

2007 Iron Butt Rally, Day -1

Sunday, August 19, 2007

Only three riders had to get through tech inspection today, but the parking lot was still bustling with activity as many riders proceeded to violate Rule Number 5 from the Iron Butt Association Archives of Wisdom:

"Avoid adding accessories or doing maintenance immediately before a trip."

Actually, many of the riders violated the rule last week and are today trying to fix problems that cropped up on their ride to the start of the 2007 Iron Butt Rally. Chris McGaffin, who flew in from Ireland to ride the rally on a borrowed Kawasaki Concours, posted a message today on the LD Riders list asking for assistance with a buzzing noise in the bike's Autocom system. Imagine that, a noise problem with a communication system.

Former top ten finisher Eric Jewell flunked tech inspection for failing to have a ground on his auxiliary fuel tank. Fortunately for Eric, electronics guru Roger Sinclair (www.irishspanner.com) volunteered to pitch in and resolve his problem.

Thanks to Gateway BMW, Arlen Brunsvold, Sr. was able to get his R1200RT repaired following the tangle with his son yesterday. Gateway did not have the necessary parts in stock, so they stripped them off of a bike on the showroom floor. Li'l Arlen will be on a new Harley-Davidson, but it won't be ready for delivery until Monday morning. The father-son team will be late for the start, but at least they are still in the Rally. Starting a couple of hours late won't mean all that much over the next 11 days.

Since yesterday, word has spread about Dick Fish's record (and eardrum) shattering exhaust system on his Buell Ulysses. Dick failed the noise test and had to replace his aftermarket exhaust with the stock system. Several people were asking just how loud Dick's bike was. When someone asked how it compared to a Screamin' Meanie, the crack tech inspection team leapt into action. Matt Watkins volunteered his Meanie and set it on its highest sound level. The sound meter was calibrated and placed exactly the same 20 inch distance from the Meanie as the distance used to test exhaust systems. Matt fired off the Meanie and everyone covered their ears. I read the sound meter myself: 111 decibels, high enough to cause permanent hearing loss, but no match for the Buell. Dick's 113 decibel reading will stand as the highest noise level ever measured during tech inspection at the Iron Butt Rally for at least the next two years.

Riders Meeting

The Riders Meeting started today at 2:30 p.m. Rider and journalist Chris Cimino was called on to provide a briefing on how everyone needs to be careful in talking with the press both during and after the rally. His main message was to avoid being trapped into responding to questions designed to create the impression that the Iron Butt Rally is a contest of speed. Chris made it very clear that excessive speed or reckless operation are grounds for disqualification and that anyone who claims to have ridden in an unsafe or reckless manner will be stripped of finisher status should they be so fortunate to achieve that objective.

Chief Technical Inspector Dale 'Warchild' Wilson explained the procedure for the start tomorrow morning, during which odometers will be recorded and rider identification tags will be punched. Riders were advised that 'you need to be at your motorcycle at 8:30 a.m.' tomorrow morning. They were then reminded that 'you need to be at your motorcycle at 8:30 a.m.' On at least three other occasions, riders were told 'you need to be at your motorcycle at 8:30 a.m.' Based on past experience, the question rally staff has tonight is exactly how many riders will not be at their motorcycle at 8:30 a.m. tomorrow morning and will end up being having to wait until all other riders have left before their odometer check is completed.

Ira Agins then informed the riders of some last minute changes to rules. All of the couples riding 2-up were asked to stand. They were then informed that, in this year's rally, one of the team members has to be in every photo. A substantial amount of time was spent on the question of what constitutes 'daylight' when the bonus requires a photo to be taken during daylight hours. Time was also spent on how to document a 'rest bonus' and when riders need to make corrections on a gas receipt.

Finally, Lisa advised riders 'to not do something stupid' and to make a safe return their highest priority.

Banquet

The banquet buffet began at 5:00 p.m. As riders were finishing their dinners, Bob Higdon admonished them to make their highest priority finishing safely and to, 'Do what you can not to embarrass yourself.' He then spent several minutes reminiscing about some of the more interesting events in past rallies.

Rallymaster Lisa Landry wasted no time in handing out the identification flags and envelopes containing the bonus listings. Each rider was called to the podium to receive their package in the order that the rider numbers had been assigned. Rider number 1 was George Barnes, winner of the 1999 Rally. Rider number 2 was Chris Sakala, the 2nd place finisher last year. Rider number 3 was Jeff Earls, the 3rd place finisher last year. Rider number 4 was Eric Jewell, three times a top ten finisher. Rider number 5 was Marty Leir, twice in the top ten.

Number 6 went to Jim Owen, number 7 to Brett Donahue, number 8 to Alan Barbic, number 9 to Dick Fish, and number 10 Peter Leap. Although the rationale for the rider number assignments was not stated, the first ten numbers went to riders who are likely to finish at the top of the heap.

Rider after rider made the trek to the podium as their rider numbers were called out. Numbers 11 through 19 went to nine riders whose resumes indicate they have a good chance of placing near the top:

11 - Tom Loftus

12 - Andy Mills

13 - Jim Frens

14 - Tom Melchild

15 - John Langan

16 - Doug Chapman

17 - Chris Cimino

18 - Bob St. George

19 - Bill Thweatt

Numbers 20 through 30 went to riders who are riding together:

20 - Jim and Donna Phillips

21 - Tom and Rosie Sperry

22 - Bob and Silvie Torter

23 - Terry and Lynda Lahman

24 - Reiner and Lisa Kappenberger

25 - Karol Patzer

26 - Tony DeLorenzo, Karol's son

27 - Arlen Brunsvold, Jr.

28 - Arlen Brunsvold, Sr.

29 - Lisa Stevens

30 - Tobie Stevens, aka Mr. Lisa Stevens

Numbers 31 through 39 went to some of the riders from outside the U.S.:

<pre>31 - Paul Allison from the U.K.

32 - Gerhard Memmen-Krueger from Germany

33 - Chris McGaffin from Ireland

- 34 - Richard Keegan from Ireland
- 35 - Bill Watt from British Columbia, Canada
- 36 - Don Wescott from Nova Scotia, Canada
- 37 - Steve Broadhead, from Alberta, Canada
- 38 - Mike Hutsal, from Manitoba, Canada
- 39 - Stephan Bolduc from Quebec, Canada

The remaining numbers, which appear to have been assigned in no particular order, were given to riders that range from top ten hopefuls to 'hope to finish':

- 40 - Robert Joers
- 41 - Vicki Johnston
- 42 - Don Kulwicki
- 43 - Mike Langford
- 44 - Greg Marbach
- 45 - Rick Martin
- 46 - Ken Morton
- 47 - Jim Mulcahy
- 48 - Peter Murray
- 49 - Bob Mueller
- 50 - Rick Neeley
- 51 - Rob Nye, introduced as 'our rally's biggest techno geek'
- 52 - Glenn Pancoast
- 53 - Dick Peek
- 54 - Paul Peloquin
- 55 - Dennis Powell
- 56 - Joel Rappoport
- 57 - Brian Roberts
- 58 - Alex Schmitt
- 59 - Mike Senty

60 - Jack Shoalmire
61 - Tom Skemp
62 - Jim Simonet
63 - Carl Stark
64 - John Tomasovitch
65 - Rebecca Vaughn
66 - Bill Wade
67 - Matt Watkins
68 - Jim Winterer
69 - Kendall Anderson
70 - Doug Bailey
71 - Michael Boge
72 - Mark Collins
73 - Art Garvin
74 - Maura Gatensby
75 - Mike Getzendanner
76 - Steve Branner
77 - Curt Gran
78 - Norm Grills
79 - Kevin Healey
80 - Dave Hinks
81 - Chip Hyde
82 - Don Jones
83 - Hans Karlsson
84 - Vance Keeney
85 - Homer Krout
86 - Mike Langford
87 - Alan Bennett
88 - David Bordeaux

89 - Mike Evans

90 - David Derrick

91 - Fred Droegemueller

92 - Richard Buber

93 - Gregg Burger

94 - Joe DeRyke

95 - Don Catterton

96 - Bob Collin

97 - Rick Miller

On second thought, there may have been some basis for the last number being assigned to Rick Miller. In past rallies, that 'honor' has usually been reserved for someone who has managed to irritate the rallymaster. I would like to provide specific information, but Lisa had 'no comment.'

Following the rider number assignments, Michael Kneebone explained the information contained on a sheet of paper that every rider had been given entitled, '2007 Iron Butt Rally Medal Levels.' He explained that riders who want to be considered 'finishers' need to try for about 70,000 total points on the first leg, consisting of 50,000 bonus points, 10,000 for a good fuel log, 7,155 points for a rest bonus, and 2,000 points for a call-in bonus. To earn bronze, silver, or gold medals, the required point targets increase significantly.

Leg 1 Bonus Listing, Who is 'Manly' Enough for Goose Bay?

When the riders were instructed to open the envelope containing the bonus listings for the first leg, those who were hoping to get some routing help from friends back home were dismayed to see that the bonus listings were printed on red paper. Kneebone then asked, "Does everybody understand what red paper does when you try to fax it."

Kneebone then reviewed some of the first bonuses in the massive Leg 1 bonus listing. The first bonus is good for 52,000 points, but it requires a picture of your motorcycle in front of the Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. Obviously, no one will be able to ride to the West coast, obtain round trip transportation for their motorcycle to Hawaii, and make it back to the checkpoint on time. Kneebone acknowledged that this bonus is impossible and made the point that it has been included to make riders realize exactly that: don't assume all of the bonuses are possible.

Assigning 52,000 points to Oahu was just part of the mind game being played. If a 52,000 point bonus is impossible, then who in their right mind would give a second thought to a bonus worth 75,527 points? Perhaps the leader at the end of Leg 1, who will earn 75,527 points for a picture of their motorcycles in front of the sign at the Goose Bay ferry terminal in Labrador, Canada.

Most of the bonus codes used in the bonus listing are cryptic alpha-numeric character strings (e.g., ME, RM, R6) to assist with data entry at the checkpoint. The bonus code for Goose Bay, Labrador is "MANLY."

The round trip to Goose Bay and back is 4,456 miles. Based on mileage, it sounds doable, but the pavement ends long before Goose Bay. Based on the default speeds in a typical mapping program, riders can expect their average speed while moving to be only 48 mph. An estimated 92 hours are required for the round trip because there are a lot of miles on dirt roads. The last 675 miles to Goose Bay is mostly dirt. Based on default speeds, there is time for only 13 hours for rest from Monday morning until Friday night. But averaging just a few miles per hour above the default speeds could provide a few more hours of rest time.

Plowing through 123 separate bonuses will take a long time, but riders will eventually figure out that anyone who can make Goose Bay will be at the front of the pack at the end of Leg 1. Dick Fish is one of the few people on the planet that has already ridden to Goose Bay. He is also one of the most experienced dirt riders in the Rally. He has a chance to make it. He also has the guts to try it. Tomorrow morning we will find out if Dick or anyone else is going to give it a shot.

Another high point bonus in Canada is Perce Rock, which is worth 33,000 points. It's available only about 4 hours each day during daylight low tide. Perce Rock might look like an attractive turn around point for riders who are not willing to risk Goose Bay. A round trip to Perce Rock is only 3,518 miles and it doesn't involve dirt roads. Other bonuses have to be chosen carefully because of the narrow windows during which the Perce Rock bonus is available, but there is plenty of time to add other bonuses on the trip up and back. The riders were all given tide charts at the banquet and Rob Nye was called to the podium to explain how to read them. Everyone knows that daylight low tide at Perce Rock occurs at about 1 p.m. local time.

Most riders won't give a second thought to Goose Bay and many will be concerned about building a route around Perce Rock. Less risk is associated with a Southern loop with a turn-around in Key West. In past years, Key West has always been a 'sucker bonus.' Will that be the case again this year? During the 2005 rally, Key West was a popular choice on the first leg because it was big points for a simple ride with relatively few other bonus options to complicate route planning. That's not the case this year.

There are more than a dozen high point bonuses that can be easily scored on the way to Key West and back.

Regardless of the turn around point they choose, virtually every rider is going to head for Gateway Arch to score their first bonus of the rally. At 3,565 points, it's too big to ignore given its proximity to the starting line. Since it's only a 23 mile ride to the Arch, and since the bonus is only available during the first 3 hours after the start, there will likely be a parade of over 90 motorcycles all headed for exactly the same spot. When everyone lines up to obtain a receipt from the Arch parking structure, it's going to be more of a mob scene than the start of the rally. But it's going to be the easiest 3,565 points on the leg. It's a 'must do' bonus for any rider who is thinking clearly.

Dean Tanji's son, Colin, will be waiting for the parade to arrive at the Arch tomorrow morning with his camera rolling. The video should be priceless.

Tom Austin

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