

Portland, Maine
August 17, 2003
Day 6

Reports from the Frozen North

Trying to retrieve accurate information from the 11 red pill riders who left for Canada during the second leg of the rally last Wednesday has been harder than going ten rounds against a kangaroo. But we do hear rumors and naturally have no hesitancy about repeating them. One of the best ones starts with the night that Paul Taylor was almost shot while trying to knock down the door of a house in British Columbia.

It was a dark and stormy night --- well, dark at least --- and Taylor was hustling toward the bonus in Bella Coola, British Columbia. Two riders passed him. That was irritating, for Paul is one of those rare riders who has finished not only the IBR in the top ten (twice) but lived through Greg Frazier's vicious, invitation-only Big Dog Rally in the Rockies. He doesn't enjoy being overtaken by anyone.

As he began preparing for a counterattack, the alternator light on his BMW's R1150GS started glowing. He continued to ride, draining the battery and looking for help. He noticed a bed-and-breakfast and turned down the driveway. It was 2:00 a.m. He banged on the door. Nothing. More banging. More nothing.

Now if your alternator is dying, you might try changing the belt, right? And you always carry a spare belt with you, huh? Of course you do. So does Paul. So he started taking his bike apart to dig out the alternator only to discover that a socket he needed to handle the job was at home in Virginia.

Back to the front door he goes for more banging. After a while, he notices that a woman is aiming a rifle at him from a basement window. She has evidently called a neighbor to protect her from this deranged motorcyclist, because Paul sees the headlights of a pick-up truck coming down the driveway. With the way his night has been going, the driver will probably be carrying a 50mm cannon and a few grenades. Before war can break out, Paul manages to relate his story of woe. And while not everyone runs around at night with a 27mm socket, the neighbor has one in the truck and lends it to Paul. The belt is replaced and everyone lives happily ever after.

Fast forward to later that morning. Peter Hoogeveen is staring at a "Road Closed" sign. It is barring his way to the Bella Coola bonus, just 30 miles away. A construction crew is preparing to do some blasting and the road will be nailed shut for about four hours. This is not good news for Peter. He begins to reason with the flagger. You have to know here that Peter's endurance riding exploits over the years have made him something of a hero in Canada. Magically he is slipped past the barricade.

What was good news for Hoogeveen was even better news for Will Outlaw who, at the moment Peter was being waved through, sat on the opposite end of the construction zone, unable to get out of Bella Coola. Apparently Peter's flagger radioed Outlaw's flagger and the gate suddenly opened for Outlaw too. When Paul Taylor, later held up for hours on the far side of the barrier, found out what Hoogeveen had done, his eyes rolled up in his head. And while gates do occasionally open for a favorite Canadian son, they rarely do so for a Yankee who is known in British Columbia mostly for terrorizing little old ladies on dark, stormy nights.

As we suspected, Alan Barbic and Dick Fish took off from California for Goose Bay, Labrador. The town lies at the end of hundreds of miles of rugged, often impassable dirt. Because Barbic was faster on pavement and Fish faster on dirt, they decided to split up in Nevada, figuring that their paths would cross later. They didn't. Barbic apparently bailed out at some point and headed for the Maine checkpoint. He'll be credited with the few bonuses he grabbed during the second leg, but without the 2,000-point Florida checkpoint bonus, his 11th place standing in Nevada will drop to perhaps 80th place in Maine. In Alan's case, the red pill turned out to be poison.

Fish's pill was poison squared. He aimed for Goose Bay, made it, and then lost his alternator on the road out. It was a shorter route than the run to Bella Coola, but it was harder on the bike and worth fewer points. It doesn't matter now; Goose Bay cooked the Fish's goose. Lee Myrah suffered minor injuries when his bike was blown into a ditch near Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan in the late afternoon yesterday. His rally is over. Mike Hutsal, who was riding with Myrah at the time, made sure his partner was all right, then continued east.

Bob Hall, with Bella Coola behind him, was feeling great yesterday until his engine began sputtering near Livingston, Montana. He subsequently called to say that all was mysteriously well again. Leonard Roy hasn't been heard from in days, but he never has problems anyway. All he ever does is finish quietly and well. Mark Kiecker pulled away from Marty Leir in Chicago and caught up with Will Outlaw this afternoon in Erie, Pennsylvania. Kiecker laughed that they were so far ahead of schedule that they might take in a Red Sox game tonight in Boston. It thus appears that of the original Canadian 11, only Myrah and Fish won't make Maine tomorrow. The nine who do will be leading the rally. And the one of them who is the most well rested will be the favorite as the long, last leg back to Missoula begins.

Reports from the Sweltering South

Key West, the southernmost point in the continental U.S., has been a bonus stop on 238 of the last 11 Iron Butt Rallies. It is never, ever worth going to, mainly because first you have to ride more than 380 miles from north Florida to Miami, then survive another 160 miles from there to Key West. The last 105 miles are two-lanes wide. It's so hot and humid that you pray for rain to come along and wash your sins away. There are cops, deer, and blue-haired matrons to enforce snail-like speed limits. On Saturday night the drunks come out to play. And no matter how well you felt before you headed south, when you emerge from the Keys in a day or so, you'll be tired, boiled meat, utterly unfit for human companionship. So when rallymaster Lisa Landry suggested that the boys and girls run down to Key West from the Lake City checkpoint instead of conserving what is left of their energy for the final run to Missoula, at least a couple of dozen of them said, "Let's do it!" Those were the last words that Gary Gilmore said some years back, just before a Utah state prison execution squad put six bullets through his heart.

Thirty-seven riders who were thinking a little more clearly left Lake City and took the saner route up to Iron Butt veteran Eric Faires' house near Knoxville, Tennessee for a bonus that paid the rider to sleep for a while. On the way north they will be picking up bonuses that are worth more than what they lost by skipping Key West.

In tonight's down-and-out report, Bob Lyskowski was involved in a multi-vehicle wreck yesterday near Gainesville, Florida on his way to Key West. He sustained what are believed to be minor injuries. Although his bike may be rideable, Bob has decided to withdraw. Don Speck's Harley was totalled when,

on his way back from Key West, a van in front of him suddenly slammed on its brakes on a bridge near St. Augustine. Speck's rear-end slid out with predictable results. He is unhurt but has retired from the rally.

Finally, in a bulletin from the Hopeless Class, we can confirm that Mike Grosche, whose '80 Suzuki GS750 has suffered fuel starvation problems from the start as well as two flat tires, not only missed the Florida checkpoint but blew out a head gasket along the way. He is somehow up and running again. If he doesn't make the checkpoint in Maine tomorrow afternoon, he's out of the rally. We can only hope that he doesn't decide to go to Key West first.

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