

2007 Iron Butt Rally, Day 11
Thursday, August 30, 2007

The 13th running of the Iron Butt Rally isn't yet complete, but we have already gotten some good ideas for 2009. The call-in bonus is likely to be a permanent feature in future rallies; it was a great source of information. We also have plans for leveling the playing field with respect to routing assistance.

We may try to level the playing field with respect to each rider's choice of motorcycle as well by adding the following bonus:

Any BMW Dealership in North America 1,000 points Available
Up To 3 Times

Pick up a copy of the repair order for the correction of a final drive or transmission failure from any BMW dealership in North America. Your motorcycle's vehicle identification number must appear on the repair order. Have a glass of Kool-Aid while you are waiting. No documentation is required for the Kool-Aid; we already know you drink it.

1st Failure Time: _____ Odometer: _____ Code: BMW1
Approved: _____
2nd Failure Time: _____ Odometer: _____ Code: BMW2
Approved: _____
3rd Failure Time: _____ Odometer: _____ Code: BMW3
Approved: _____

There is a button you can pick up at your friendly, local BMW dealer that has printed on it, above a BMW logo, "I'd Rather Be Riding." That phrase has taken on a whole new meaning from the one intended by some marketing genius at BMW. During the last eleven days, there were a number of riders who would rather have been riding than sitting in BMW dealerships waiting for repairs.

My only consolation is that nobody tried to get me to wager on whether any of the all-new, never needs maintenance final drives would have failed during this rally. I would have lost my shirt. As an owner of nothing but BMW motorcycles for 32 years, I really wanted to see all of the current generation models do well. I was hoping that would have ended the BMW reliability jokes I have to listen to from those insufferable FJR and Gold Wing riders. In the last eleven days, my suffering not only continues, it has intensified.

Another One Bites the Dust

Only once before has the Iron Butt Rally had a theme song. In 2001, it was "I Can See Clearly Now." It was played at the pre-rally banquet as a clue about what was to come. This year, the theme song is the 1980 hit by the English rock band Queen: "Another One Bites the Dust"

*"Are you ready, are you ready for this
Are you hanging on the edge of your seat
Out of the doorway the bullets rip
To the sound of the beat*

*Another one bites the dust
Another one bites the dust
And another one gone, and another one gone
Another one bites the dust"*

Gerhard Memmen-Krueger has experienced a final drive failure near Oklahoma City, OK. Can you guess what he is riding? Duh! Another of the all-new, never needs maintenance BMW final drives has failed. His bike won't be fixed until after the final checkpoint closes at 10:00 a.m. tomorrow.

I finally understand how Robert E. Higdon came to be widely regarded as a sarcastic, bitter old man. Covering this event 24/7, and getting to know so many of the riders personally, you learn how much it means to them to do well in this rally. They spend hundreds and hundreds of hours and thousands and thousands of dollars preparing for these eleven days. It can't help but give you a sour disposition when you watch it all go down the drain for someone like Gerhard. The only error he made was believing that BMW's reputation for building durable machines applies to recent models.

More Late Breaking News

Mike Hutsal, riding my (not so) old K1200GT, had been having a great ride until about 5:00 a.m. this morning. That's when a forest rodent crossed his path. At first it looked like it was K1200GT: 1, Bambi: 0. Mike kept the bike upright and was able to continue on. Unfortunately, there was more damage to the bike than he originally thought. The cooling system was obviously damaged in the collision; the engine overheated and quit.

Mike was intent on a top ten finish this year. With over 100,000 points on Leg 1, he demonstrated that he is a top ten-caliber rider. All that was missing was luck. If there are endurance keyboard riders out there who think a deer strike is avoidable by a prudent and competent rider,

they don't have a clue. Try riding a few hundred thousand miles at night and you will learn that Lady Luck is a significant factor. Yes, you can reduce the risk by slowing way down when in deer infested areas, but most of North America is a deer infested area and traveling 10 mph under the speed limit is no guarantee that you won't eventually be run over by one of these incredibly stupid vermin.

As we suspected yesterday, Bob Collin has called it quits. After a long sleep in Las Vegas, he is headed back east, but he is no longer competing.

We got word this morning that Don Kulwicki and George Barnes were both okay and on their way back from Homer, Alaska. But Don has hit the wall and has dropped out. He needs sleep and it was obvious to him that he wasn't going to make it back in time. Homer was the wrong choice for his first rally; dropping out was the right choice at this point. Trying to make the final checkpoint would have violated the last and loudest instruction given at the riders meeting eleven days ago, "Don't do something stupid."

George Barnes was still on the road, but maybe not for long. His K1200LT has developed a vibration at cruising speed. George called his daughter to report the problem at around 4:00 p.m today. He was about 1,200 miles from the finish, something George can handle on a bike that is running properly. As this goes to press, we don't have the final word on what the source of problem is and whether George will be able to continue. It will just be the frosting on a rancid cake if George's vibration problem turns out to be the onset of yet another final drive or transmission failure.

While the Alaskan drama has been interesting, most of the top ten places are going to be determined by how well things went for riders who went to the West Coast. It was clearly possible to score more points out west for strong riders who understood the local conditions and knew how to put a route together (or who had support from someone with knowledge of the West Coast who also knows how to route).

For some of the riders who had little or no previous rally experience, just heading for the bonus-rich West Coast did not guarantee success. There have never been more difficult bonus listings to deal with in an Iron Butt Rally. To score sufficient points to be considered a finisher, you had to demonstrate that you could plan a route that would put you at various locations within a time window. Just riding a lot of miles wasn't enough. With a decent route you could never exceed the speed limit, get eight hours sleep every night, and score enough points to be a finisher.

It will be heart breaking for riders who invested so much time, money,

and effort if they fail to score the minimum number of points required to be listed as a finisher. In most cases, riders in that situation will have no one to blame but themselves. All but three of the rookies took a pass on Michael Kneebone's offer to provide some basic advice to new riders at the start of Leg 2. What were the others thinking?

Tom Austin

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