

Gillette, Wyoming  
August 20, 2003  
Day 9

## **Moron Sails West**

I know a lot of motorcyclists who can't abide the midwest. I love it. The Great Plains is an inland sea with waves of corn and grain elevators for navigation buoys. Interstate 80 is one of the principal shipping lanes. This is the very heart and soul of America; everything else just hangs on to it for one reason or another.

We have been on The Eighty since New York, for two days, for forever. It isn't my kind of road with its sameness, its remorseless stamp of federal approval, its turbulence, and its incessant noise. Give me anything that parallels it, even a goat track. But Moron doesn't care. It plows on.

The heat is searing, but Moron doesn't care about that either. The oil light may have come on for a while this morning; we'll check it if we ever stop, unless we forget. Moron keeps rolling, uncaring. Now and then the whine of the tires on the concrete and the buzz of the wind are interrupted by the sound of Mike ripping another magazine in half. He can't put it down or away or aside. When he finishes one, he has to rip it across, creating top and bottom half magazines. We had about 35 magazines a week ago; now we have 70, and they're harder to read.

I take his atavistic response to finishing a magazine as an angry sign, usually manifesting itself on the ninth day of the event, that there is no way on Earth there will ever be another Iron Butt Rally. That feeling will continue to grow until next June when he will run across a plaster cast of the world's largest wart at the Museum of Disgusting Things somewhere in North Dakota. "If I were doing that stupid rally again, this would have been a good bonus," he'll think. A week later he'll forget the fingerprints that the 2003 IBR left on his soul. Two weeks after that he'll be sending out the preliminary invitations and mapping the base route.

Until then, the blistering heat pops corn on the stalk in the fields along I-80, another magazine is ripped in half, and Moron rolls up and down the gentle hills of western Iowa.

## **And the Beaten Go On**

Paul Meredith's hopeless, triple-cylinder, two-stroke Suzuki, a motor that creates its own smog system as it limps down the highway and struggles to achieve a worthless 20 mpg, yesterday finally dropped off the Environmental Protection Agency's hit list when a broken piston skirt drove a dagger through the machine's oil-fouled heart. Its days of contemptuous sin are finished.

Paul's are not. A friend posted news of the breakdown on the K1200LT owner's list. Thirty minutes later a Samaritan responded, brought his own bike on a trailer, rolled it off and turned it over to Meredith, and hauled the dead Suzuki off to the nearest toxic waste dump.

This illustrates what I think is the major difference between all previous Iron Butt rallies and this one. It isn't advanced GPS receivers or sophisticated mapping programs or other high-zoot gizmos. It's the availability of internet e-mail lists, brand specific or otherwise, that can produce salvation literally at a moment's notice. I have lost count of how many riders have been rescued by them so far.

There are reports that Marsha Hall's BMW R1100 alternator belt went to alternator belt heaven this afternoon, where it will join Paul Taylor's, Dick Fish's and many, many more. It is not for nothing that BMW calls its machines "The Legendary Motorcycles of Germany." Marsha was looking for a tow; BMW was looking for an engineer who knew something about alternator belts.

In a mechanical failure this afternoon that is as scary as it gets, Rick Sauter broke a chain on his Suzuki V-Strom and cracked open the crankcase, not his leg. He was 11th overall in Maine. We put out an emergency bulletin on the moto lists but have heard nothing further.

Eric Jewell, who may be in the midst of a monster final leg, had the rug temporarily pulled out from him near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Today's quiz: Eric's BMW R1100RT quit running because: a) It was tired; b) Eric has already won enough rallies; or c) An alternator belt failed. Marty Leir, having heard stories of belt failures for the past week, had the presence of mind to buy a few spares on the way from Bella Coola. As prescient fate would have it, he gave one to Eric at the Maine checkpoint.

### **The Leaders Head into the Home Stretch**

If you were in the top seven positions in Maine, took a rest bonus today, and picked up the bonuses in Nova Scotia, Long Island, Manhattan, and Shanksville, Pennsylvania, you have gained the combination bonus and will have a chance to win the rally. If you didn't do that, you won't win. Your finishing position also depends on what those other six guys are doing.

At 7:20 CDT this morning, Marty Leir, Will Outlaw, and Mark Kiecker --- the second, third, and fourth overall riders in Maine --- called from New York. They had picked up the largest bonuses from Maine to Manhattan and wanted Lisa Landry to tell them if they were ahead or behind.

"Yes," she said and hung up.

We call them "The Boys." They're young, smart, and incredibly tough. They're from Minnesota and are affiliated with Team Strange, which means that, especially in Kiecker's case, they have utterly no respect for authority. In most cases numbers on the identification towels were assigned randomly, but Lisa saved the highest numbers for those who had given her endless trouble in the months leading up to the rally's start. Of the 117 towels issued, Kiecker's is #115.

They've been joined at the hips for days. At some point they will have to break apart from each other or they'll end up in Missoula as they were in Maine, with Leir 35 points ahead of Outlaw and 314 points in front of Kiecker. Maybe they've agreed to that finishing order, but we don't think so. We know that they did the combination bonus, so the bar has been set.

Leonard Roy, who led Leir by 51 points when the final leg began, has as usual disappeared into deep space. He never calls; he never writes. We don't have a clue what he's done since yesterday and we miss him. Still, we think he'll show up in Missoula. He'd better. My bike is locked in his trailer.

We can give a time allowance to Mike Hutsal for his help to Lee Myrah but we can't give back his lost energy. He earned some tough bonuses in the last 24 hours but he didn't take down the combination. It looks as if his long effort will fall short.

Peter Hoogeveen, along with The Boys, checked in this morning for a bonus at a Harley dealer who is on a direct line from lower Manhattan to Shanksville. It's reasonable to believe that Peter has nailed down the combination bonus, but we don't know.

Paul Taylor also showed up at the Harley bonus. More ominously for his competition, he was also able to secure the Pentagon bonus, one of the largest on the leg. There he ran into Todd Witte and Brent Ames. If other riders have made it to Washington, we aren't aware of it.

As you can tell, we are wandering in the dark here, but we do know this: just 34 hours are left.

Bob Higdon

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