

Hartford, Connecticut  
August 18, 2003  
Day 7

### **M\*A\*S\*H, Iron Butt Style**

After a telephone call from Peter Icaza last night, I decided to administer mental status tests to some of the suspect riders. Icaza was reporting that he would miss the Maine checkpoint by several hours. It turned out that he was fewer than 200 miles from his goal and had almost 24 hours to get there. He's not the first rider to be off target by a day.

So now I look at them carefully when they check in. If they crawl up to the table on all fours, I ask them what day of the week it is and the name of the vice-president of Botswana. If they fall asleep before answering, we drag them off into a corner and hit them with the fire hose. If they get cute with me, I threaten to disqualify them. Naturally, I have no power to do that, but they don't know it.

If I did encounter a truly questionable case, I would refer the matter to my medical officer, Don Arthur, a two-star admiral and the commandant of the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. He worked the intake scoring table today and on Saturday night he put up most of Moron's crew for the night at his home in suburban Washington, D.C. We like to have multi-talented individuals volunteering to help this rolling circus. Arthur, who racked up more than 100,000 miles last year on a BMW K1200LT and won both endurance rallies he entered, certainly fits that bill.

On the days when I don't think I'm Ernie Pyle, I like to think I'm a doctor, like Dr. Seuss. I sure hope no one decides to start testing me. They might find the cat in my hat. Canterbury Tales

By early afternoon the riders began filtering into the Reynolds Motorsports dealership in Buxton, Maine, a checkpoint on every Iron Butt Rally since the first one in 1984. With them, strange and twisted stories from their travels arrived too. It was sort of a "Canterbury Tales" as told not by Chaucer but by Vlad the Impaler.

Example: Stephan Bolduc, Quebec's Iron Butt entrant, is more comfortable speaking French than English. When he was checking in with Mike Kneebone, the first step in the scoring process, I asked him diplomatically in my best French how he was doing. "Ca va bien?"

"Non," he said. "I try to sleep in zee park, but zee bear he will not let me."

"The bear? You mean the police?"

"Non, non," he said, waving his arms. "Zee BEAR!"

I can't remember the French word for "bear," but I could understand Stephan perfectly.

Example: Voni Graves, who has undoubtedly logged more motorcycle miles than any woman in recorded history, pointed at her BMW's odometer with disgust. "It stopped working," she said. I looked at the traitorous instrument. It was just 4,900 miles short of 300,000. Voni has never learned to frown, but she wasn't quite smiling either.

Example: Jim Frens' wallet flew out of his tank bag on the New Jersey Turnpike. Bad luck. He yanked his bike over to the breakdown lane, stopped, jumped off the bike, and began running back down the highway. The odds of finding the wallet, given that 20,000 cars and trucks per second were flying up that highway, are too small to be measured. Yet Frens did find the wallet and its cash (good), but the credit cards were long gone (bad). At the checkpoint he told his Canterbury Tale and one of the volunteer scorers, Howard Chain, lent Jim a credit card to finish the rally (good). But this is the Iron Butt Rally, where no good deed goes unpunished. My guess is that the first time Frens tries to use Chain's card, he'll be arrested for theft, fraud, and forgery (bad).

But there is the rare Canterbury Tale where good triumphs over evil. It happened today to Joe DeRyke. He came into Reynolds' parking lot with one thread of his BMW R1100RT's twisted steel throttle cable still intact. The first time DeRyke applied the slightest pressure to the throttle, the final strand would snap faster than a heart string. The closest BMW dealer didn't have the cable in stock, but a shop in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 60 miles south, did.

Joe Mandeville, DeRyke's riding partner, asked me if the rules would permit him to ride down to Portsmouth and buy the cable. No problem, I said. Mandeville, a judge in Los Angeles, suited up and was ready to leave when David Smith, a lawyer from Chicago, said that he was carrying an extra throttle cable on his R1150RT. Would it fit DeRyke's bike? Well, we'll ask Bob Wooldridge, who owns a BMW shop. He says it's no problem. But does anyone really know how to do the replacement? Ah, there's Paul Glaves, the tech guru of the BMW Motorcycle Owners of America, already on his knees at the side of DeRyke's bike. He has the machine in pieces in the parking lot, with the help of Chris Ratay, who with his wife Erin has spent the last four years riding around the world on their BMWs. They showed up just to be part of the crowd and now Chris had grease up to his elbows, busily repairing the bike of a guy he had known for all of four minutes.

An hour later DeRyke was headed for the open road. He saw me. "You can't write about this," he said. "My wife would kill me if she thought there was anything wrong with the bike."

"Your secret's safe with me, Joe" I said.

Sure it is, like I'm going to sit on this story, the quintessential example of True Iron Butt. We tell them over and over: If you're not sleeping, riding, eating, filling the tank, or sitting on the pot, you're wasting time. Yet here were a dozen contestants helping a rival for no other reason than he needed help. They might be in his shoes one day. I shook my head and smiled. How were we ever so fortunate as to meet such people as these? Wine for My Men; We Ride at Dawn

Eleven riders had gone to Canada. One had crashed, one had blown up, one had pulled up short with no bonuses, and one, 2001 IBR winner Bob Hall, called from his home in Ohio this morning to announce his retirement because of a failing motorcycle. The curse of the Iron Butt had struck again. No one has ever won two Iron Butt Rallies outright. They keep trying. The curse keeps cursing.

The Canadian 11 were now The Canadian 7. All made it to Maine, though Mike Hutsal was more than one hour late. His penalty was voided because he had spent time helping his downed partner, Lee Myrah, a few days earlier. Of these seven only Hutsal wasn't completely rested. Paul Taylor was. "The Robo is ready to rumble," he said, referring to his license plate, "RoboBike."

Eric Jewell, in eighth place and more than 14,000 points behind the seventh place rider, had been one of the original 33 red pill riders, but had opted not to go to Canada. He hoped that he would be able to score enough in the Florida and Maine legs to come close to those who had gone north. That didn't happen. He hoped that they would come in bushed while he was fresh. Fresh he was, but so were they. He is a great endurance rider, but he had given away too much. You can't give even an inch to the seven men who lead the IBR tonight. They won't give it back.

At 6:00 p.m. EDT tonight the run back to Missoula began. It is a difficult ride that will require planning, precision, and luck. Only seven men have a realistic chance to win. Ninety hours remain.

The Top Ten (complete standings are on the [www.ironbutt.com](http://www.ironbutt.com) web site):

1. Leonard Roy Honda 39,273
2. Marty Leir BMW 39,222
3. Will Outlaw BMW 39,187
4. Mike Hutsal BMW 39,009
5. Mark Kiecker Honda 38,908
6. Paul Taylor BMW 38,888
7. Peter Hoogeveen Yamaha 38,830
8. Eric Jewell BMW 24,433
9. Eddie James BMW 24,421
10. Paul Pelland BMW 24,169

Bob Higdon  
[www.ironbutt.com](http://www.ironbutt.com)