars in a metaphysical sense, but those good-looking dates you used to have don't seem to be returning your calls now that the Neon's in your garage.

Sameiro's was an heroic ride. It took him the remainder of the rally, but he eventually crawled up into positive numbers. Two years later, riding with Harold Brooks, he tied for third overall.

He'll be close to the bottom of the standings this year, unfortunately. His Wing apparently washed out in gravel in a corner on the way to the Primm checkpoint. The abrasions on his right forearm were bad enough for the New Jersey prosecutor to call it a day. At least he'll be symmetrical now; six years ago it was the left arm that took the hit.

A couple of days ago the plastic radiator in Dave Tyler's BMW K1100LT started to melt in the desert. He made it to a big bonus in Leadville, Colorado, at which point the radiator began leaking. Tyler nursed the machine south to Tucumcari, New Mexico, looking for replacement parts all the way but finding nothing. This morning, he was forced into retirement.

John Bolin, whose wife Karen is the president of the Motorcycle Riders Foundation, left Salt Lake City at 5:00 p.m. yesterday after having made frantic repairs to his bike. As he hurried toward Florida, he was called back to San Francisco today because of a family emergency. Our sympathies go out to John for a courageous ride under such daunting conditions.

This afternoon a sixteen year-old driver turned in front of Rody Martin's '87 Yamaha Venture, a bike formerly owned by Michael Kneebone. The accident happened just twelve miles north of Mamou, Louisiana, a large bonus that was available to riders on both red and blue routes. Rody had an improbable rescue by the Wild Pelican Iron Butt Club, whose membership includes only riders who have completed an IBA-certified ride. They had been manning the Mamou bonus location. So well known is the club that word of mouth about Martin's wreck reached the Pelicans before even a telephone call could. Fortunately, Rody didn't break anything but was admitted to a local hospital for overnight observation.

When we last saw Russell Stephan, he had finished off both a deer and the front-end of his motorcycle in about three-fifths of a second on U.S. 395 in Oregon. If that weren't enough, I negligently referred to him as "Stephan Russell" in that day's report, which is the sort of thing that must happen fairly often to people with two first names. With his rally in the tank, Russell bought a \$2,000 truck to transport his mangled machine, drove to Las Vegas and dropped the bike off for repairs, sold the truck, bought a better one, and is now sightseeing somewhere in the West, waiting for the rally to return to him. He paid a lot of money for that final banquet ticket; he might as well stick around to use it.

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