

2007 Iron Butt Rally, Day 1
Monday, August 20, 2007

There has never been a more dramatic start for an Iron Butt Rally than occurred this morning in Chesterfield, Missouri. Although there were threatening skies all morning, there was little more than a light mist in the air as staff members recorded outgoing odometer readings and I collected information from the riders regarding their basic route plans. We walked down two long rows of motorcycles arranged side-by-side, one row facing the other with an empty parking lot aisle in between.

A ten minute riders meeting began at 9:45 a.m. during which Chief Technical Inspector Dale Wilson reviewed the starting procedures one last time and Rallymaster Lisa Landry announced a few minor corrections to the Leg 1 bonus listing. Following Lisa's comments, Dale told all of the riders to mount up and be prepared to exit the parking lot one-by-one when he pointed to them. At the very instant the meeting ended, the deluge began.

It didn't just start raining, it started pouring with the intensity that causes cars to pull off of the freeway and wait it out on the side of the road because windshield wipers won't keep up. Dale, Lisa, and other rally staff that were working the start were soaking wet in less than a minute. (To the surprise of Bob Higdon and many riders, Lisa did NOT melt.)

Riders and staff alike were no doubt contemplating whether the cloudburst was some sort of omen. But almost as soon as it had begun, it quickly tapered off to a light drizzle just a minute before the start, leaving the superstitious to ponder the mixed message being sent from above.

At exactly 10:00 a.m. Dale pointed to Rob Nye; "Go!" Next was Dick Fish; "Go!" One by one they pulled into the center aisle and headed for the exit where the Chesterfield Police Department had stopped all other traffic and provided a clear path to U.S. 40, the nearest limited access roadway.

Another new record was established. 94 motorcycles crossed the starting line in 4 minutes and 59 seconds; 1 motorcycle every 3 seconds.

Reiner and Lisa Kappenberger's Gold Wing was the only motorcycle left sitting on the starting grid. The battery had died and it wouldn't start. Following a jump start, the Kappenbergers continued on to the Gateway Arch. Five miles down the road the bike died. Reiner took a taxi to purchase a new battery while Lisa stood guard over the bike. After installing the battery on the side of road, they continued to the Arch, scoring the bonus before the end of the time window.

The Brunsvold father and son team also failed to leave the starting line on time. They were still at the local Harley dealer where Li'l Arlen's new-to-him Road Glide was being prepared. Thanks to the not quite lightening-like speed with which the dealer transferred the auxiliary fuel tank from the old bike to the new one, it was almost 5 p.m. when they finally rolled out of the parking lot. They were still planning to make Perce Rock. Hopefully, they can make schedule changes as necessary as the week progresses.

Doug Chapman's FJR1300 left the starting line on time, but all was not well. His alternator was producing less than 12 volts at idle. Even at elevated rpm he wasn't seeing more than 12.5 volts, significantly below the normal reading of 14 volts. The only person more concerned about this situation than Doug is Dale Wilson. If the FJR's don't prove to be more reliable than the BMWs in this year's rally, Dale is going to require Prozac.

Off to Gateway Arch

As expected, almost every rider headed for the 3,565 point bonus at Gateway Arch, the famous St. Louis landmark. (Dick Peek is the only rider who told me he was definitely not heading to the Arch because he was going to try to make New Orleans before dark.) The bonus instructions for the Arch are as follows:

Take a photo of the large display entitled "The Builders" and bring a receipt from the Arch Parking Structure. Located on the bank of the Mississippi River in eastern Missouri just north of the intersection of I-55/I-70/I-64. Parking is available in the Arch Parking Structure on Washington Avenue, just east of I-70. The display is located in the Visitor Center under the Arch.

The parking structure is at the north end of the arch. There are entrances to the underground Visitor Center at both the north and south ends of the arch. Even though it's only a few hundred feet away, you can't see the south entrance when walking to the north entrance. So all the riders headed for the north entrance. As they walked down the steps to the entrance they got their first surprise of the rally; everyone has to go through a metal detector to gain entrance. It's sensitive enough to detect keys, cell phones, pocket knives, and numerous other items that the riders were carrying.

As the riders waited in the queue that forms at the metal detector, Lisa, my wife Helen, and I had a leisurely drive to the Arch and walked to the south entrance where there was no line. We got right in and walked to the large mural where the riders needed to take their bonus photo. A number of riders had already made it through security and were

busy taking their photos. Several riders who were just walking in looked at us in stunned amazement and asked, "How did you beat us here?"

The normal tourists in the Visitor Center seemed quite puzzled at the scene they were observing. There were piles of riding suits and helmets strewn everywhere. Several of the tourists approached the three of us to ask questions, probably because we were relatively normal looking people who seemed to be acquainted with the weirdoes in the funny outfits running around with the Polaroid cameras. We were asked questions like, "Why are all of these people with the snowmobile suits taking pictures of flags with numbers on them?" But the absolute best question we got was, "Is this some sort of a senior citizens tour?" Some of these bystanders were quite observant.

We hadn't been in the visitor center for 2 minutes when Lisa noticed a Polaroid 600 sitting on a trash can. Someone had apparently left the camera behind. George Barnes noticed it too and made some comment about the rookie mistake that had obviously been made. George had already gotten his photo and hustled off to his next destination.

20 minutes later, the Polaroid remained unclaimed. Then we noticed George Barnes coming back from the direction of the parking garage. George sheepishly picked his helmet off the floor where he had left it.

As Jeff Earls was leaving with his bonus photo, he suggested this bonus should have been named "the goat rodeo."

Where They Are Headed

I didn't get a chance to talk to every rider before the start today, but I did get basic routing plans from over 80% of the riders. Based on my survey, about 60% of the pack is headed for the 33,000 points available at Perce Rock. A little under 20% of the riders are headed for Key West and a little under 20% are doing a loop somewhere in the Northeast, Southeast, and or Midwest that does not involve either Perce Rock or Key West.

A single rider is headed for Goose Bay and it's not Dick Fish. It turns out that Chip Hyde is the only rider who thinks he is manly enough for the Goose Bay bonus (which is code named "MANLY"). He's an Iron Butt Rally rookie and relative unknown. When I mention that Chip Hyde is the only rider going to Goose Bay, the next question is usually, "Is he riding a GS?" It's interesting to see the look I get when I say, "No, he's on a Gold Wing." "You have got to be kidding me," is what I hear next.

Nobody I've talked to thinks a rookie on a Gold Wing has a snowball's chance in hell of making it to Goose Bay and back. But this is someone

who has ridden the infamous Haul Road between Fairbanks, AK and Prudhoe Bay. Maybe he is going to surprise everyone. It would be one of the greatest accomplishments ever achieved in the history of the Iron Butt Rally if he pulls it off.

I asked Dick Fish why he changed his mind about Goose Bay. He said, "It's not a good choice. I would have to average 53 mile per hour from here to Goose Bay and back and do nothing else. I would be fried and I would have abused my motorcycle on the first leg." I responded, "Do you realize how many people you are disappointing?" Dick replied, "Do I give a ****? I'm riding this for me." Dick had obviously come to his senses since declaring that he was going for Goose Bay on the previous day.

Perce Rock is obviously a much easier bonus than Goose Bay, but it does require dealing with a fairly narrow time window. The bonus instructions are as follows:

This bonus requires two photos.

Photo #1: Take a picture of Perce Rock from the bottom of the stairway. Your ID flag does NOT have to be present in this photo. This photo must show that the tide is out! These are fast moving tides; no wading this year Tom! Depending on weather conditions, you may access Perce Rock for approximately 2 hours before and 2 hours after low tide.

Photo #2: Walk out to Perce Rock, place your flag on the rock and take a closer photo.

WARNING: This bonus requires a short walk across the ocean floor; however, the footing is treacherous and should not be attempted unless the water has subsided during a low tide. Tides in this area are extreme and fast-changing, rising 6 to 8 feet per hour!

Perce is located on the eastern end of the Gaspé Peninsula on Provincial Rte-132. To get to the access stairwell, turn right on Rue Biard.

In contrast, the Key West bonus is available 24 hours a day. It's worth far fewer points (8,999), but there are many relatively high point bonuses that can be bagged along the way.

The people headed for Perce Rock include seven of the riders assigned numbers 1 through 10: Chris Sakala, Jeff Earls, Eric Jewell, Marty Leir, Jim Owen, Dick Fish, and Peter Leap. Rider number 1, George Barnes, and rider number 7, Brett Donahue, are headed for Key West. Rider number 8, Alan Barbic is taking a loop that includes the Midwest and Northeast,

but not Perce Rock.

Seven of the next nine riders are also headed for Perce Rock. They are Tom Loftus, Andy Mills, Jim Frens, John Langan, Doug Chapman, Bob St. George, and Bill Thweatt. Tom Melchild and Chris Cimino are doing routes that involve neither Perce Rock nor Key West.

Four of the five 2-up teams are heading for Perce Rock too. They are Jim and Donna Phillips, Tom and Rosie Sperry, Bob and Silvie Torter, and Reiner and Lisa Kappenberger. Terry and Lynda Lahman are headed for Key West.

If the majority are right, a route based around Perce Rock is likely to produce a greater number of points than a route based around Key West. The likelihood of the majority being right would seem to be reinforced by the fact that routing guru Jim Owen is headed in the same direction. But, perhaps George Barnes has found a way to make more points out of a Key West-based route. Maybe Chip Hyde will surprise everyone and return from Goose Bay with 75,527 points. We will know a lot more in two days when the riders call in to report their progress.

Tom Austin

August 20, 2007

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