

## **Until the Morning Comes**

As the sun begins to drop behind the mountains to the west, the Iron Butt's corps of workers and volunteers is returning to Iron Butt Central: Jim and Donna Fousek, Ira Agins, Dennis Bitner, Dave McQueeney, Marc Lewis, Dale Wilson, and God only knows how many others I have been too neglectful to mention. They scurry around, preparing for the all-night checkpoint siege. In the parking lot Rick Martin's wife and daughter unload a van with dozens of balloons for their soon-to-be-returning hero. Leonard Aron, the poster child of the Hopeless class for successfully manhandling an ancient Indian to the finish in the 2001 IBR, relaxes in the bar with a beer and some fans. Friends, husbands, wives, children, passers by, hangers on, and wannabes crowd the lobby of the Doubletree Hotel.

Over the course of the next 11 hours, returning Iron Butts will add to the mob. We won't be able to begin the party without them. We all --- friend, family, or fan --- can barely wait for their collective return. We want this to be over now, or sooner than now, but of course there is nothing we can do but wait. Now and then the telephone rings. We hope it will be a rider reporting progress or not much progress or negative progress. We can live with those. There can be worse calls. We try not to think of them.

As usual, reports from the front are delayed, confused, erroneous, rendered inoperative, or overtaken by events. Riders we thought were hanging in are hanging out. Rick Mayer missed being time-barred in Maine Monday morning by 12 minutes. He retreated to the nearest motel for some rest. And more rest. By the time Agins and Bitner left the motel the following morning, Mayer's bike was still in the parking lot. We have heard nothing from the motorcycle saddle maker since.

Conversely, riders we thought had opted out have opted back in. Al Holtsberry, depressed at facing yet another pass through amber waves of grain in Kansas, called rallymaster Lisa Landry two days ago to express his displeasure and announce his withdrawal from the traveling circus. The majesties of the purple mountains in Colorado appealed to him, he reported, so he was going to ride around there until the finishing banquet. Lisa tried to talk him out of it but Al had definitely had it with corn. We duly reported his decision, not aware that five minutes after he'd hung up, he reconsidered, turned toward Cape Disappointment, and renounced his renunciation without actually telling us. We're pleased, of course.

Holtsberry's perseverance led him to rendezvous this morning just before 8:00 with ten other riders at the entrance to Cape Disappointment: Allen Dye, Harry Kaplan, George Barnes, Brett Donahue, Mike Berlien, Keith Keating, John Ferber, Tim Conway, and the team of Jim and Donna Phillips. The site is pleased to receive maybe five visitors a month in busy times. We can't even imagine what the sight of 11 hammered motorcyclists must have conjured up in the mind of the Coast Guard attendant who showed up to open the gate. They all apparently made it out of the area without being arrested and strip searched, which is more than one of our poor contestants can say about his visit to the Naval Acoustic Research Center on the first day of the rally.

As usual, the parade of crumbling machines marches on, this time the BMW R1150RT police bike/sidecar apparatus of Bob Mutchler. For two days his clutch and transmission have been sliding toward the abyss. Earlier this evening he was reported to be almost 500 miles from the finish, flashers flashing, and riding in 3rd gear (4th and 5th gears having already departed to transmission heaven). He might make it.

His wife and parents, waiting here at the hotel, certainly hope so. It is going to be a long night for the Mutchler clan.

Bill Shaw's long nights are now officially over. Caught up in a multi-vehicle crash early in the 2003 IBR and forced to withdraw, this evening at just after 7:00 p.m. MDT he was the first rider to be classified as a finisher to arrive at the hotel. "I know I'm early," he confessed somewhat sheepishly, "but I've been dealing with microbes in my gut for three days and carrying an 8,000-pound gorilla on my back for two years. The bugs are still there but I've finally gotten rid of that damned ape."

Riders not qualifying as finishers began drifting in by mid-afternoon. The first, Jerry Harris, was knocked out of the rally by his bike in a freak accident at a gas station several days ago. Tim Yow, not long after leaving the checkpoint in Maine, hit the corpse of a deer on the road, jolting his cervical vertebrae so badly that all he could do afterwards was crawl slowly and painfully to Denver. He will not have picked up enough points to qualify as a finisher, but he's happy to be here just the same. And Brian Roberts, also victimized by a close encounter with a forest rat on the first night of the rally, is here, still thrilled to have been a part of the spectacle, however briefly.

At 8:00 a.m. tomorrow the penalty points begin to accumulate for riders not yet checked in at the finish. If they fail to arrive by 10:00 a.m., they'll be finished, not finishers. As far as we know, the top forty riders in Maine are all still running, though realistically only the top half-dozen have any chance to win. If Jim Owen's satellite transponder is to be believed, he is winding down a monumental effort that might be derailed only by mechanical failure. The other highly-placed riders --- Jeff Earls, Eric Jewell, Chris Sakala, Eddie James, Shane Smith, and Jack Savage --- can do nothing now except grind it out through one more long night and hope for the best. We won't be running with them, but we too will be hoping for the best just as fervently as they do.

#### **BULLETIN**

Three minutes after this story was posted to the web, we received news that Jim Owen's bike, a BMW R1150RT, has failed in Elko, Nevada. We have no further information to impart.

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Denver CO