

## The Right Stuff

Today is travel day at Iron Butt Central. The administration is winging it to Maine. If we look carefully down from our window seats at 37,000 feet, we might see a string of motorcycles heading into the morning sun. Most of the riders know where they're going. The severely map-challenged have been instructed simply to head east on I-70 until they hit I-95, then turn left. With luck, we should beat them all to the checkpoint before it opens early Monday morning.

The scores were posted just before 9:00 o'clock last night. There were few surprises. Jim Owen, despite losing a 1,000-point bonus for keeping gas receipts, had a lead of almost 4,000 points over Eric Jewell. They had taken the west coast route, as had the third- through fifth-place riders. Tied for sixth were George Barnes, Shane Smith, and Brian Boberick, the riders who had gone to New Brunswick and North Carolina on a gigantic loop. Jewell was efficient, picking up almost eight points per mile. Shane was the master of brute force, riding almost 1,300 miles farther than Jewell for 4,601 fewer points.

The gang of seven that swept through Florida, Fontana, and Chicago is tied for 13th. Mark Kiecker would have been with them but he too lost a 1,000-point gas bonus. Other scores are strewn across the board like sand on the beach. The complete listing, along with photos of the riders and the bonus locations they visited, are posted at <http://www.ironbuttrally.com/ibr/2005/RiderScorecards.cfm>.

In 49th and 62nd places are Bob Mutchler and John Bolin. That may not be impressive to you, but each had epic struggles just to make it to the finish with literally mere minutes to spare. Not everyone was so fortunate. You'll see some scores of zero at the bottom of the list, those belonging to riders who have been time-barred. Fitch: motor; Fish: motor; Roberts: down in the Bitterroot Mountains; and Crittenden: fatigue. Dan Lowery bombed out before the start in 2003. He didn't get much farther this year. The last victim of the rains in the plains was Phyllis Lang, more than an hour late at the final bell. She had run the Key West route, clearly much too ambitious a ride for such a small woman on such a large Harley. We'll miss her bright smile on dark nights.

Sometimes they make it too easy for us here at The Daily Planet. Our cub reporters in their capes and blue tights scurry around all day looking for the lead story. Yesterday one of them --- the story, not the cub reporter --- fell right into our lap. Take a look at the scores of Eddie James and George Zelenz, for example. Eddie is in fourth place today, trying to figure out how to ride ten straight miles without cramping, creaking, or cringing. George Barnes tells rookies that they must adapt their bikes so that the machine is the most comfortable place on earth for them to be. Eddie's bike isn't like that these days. He's trying to recover from a terrible accident in the final hours of the last Iron Butt Rally. His isn't a BMW dual-sport bike; it's an ordeal with wheels. His leg locks up; he can't walk without an occasional shiver of pain wrinkling his face; aspirin is another basic food group for him. Instead of being on a motorcycle, he needs to be pruning his skin in the hot tub where George Zelenz hangs out.

At the Cabrillo lighthouse bonus in Mendocino, California, Eddie entered by the handicapped access road and took the required photo. No one at the scoring table would have questioned for one second his right to do exactly that. But some fellow riders saw him and a few predictable razzes were shouted out. Eddie knows a no-win situation when he sees it, having created a few of them by himself in the past, so he curled back around into the main lot, limped a quarter-mile toward the lighthouse to take a second photo, and headed off to his next stop, grimacing a bit as he usually does these days.

That's one way to do it, what we call the good faith effort. George Zelenz took a different approach. In the main parking lot he tossed his identification towel on a bush, took the picture, and departed. Total steps taken: maybe eight. When Zelenz presented the photo at the scoring table last night, an immediate problem arose: No one could identify a man-made structure anywhere in the picture, much less a lighthouse. The issue was bounced up to Tom Austin, the chief scorer. Austin saw the vague, tiny outline of a what may have been a tree, but the lighthouse apparently was behind even that. Tom showed me the photo and asked if I could see anything. "I'm sure I'll be able to," I said, "as soon as I run this crap through an electron microscope." Bonus denied. Zelenz said he would protest. "Be my guest," Austin shrugged. I'm not sure how the appeal was decided, but the laughter heard in the chambers of the Supreme Court probably don't bode well for the rider.

Eddie James might make it to Maine. He might even make it back to Denver if his painkillers hold out. When it's over, he won't be in fourth place. You can ask only so much of bones and muscles that hurt too much already. He can drive you absolutely crazy, but he can also shine, sometimes as brightly and intently as the Cabrillo lighthouse.

George Zelenz, in the meantime, wallows in 65th place. He doesn't ache the way Eddie does, and because he has a raw, natural talent for this kind of sport, he'll probably climb up in the standings almost as fast as Eddie will drop. Along the way he'll learn some things about the Iron Butt and the people who focus a good part of their lives on it. One day he might learn that this game isn't just about miles. It's also about how you ride them.

### **Feedback**

An attentive reader --- we have no other kind, actually --- complains that Gary Eagan holds the record for the friskiest time from Prudhoe Bay to Key West, not Chris Sakala as I wrote on Day #2. Have I not seen the recent blizzard of ads in bike rags touting the Guinness record-setting feat, he asks? Of course I have. How can you avoid them?

There are just two problems with the claim. First, Guinness stopped certifying speed runs on public roads at least 15 years ago. They used to do that, true enough, and I've seen the certification that Fran Crane received for her New York to San Francisco ride in 1988. I asked Gary months ago to show me his award, but not even a photocopy of it has turned up yet. Second, the final authority for motorcycle endurance claims, by the tacit agreement of riders in 26 countries to date, isn't a beer company in Ireland but the Iron Butt Association in Chicago, Illinois. If Gary has so much as a single gas receipt that attests to his presence on any highway between Alaska and Florida last year, the IBA hasn't seen it.

I stand by what I wrote. Until evidence more compelling than an ad campaign for a motorcycle jacket turns up, the record belongs to Sakala. Case closed.

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