The 2007 Iron Butt Rally Day -2
Saturday, August 18, 2007

Today was the primary day for tech inspection and rider check-in for the 13th running of the Iron Butt Rally. The parking lot of the Doubletree Hotel in Chesterfield, Missouri is filled with motorcycles that are anything but a representative cross section of the motorcycles purchased by the general public. Cruisers and sport bikes dominate the U.S. motorcycle market. But cruisers are about style and sport bikes are about speed. The Iron Butt Rally is about efficiently riding long distances.

There have been some exceptional long distance rides done on cruisers and sport bikes, but they are just not the optimum type of motorcycle for this event. With the exception of Brett Donahue's extensively modified Harley-Davidson Sportster and Alan Bennett s 250 cc Kawasaki Ninja, everyone is riding a motorcycle in the "touring," "sport-touring," or "dual sport" category.

Among the touring bikes, the most popular models are Honda Gold Wings and BMW K1200LTs. In the sport-touring category, the most popular models are the Yamaha FJR1300, the BMW R1200RT and R1150RT, the BMW K1200GT, and the Honda ST1300 and ST1100. The most popular Dual-Sport models are the BMW R1200GS and R1150GS, the Suzuki DL1000 and DL650 (aka the V-Strom and the Wee-Strom).

Of the 97 motorcycles entered, there are 42 BMWs, 27 Hondas, 14 Yamahas, 5 Suzukis, 3 Kawasakis, 3 Harley-Davidsons, 1 Buell, 1 Triumph, and 1 Victory. The oldest is the 1972 Harley-Davidson Electra Glide ridden by Mark Collins. The newest are the 2008 Kawasaki Concours 14 ridden by Chris Cimino and the 2008 Victory Vision ridden by Andy Mills.

Honda's representation on the IBR starting line is roughly proportional to its share of the U.S. motorcycle market. In 2004, Honda had 29% of the market and about 28% of the riders in this year's rally will be on Hondas, but none of them are Honda s popular cruiser or sport bike models. The are all Gold Wings and STs, touring and sport-touring models that have a good reputation for reliability and have the alternator capacity necessary to run the auxiliary lights and heated clothing used by most Iron Butt Rally riders.

This year, Yamaha will also come close to matching its percentage of the U.S. motorcycle market, which is about 15%. When most motorcyclists think of Yamaha, they think of sport bikes like the awesome 1000 cc "R1" and the 600 cc YZF-R6 or cruisers marketed under the "Star" brand. There are exactly zero Yamaha sport bikes or cruisers entered. All 14 Yamahas are the FJR1300 sport-tourer.

Suzuki and Kawasaki are significantly under represented based on their share of the U.S. motorcycle market. The old Kawasaki Concours has been a great long distance bike for the money, but it is rather long of tooth. The company's representation in the IBR may increase with the all new Concours that has just been released. The new "Concours 14" wasn t really available in time to be fully prepped for the Rally, but hasn t stopped Chris Cimino. Chris will be riding a nearly showroom stock 2008 model Concours. He has done little more than add some auxiliary lights, bar risers, and a throttle lock.

Suzuki doesn't really build a touring or sport-touring bike. The 650 and 1000 cc V-Stroms are probably the best rally bikes they make.

The two makes that have the most dramatic difference between their U.S. market share and their percentage of the bikes on the starting grid are BMW and Harley. Harley had 28% of the U.S. market in 2004. Including the Buell, only 4% of bikes in this year's rally were produced by Harley-Davidson. The lower percentage is explained by the fact that Harley's touring bikes don t enjoy the same reputation other brands have in the areas of handling, braking, reliability, and performance.

BMW had 1.4% of the U.S. motorcycle market in 2004 and accounts for 43% of the starting grid this year. In other words, BMW is OVER-represented by a factor of 30 based on its market share. Although final drive reliability has been an issue in prior models, BMW builds some truly great motorcycles for long distance riding, including the K1200LT, the K1200GT, the R1200GS, and, my personal favorite, the R1200RT. BMW's tend to be lighter than the competition, have much higher alternator capacity, great ride and handling, stunning brakes, and good fuel economy.

A number of the motorcycles entered in the rally this year can be comfortably and efficiently ridden long distance right off of the showroom floor. But the vast majority of the motorcycles that went through tech inspection today are equipped with auxiliary fuel tanks, upgraded lighting, GPS, and custom seats. Many have aftermarket windscreens, handlebar risers, throttle locks, aftermarket luggage, radar detectors, custom hydration systems with drinking tubes, 12-volt receptacles for heated clothing, tank bags with waterproof holders for maps and bonus listings, CB radios, and other communications gear. Tire pressure monitoring systems are installed on a number of motorcycles this year.

An example of the lengths that riders will go to in modifying their motorcycles is Rob Nye s BMW R1200RTP: http://www.maxbmwmotorcycles.com/IBRB/

The amount of electronic gadgetry on Rob s bike is mind boggling.

The extensiveness of the modifications riders make to their motorcycles for long distance riding comes at a price. Most riders have spent hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars preparing for this event. Some of the modifications are relatively simple; some are unbelievably complex.

A decent auxiliary fuel system can be assembled for a few hundred dollars if you start with an off-the-shelf high-density polyethylene tank and mount it to the sub-frame under the pillion seat. At the other end of the spectrum, I think I set the record for auxiliary fuel system extravagance in 1999 with the $4,000 I invested in a hand-formed aluminum "tail-dragger" cell for my K1200LT. That record has now been shattered. The custom Kevlar and carbon fiber tank that Bob and Silvie Torter had built to increase the fuel capacity of their K1200GT to 10.5 gallons looks like it came right out of the BMW factory. It s mounted on top of the stock tank, making it look like the bike has an enlarged OEM tank. The finish is flawless; the color matches the rest of bike perfectly. There are a number of motorcycles entered in this rally that cost less when they were brand new the cost of the Torter s custom tank.

Although the Torter s tank sailed through tech inspection, others weren t so lucky. Rob Nye announced that he had a 0.1 gallon cushion, telling tech inspector Joe Denton that his custom auxiliary cell was designed to be exactly 4.4 gallons so that he would be at 11.4 when added to the 7.0 gallon capacity of the stock tank on his BMW R1200RT. I wish I could have gotten a picture of the look on Rob s face when he was informed that the capacity of the stock tank on an R1200RT is 7.1 gallons, not 7.0. His 0.1 gallon cushion had just been converted to zero cushion requiring an actual fuel capacity measurement.

For the next two hours, Rob nervously awaited the official fuel capacity measurement. Joe Denton warmed up the electronic scale, carefully measured the specific gravity of the gasoline being used for the measurement, checked the calibration of the scale, and then weighed the fuel container before and after filling Rob s cell. Rob struggled to do the math in his head while waiting for the laptop computer to be booted up that does all of the calculations automatically. The final result: a system total of 11.45 gallons, under the limit by 0.05 gallons.

Closer still to the limit was Dennis Powell. He declared the capacity of his auxiliary tank at 4.7 gallons. When added to the 6.6 gallon stock tank on his GL1800, the total should be 11.3, comfortably under the 11.5 gallon limit. But Dennis s tank was a one-off product built by someone the tech inspection crew had never heard of. Since it wasn t an especially complex shape, Joe Denton calculated the volume from the external dimensions. Accounting for the wall thickness, the calculated volume was 5.1 gallons, putting him over the limit by 0.2 gallons. His use of the "I m just a poor pig farmer plea was useless. The

tank would have to have the official test during which it is filled with gasoline. By removing a fuel filter from the system, Dennis was able to get his official reading down to 11.51 gallons, which rounds the 11.5 standard.

There were no close calls with the noise testing. Everyone passed with flying colors except for Dick Fish. Dick failed with flying colors, setting a new record for the noisiest motorcycle ever tested during Iron Butt Rally tech inspection. The aftermarket exhaust system on his Buell Ulysses was enough to wake the dead blasting out 113 decibels on the official test. The standard is 105. Because the decibel scale is non-linear, 113 is not just 8% louder than the standard. It was more than double the perceived loudness of any other motorcycle in the Rally.

Although he grumbled about the results, failing the noise test was obviously not a surprise to Mr. Fish. Why else would he have brought his stock exhaust system with him? It was sweaty work for Dick in the parking lot, but the bike will be making much less of a racket when it leaves the starting line on Monday morning.

Most other problems identified during tech inspection were related to paper work. A surprising number of riders showed up with registration and insurance documents without matching vehicle identification numbers. That wasn t a problem for veteran Karol Patzer; because she totally forgot her registration papers for her 1988 BMW K75. Hopefully she will find some way come up with the necessary documentation. She has been looking forward to being part of the first mother-son team to finish the Iron Butt Rally. Her son Tony DeLorenzo will be riding with her on his 2007 R1200GS Adventure.

Several riders had serious problems today that were unrelated to tech inspection and check-in. Richard Buber s 2002 R1150RT is a sick puppy. The transmission began failing on his ride to Chesterfield. Several people of have been trying valiantly to arrange for an emergency transplant. The latest word is that a replacement transmission will arrive tomorrow and transplant surgery will be performed.

The Brunsvold father-son team of Arlen Sr. and Arlen Jr. no doubt expected that the Rally would bring them closer together. Turns out a bit too close. After getting though tech inspection just fine, Arlen Jr. T-boned Arlen Sr. out on a short ride to check out a rough running problem with the Arlen Srs. R1200RT. Neither Arlen Sr. nor his BMW R1200RT sustained damage that can t be quickly repaired. Arlen Jr. is also okay but his Harley-Davidson Road King is apparently out. Team Brunsvold has less than 24 hours to come up with a replacement for the Road King.

In addition to the problems the Brunsvold s and Richard Buber have to deal with, there are three riders yet to complete tech inspection. Paul Allison, a rider from Great Britain, didn t finish the installation of an auxiliary fuel tank on his rented Gold Wing early enough to get it inspected today. He has plenty of time tomorrow. Eric Jewell arrived too late to start the process today. Rick

Miller isn t due in until tomorrow.

Following the completion of tech inspections and rider check-in, the riders meeting is at 2:30 tomorrow afternoon. The pre-rally banquet begins at 5:00. The first leg bonus listing will probably handed out by about 6:30 p.m. Although the official start isn t until 10 a.m. on Monday, the Rally will really begin when the riders see the bonus listing. Many may be thinking they will have plenty of time to figure out an optimum route and then get a solid 8 hours sleep. They are wrong.

Tom Austin
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