

Waiting

If this report makes it to 200 words it will be a miracle. The long and short of it is that we know next to nothing about what is going on, other than what we learn from the occasional telephone call, an e-mail that reports a sighting, or the Star-Traxx web site. We're mushrooms, sitting in a dark, damp corner, waiting for someone to come along and throw some more manure on us. One day we may bloom, but it won't be tonight.

When the riders left Buxton, Maine yesterday morning, they had basically four days to make it back to the finish in Denver, a straight-line distance of just under 2,100 miles. The largest bonus of the leg, continuing the water theme of the rally, was at Cape Disappointment, Washington. That adds another 2,400 miles to the basic route, but for the top rung of endurance riders, even at this stage of the event, it's doable. Throwing in more bonuses can run the final total to more than 5,000 miles. At some point even Superman will throw in the towel, but when and where that might happen is anyone's guess. A stack of riders, apparently led by the Wrecking Crew, has been heading along that route for the past 36 hours.

more modest route is to visit bridges in Brooklyn, New York and Las Vegas, Nevada, add in a couple of sleep bonuses, and perhaps make a desperate run to the Pacific. It looks like the route that has been chosen by leader Jim Owen, if the Star-Traxx transponder that has been recording his progress can be believed. One of our more paranoid consultants thinks that Owen may have surreptitiously given his unit to a mule to disguise the leader's actual route. That seems extreme to us. Owen has gotten this far by careful planning and hard riding, not by tricks and stealth. If he rides the third leg in the same way he has run the first two, he has an excellent chance to prevail.

Perhaps the most point-packed route to the finish from Maine is first to ride back to New Brunswick. Some large bonuses lurk in the area of Prince Edward Island. For some riders this is more than just another incidence of deja vu; it's a preview of actual hell. Iron Butt vet Tom Loftus has made three round-trips into Canada within one week. It may be a record of repetition that could attract the attention of the Guinness book. Once having cleaned out the bonuses in New Brunswick, they could just give up and return to Colorado. Potentially the most fruitful ride would entail a trip down the congestive entrail of I-95 to the Cape Hatteras area. If something happens to Owen, a rider taking the New Brunswick/North Carolina route could be smiled upon by fickle fortune.

But fortune wasn't smiling on Britain's Paul Allison today. His R1100RT BMW burned out a clutch near Quebec. Salvation could not be found in time to keep his hopes alive. Late this evening we received reports that Tim Conway's BMW was acting up. He has lost top end power, not just threatening his drive to the Pacific but possibly even his chances to stagger back to Denver.

The pains didn't end there. Starring in a soon-to-be-released blockbuster, "Revenge of the Bikes," both Rick Martin and Jerry Harris were smacked by their motorcycles in strange accidents. Harris' bike began to tip over onto him at a gas station. He tripped trying to back away from it, fell, and was pinned by the machine when it toppled onto his leg. He was able to continue for a while, but he has had to withdraw when the pain grew too irritating to continue. Rick Martin's FJR1300 saw an opportunity for payback while its owner was sleeping. It dropped onto him without warning at a rest stop. Martin is continuing with the ride, but now is watching the treacherous motorcycle like a hawk.

Al Holtsberry's ride on the rally's oldest bike has concluded voluntarily. He couldn't face another ride across Kansas.

That's the news from Denver. It pales in comparison, of course, to the news from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast of Mississippi. Our hearts go out to those affected, however tangentially, by this awful storm. One way or another, for motorcycle riders spread out across North America and for terrified, anxious people huddling in the wake of disaster, this too shall pass. We just have to cross our fingers and wait.

Bob Higdon
Denver CO