

2007 Iron Butt Rally, Day 6
Saturday, August 25, 2007

At 4:00 a.m. this morning, the 35-page bonus listing for Leg 2 of the 2007 Iron Butt Rally was handed out. There are 134 separate bonuses to choose from. The standard caution to riders printed on the first page was never more appropriate:

"IMPORTANT CAUTION: The following Potential Bonus locations are like a restaurant menu. If you order everything on the menu and eat it, you are going to get sick and perhaps die. Please pick and choose bonus destinations carefully!"

This morning, most of the riders were having trouble with the menu. Three hours after the bonus listing had been distributed, only a few riders were on the road. Even routing guru Jim Owen spent more than six hours planning his route.

Eric Jewell got out of the parking lot before Owen, but then returned in less than half an hour. I asked Eric if something was wrong with his bike. He said the bike was fine, he just decided that he needed to spend more time working on his route. Eight hours (!) after the bonus listings had been distributed, Eric finally got back on the road. He was not the last rider to leave.

In the history of the Iron Butt Rally, never have riders had so much difficulty planning a route. This was the bonus listing from hell.

There are 6 days and 4 hours between when the Leg 2 bonus listings were handed out and when the final checkpoint opens next Friday at 8 a.m. That's 148 hours. At a 1,000 mile per day pace, it's 6,167 miles.

A quick scan of the bonus listing shows the highest point bonus is Deadhorse, Alaska (Prudhoe Bay); a whopping 161,014 points. Trouble is that the round trip to Deadhorse is 8,300 miles, 800 miles of which are over the treacherous Dalton Highway, otherwise known as the Haul Road. Given the roads involved, the required 1,350 miles per day average pace is almost certainly beyond the reach of even the top riders. Forget about it.

The second highest bonus on the list is Homer, Alaska at 142,501 points. Homer is a 8,000 mile round trip, requiring about a 1,300 mile per day average. To average just four hours per day off of the bike, you would have to maintain a BBG pace (63 mph) while on the bike, riding over less than optimum roads. No one has ever averaged 1,300 miles per day during the Iron Butt Rally.

If your name isn't George Barnes, Homer, Alaska should probably be

considered a sucker bonus. If you name IS George Barnes, it should probably be considered a sucker bonus. But several riders are bound to try it. I'll be surprised if Dick Fish isn't one of them.

The remaining 5 figure bonuses include the following:

Hyder, AK, 42,345
Watson Lake, Yukon Territories, 28,230
Lick Observatory at Mt. Hamilton, CA, 24,057
Two Harbors, MN, 18,674
Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, CA 18,567
Cape Royal, AZ (on the rim of the Grand Canyon), 12,978
Mono Hot Springs, CA, 12,667
Vancouver Island, BC, 12,234
Mt. St. Helens National Monument, WA 10,878
Glacier Point in Yosemite Park, 10,234

Unlike the other Alaskan bonuses, Hyder is clearly doable. It's about 5,600 miles, requiring an average of 900 miles per day. The question is whether it makes sense in combination with other high point bonuses. Adding Watson Lake in the Yukon Territories increases the round trip to about 6,000 miles. That's a relatively straight forward ride that many of the better riders in the field can do, but 70,575 is not enough points given the multitude of relatively high point bonuses available in the lower 48 states.

Adding Split Rock Lighthouse State Park (near Two Harbors, MN) to the a route based on Hyder only increases the round trip to about 6,104 miles while adding 18,674 points. With the points for the rest bonus, call-in bonuses, fuel log, and return of the rider ID tag, the point total is 115,049. The fact that the suggested "finisher" level for Leg 2 is 120,000 points should be a clue that this route is not adequate.

The better option is a route that requires more planning and a lot more bonus stops, including many of the bonuses below 10,000 points. Building a route around the 24,057 point Lick Observatory bonus near San Jose, California is going to be a popular option. The ride to the observatory and back is 4,168 miles. That requires less than 12 hours per day of riding, leaving lots of time to go for other bonuses.

There are five relatively high point bonuses on the San Francisco peninsula that are a must add: Sutro Baths (3,345 points), the Christopher Columbus Statue on Telegraph Hill (2,567 points), Golden Gate Bridge (2,453 points), Lombard Street (4,109 points), and the Palace of Fine Arts (2,452 points). They increase the point total by 14,926 while adding less than 100 miles to the base route to Lick Observatory.

For those willing to tackle some twisty roads in the Sierra Nevada mountains, there is a mother lode of 54,739 points available at Sequoia National Park (8,704), Mono Hot Springs (12,667 points), Glacier Point in Yosemite (10,234), the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite Village (4,567), and the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest (18,567).

A route built around Lick Observatory that includes just the bonus stops listed above is already above the point total for the aforementioned Hyder-based route and it has far fewer miles.

Will It Be the Rider or the Router?

We wouldn't normally provide this much insight into the makings of a smart route so early in a leg, but a lot has changed in the last ten years; riders are getting routing tips from multiple sources. In recent years, the greater complexity of the bonus listings has increased the importance of routing skills in the Iron Butt Rally. But there has been an unintended consequence. There is now a significant number of riders that is depending on outside assistance for route planning. Within a few hours of the bonus listings being distributed, electronic files containing all of the bonuses were moving over the Internet.

Currently, there is a thread entitled "IBR Podium Etiquette" on the Long Distance Riders list. The question is being asked whether the trophies should be awarded to the rider or the router this year.

In some cases, the riders are just screwing themselves by taking routing advice from others. This morning rider Eric Jewell heard spectator Mark Crane say that the round trip to Deadhorse and back was easily doable because it's only 5,500 miles. I know Eric is too smart to take such bogus advice. But other riders are being coached by teams of individuals that include former IBR winners.

Under the current rules, team efforts are not prohibited, but they are inconsistent with the spirit of the Iron Butt Rally, as far as many rally veterans are concerned. For 2009, riders can expect to find changes that will substantially reduce the incentive for outside assistance with their routes.

The DNF Total Rises

Four more riders are out today, bringing the total of DNFs to ten. The Brunsvold father and son team has called it quits. They were in 88th and 89th place at the end of Leg 1 and almost 20,000 points behind the pace required to be classified as finishers. They took one look at the bonus listing for Leg 2 and waved the white flag.

Bob Joers has also called it quits. He was in 82nd place at the end of

Leg 1 with 63,261 points.

Finally, Doug Chapman has decided to head for home to deal with some family issues. He was in 56th place with 76,026 points.

There is also some additional information available today regarding Bob St. George, who failed to make checkpoint 1. Bob, who was time-barred yesterday because of an electrical problem with his FJR1300, limped back into Chesterfield today. His bike died yesterday, less than 200 miles from the checkpoint. The aftermarket stator had failed.

What makes this particularly unfortunate is that Bob was having a terrific first leg. His route was based around Perce Rock. In addition to the Rock, he would have scored the gas bonus, the rest bonus, the call-in bonus, Hopewell Rocks, New Brunswick, Moundsville, WV, Buxton, ME, Todd Witte's house, Prince Edward Island, Buell Motorcycle Company, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Gateway Arch, Grand Marais, MI, and Campbellton, New Brunswick. His score of 102,034 points would have put him in 11th place.

Bob is somewhat depressed tonight; he really wanted to finish. I suspect he will have another chance some day. Based on his impressive 4-day performance, he will be a rider to watch in a future rally.

Additional information is also available regarding Hans Karlsson. He is unlikely to be a rider to watch in a future rally. Yesterday's report indicated that Hans had missed the close of the window for checkpoint 1 and was out of the rally. I apologize for leaving the impression that Hans had arrived late. That was for the benefit of his wife, in case she was monitoring the rally via the Internet. In fact, we had no idea where Hans was.

Hans committed a Cardinal Sin; he failed to call the rallymaster and report that he would be late. He had no excuse other than he thought it was "no big deal." He thought wrong.

Tom Austin

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