

2007 Iron Butt Rally, Epilog
Monday, September 3, 2007

The Council of God meets once every two years on the Friday afternoon of the last day of the Iron Butt Rally. Most of the members are rally veterans; all have worked their butts off for the Association and the Rally. They have been hand-picked by Michael Kneebone to assist in performing one very important function: protecting top finishers from the embarrassment associated with a post-rally determination that they didn't earn their finishing position.

This year, the Council was in a bad mood after reading the disclosure forms that each rider was required to fill out before being scored for the final leg. The form required the name of each person who had provided the rider material assistance during the course of the rally and an indication of the type of assistance received. One of the categories was "routing."

With the sole exception of Bob Higdon, the Council members were all surprised and disappointed at the level of outside assistance that many riders had received. Higdon didn't like it either but he fully expected it. The rest of the members were naïve enough to think that the comments from on high made at the 2006 National Meet would have been sufficient. But many riders didn't get the message that the level of outside assistance during the 2005 rally was considered excessive.

Instead of a return to greater focus on individual achievement, the level of outside assistance that occurred in this year's rally escalated. The number of complaints received from both riders and veterans who weren't riding was overwhelming. However, serving as defense counsel for all of the riders that used significant outside routing assistance, Higdon pointed out that the rules don't clearly prohibit such assistance. In fact, the following language in the rules suggesting outside routing assistance is acceptable:

"If you feel as though you need a computer but cannot afford a laptop or do not want the hassles of carrying one, we recommend that you have telephone access to a trusted friend with a computer and mapping software. You can call that person after you receive your bonus listing and have mileage tables produced for you."

During this year's rally, "a trusted friend with a computer" was the loophole through which teams of veteran riders providing assistance squeezed through. "You can call that person" was the language cited to cover certain riders receiving information by telephone more than a hundred times during the course of the rally.

But some of the outside assistance received this year was even too much for Bob Higdon. The straw that broke the camel's back was the revelation that some riders had been led to several bonus locations in a congested metropolitan area by a local resident that one of the riders had arranged to meet.

Riders who had stretched the definition of "undue assistance" to the breaking point were asked to contemplate the possibility of trying to rationalize their actions in front of everyone attending the banquet. This will be the last year that riders are given the opportunity to withdraw their request for bonus points associated with assistance they were too embarrassed to talk about.

Although most of the assistance riders received was determined to have been acceptable under the rules, much of it went beyond what any of the Council members or, more importantly, Michael Kneebone want to see. A number of riders have already gotten the word. Others will soon.

Let the Word Go Forth

The changes being implemented to bring the Iron Butt Rally back to an event more focused on individual achievement are still under development. In fact, all of the changes may not become apparent until the 2009 Rally is underway. But the concept can be communicated now: If you use outside assistance to plan your route, you will be at a severe disadvantage, if not disqualified. If you plan to route and ride with one or more other riders, you may not have the same advantage as in previous years.

One indication of the changes that are afoot should have been apparent to those who attended the post-rally banquet. Before the final standings were announced, Michael Kneebone asked everyone to stand who had just ridden the rally. He congratulated them all for the effort they had made and they received applause from the audience.

Next, Kneebone asked everyone to stand who had planned their own route. The applause was louder. Finally, he asked four individuals to stand who had planned their own routes and finished near the top of the pack: Jim Owen, Jeff Earls, Eric Jewell, and Mike Evans. They received still louder applause.

Riding Smarter, Not Harder Was the Key

As Rallymaster Lisa Landry and IBA President Michael Kneebone read off the names of the finishers, it became clear that the "ride harder, not smarter" strategy didn't work this year.

The biggest bonuses on the 2007 Rally were in Goose Bay, Prudhoe Bay, and Homer, Alaska. On Leg 1, a successful ride to Goose Bay and back would have been enough to put a rider in first place with just a few other bonuses that were almost right on the route to Goose Bay. But, as Chip Hyde found out, the road to Goose Bay is a nightmare. It was not the smartest choice. Almost as many points were available for a much less risky route built around either Perce Rock on the Gaspé Peninsula or Key West, Florida.

On Leg 2, Prudhoe Bay in combination with Watson Lake might have been enough to win, assuming anyone was actually capable of averaging 1,350 miles per day over a route that included 800 miles of the Haul Road. The 161,014 points for Prudhoe Bay and the 28,230 points for Watson Lake, along with the fuel log, the call-in bonuses, the rest bonus, and the return of the ID card, was good for 215,044 points on Leg 2. As it turns out, even that wasn't enough to have the top score on Leg 2. Top three finishers Marty Leir, Jim Owen, and Brett Donahue scored more points by heading to the West Coast.

Jim Frens put in a very impressive ride to Homer, Alaska and back, averaging 1,300 miles per day. But, since Homer was worth 18,513 points less than Prudhoe Bay, several other riders were able to do better than Jim with a West Coast route. The three other riders that set their sights on Homer - George Barnes, Don Kulwicki, and Rob Nye - were DNFs.

Not surprisingly, both first place finisher Marty Leir and second place finisher Jim Owen scored the 54,739 points available from the five bonuses available in the Sierra Nevada Mountains: Sequoia National Park (8,704), Mono Hot Springs (12,667), Glacier Point in Yosemite (10,234), the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite Village (4,567), and the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest (18,567). The key to the

success of the top riders was having the ability to include other big point bonuses along with those for Lick Observatory and the Sierra Nevadas.

Besides the 24,057 points for Lick Observatory and the high value bonuses in the Sierras, the 5-figure bonuses outside of Alaska were Two Harbors, MN (18,674), Cape Royal, AZ (on the rim of the Grand Canyon) (12,978), Vancouver Island, BC (12,234), and Mt. St. Helens National Monument, WA (10,878). Leir got both the Grand Canyon and Two Harbors, MN. Owen got Mt. St. Helens but had to bail out on the Grand Canyon because of the need for an unscheduled tire replacement.

One indication of the number and complexity of the bonus locations this year was the average mileage. Only six riders logged 11,000 or more miles: Marty Leir, Jim Owen, Brett Donahue, Jeff Earls, Jim Frens, and Curt Gran. Not surprisingly, Jim Frens had the highest accumulated mileage (12,658) as a result of his Leg 2 ride to Homer and back.

The most amazing mileage total is that recorded by Marty Leir. Marty rode 12,460 miles over a much more complicated route than Frens ran. In contrast, Jim Owen ran 1,323 fewer miles while scoring just 10,651 fewer points. Owen's efficiency was approximately 30 points per mile, the same as 6th and 9th place finishers Tom Melchild and Alan Barbic. Owen, Melchild, and Barbic scored more points per mile than any other riders, but all of the top ten riders were above average in points per mile.

It was the second top ten finish for 4th place finisher Jeff Earls and it was the fourth top ten finish for 5th place finisher Eric Jewell. The other veteran rider in the top ten was 10th place finisher Peter Leap. Peter finished 12th in 2005.

There were 38 "rookies" who became first time finishers of the Iron Butt Rally. Two of them finished in the top ten: 7th place finisher Greg Marbach and 8th place finisher Michael Evans. Alexander Schmitt would have been the third rookie in the top ten were it not for breaking a wheel 140 miles from the finish line. Alex borrowed a motorcycle from a total stranger to make it to the finish line in time.

Rookies finishing in the top twenty included John Tomasovitch in 12th place, Curt Gran in 13th place, Andy Mills in 15th place, Matt Watkins in 17th place, Paul Peloquin in 18th place, Gregg Burger in 19th place, and Brian Roberts in 20th place.

Besides Jim Frens in 11th place, other veterans in the top 20 were Vicki Johnston in 14th place and John Langan in 16th place.

At the back of the pack, a record breaking 33 riders were in the "Did Not Finish" (DNF) category this year. Some dropped out when it became obvious that they were too far behind the pace required to be listed as a "finisher." Nine made it back to the finish line, but with insufficient points. Others didn't make it back to the finish line because of mechanical failures. One rider, Leg 1 leader David Derrick, was still hospitalized from his accident on Interstate 80. We are all hoping for David's speedy and complete recovery.

The Tarnished Blue and White Roundel

A disproportionate number of the DNFs fall on the shoulders of BMW. BMW failed several riders, demonstrating that they are no longer capable of building motorcycles that can run 11,000 miles in 11 days without a significant fraction experiencing a catastrophic drivetrain failure of some sort. BMW of

North America has requested contact information for the riders who experienced failures. The riders BMW should be more concerned about are the thousands of unsuspecting souls who will breakdown in the future because the company has lost its previous ability to either design durable drivetrain components or (more likely) adequately monitor production and assembly quality. It's way, way past time for BMW to fix its drivetrain reliability problems. A good start might be to acknowledge that there is a problem.

Hopeless is as Hopeless Does

All four of the Hopeless Class entries were DNFs. However, they outperformed the late model BMWs as far as mechanical reliability is concerned.

Mark Collins' 1972 Harley-Davidson was sidelined for a day with a broken rim. The failure was the result of a nasty pothole, not a design or quality problem with the bike itself. The time spent waiting for repairs cost Mark finisher status. Mark limped back to the finish nursing a leaking cylinder base gasket and a blown head gasket. On Saturday morning, after the finish, he was doing the repairs himself in the middle of the Doubletree Hotel parking lot. This guy deserves another shot in 2009 if he hasn't had his fill of the Iron Butt Rally.

The 1978 Honda GL1000 ridden by Donald Jones suffered a broken side stand, but it was still rideable until Don called it quits. The 1976 BMW R60/6 ridden by Joel Rappoport also performed well; it was Joel that sputtered a bit and didn't quite bag enough points for finisher status. Rider performance also sidelined the 250cc Kawasaki ridden by Alan Bennett.

The "Finisher" Benchmark

It was a bitter disappointment for nine riders that made it back to the finish with insufficient points to be finishers. In some cases the problem was mechanical failure, in other cases it was poor routing.

In past years, when checkpoints were located near each of the country's four corners, riders had to make it to each checkpoint to be listed as a finisher. The number of bonus points scored was not a factor. But when the rally format involves having riders return to the same location from which they started, just making it to each checkpoint on time is meaningless. It takes a minimum number of bonus points to be considered a finisher.

For this rally, 190,000 points were required to be considered a "finisher." The target levels were 70,000 points for Leg 1 and 120,000 points for Leg 2. Using the Leg 2 target as an example, it could be achieved by a rider who planned a route based around Lick Observatory near San Jose, kept an accurate gas log, did the call-in bonuses properly, did not lose their ID card, rode at the speed limit, and stopped for 8 hours of sleep every night. In addition to making Lick Observatory during the time window, it was necessary for a finisher to get to a number of additional bonuses along the route, but it was not necessary to score difficult bonuses like the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest. One of many options to achieve finisher status would have included the following:

Milner Pass, in Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado, 6,320
Dinosaur National Monument, Utah, 9,102
New York, New York Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, 3,112
Scotty's Castle, Death Valley, California, 4,996

Glacier Point in Yosemite Park, California 10,234
Ahwahnee Hotel, Yosemite, California, 4,567
Fire Station #6, Livermore, California, 3,123
Lick Observatory at Mt. Hamilton, California, 24,057
Sutro Baths, San Francisco, California, 3,345
Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco, California, 2,453
Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco, California, 2,452
Lombard Street, San Francisco, California, 4,109
Christopher Columbus Statue, San Francisco, California, 2,567
Cupid's Arrow Sculpture, San Francisco, California, 1,415
Kneebone Cemetery, Grass Valley, California, 2,786
Bridgeport Covered Bridge, Grass Valley, California, 3,314
Doobie Lane, Gerlach, NV, 6,321 points
Garmin International, Olathe, Kansas, 3,189
Turn In Emergency Contact Information Card, 4,000

All of the time windows could have been met and 101,462 points could have been scored. Adding the gas log, call-in bonuses, and rest bonus, brings the total points to 123,262, which leaves some margin for mistakes on the gas log. It's a 4,750 mile ride; an average of about 770 miles per day. Based on a popular mapping program, it requires about 94 hours of riding time at an average speed of 51 mph, leaving over 8 hours per day off of the bike. That's based on "default" speed values which account for typical levels of traffic congestion and strict adherence to the speed limits.

A Leg 1 total of 70,000 was needed for finisher status if a rider scored exactly 120,000 points on Leg 2. That was available with a loop based around either Perce Rock on the Gaspé Peninsula or Key West, Florida. For riders concerned about traveling in Canada and hitting the window for low tide, a 70,000 point route based around Key West was not that difficult.

It took an additional 20,000 points for a Bronze Medal. That required adding one big bonus (like Bristlecone Pine) and one medium size bonus to the route. Alternatively, a rider could add several medium size bonuses or a larger number of smaller bonuses.

The Gold Medal level required 50,000 points more than the "finisher" level. That could have been accomplished by adding about four high point bonuses to a route based around Lick Observatory. For example, adding Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest (18,567), Cape Royal, AZ (on the rim of the Grand Canyon) (12,978), and Mono Hot Springs, CA (12,667), would get you most of the way there. The Silver Medal was set in between Bronze and Gold at 225,000 total points for both legs.

Listed below are the final results showing, position, rider name, motorcycle model, miles ridden, and total points scored. Please note that the 148,232 points shown for last place finisher Alexander Schmitt reflect a 50% reduction in his score for changing motorcycles 140 miles from the finish. His unadjusted score of 296,464 points determines his medal level.

- 1 Martin Leir, BMW R1200GSA, 12,460, 344,122
- 2 Jim Owen, BMW R1200RT, 11,137, 333,471
- 3 Brett Donahue, H-D XLH1200R, 11,283, 316,707
- 4 Jeff Earls, BMW K1200GT, 11,059, 309,681
- 5 Eric Jewell, BMW R1150RT, 10,873, 304,597

6 Tom Melchild, Yamaha FJR1300, 10,025, 299,729
7 Greg Marbach, Yamaha FJR1300, 10,323, 298,492
8 Michael Evans, Yamaha FJR1300, 10,921, 298,077
9 Alan Barbic, Yamaha FJR1300, 9,832, 294,561
10 Peter Leap, Honda ST1300, 10,910, 292,596
11 Jim Frens, Honda GL1800, 12,658, 288,910
12 John Tomasovitch, BMW K1200RS, 10,874, 285,875
13 Curt Gran, Honda ST1300, 11,090, 285,512
14 Vicki Johnston, BMW F650GS, 9,868, 284,724
15 Andrew Mills, Victory Vision, 10,552, 283,621
16 John Langan, Honda GL1800, 10,096, 279,770
17 Matt Watkins, Yamaha FJR1300, 9,857, 272,054
18 Paul Peloquin, Yamaha FJR1300, 10,001, 270,097
19 Gregg Burger, BMW R1150GSA, 10,626, 261,475
20 Brian Roberts, Suzuki DL1000, 9,758, 253,273
21 Dick Peek, Yamaha FJR1300, 10,531, 251,924
22 Michael Boge, BMW R1200RT, 8,924, 250,985
23 Reiner & Lisa Kappenberger, Honda GL1800, 9,849, 250,236
24 Carl Stark, Honda GL1800, 8,644, 246,335
25 Art Garvin, Honda GL1800, 8,826, 245,768
26 Mike Langford, BMW K1200LT, 9,349, 242,524
27 Rick Miller, Honda GL1800 9,026, 242,060
28 Vance Keeney, BMW K1200GT, 9,392, 239,863
29 Terry & Lynda Lahman, Honda GL1800, 9,397, 235,736
30 Jack B. Shoalmire, BMW R1200RT, 9,306, 235,156
31 Jim and Donna Phillips, Honda GL1800, 10,022, 233,202
32 Richard Buber, BMW R1150RT, 10,180, 228,077
33 Kendall J. Anderson, Suzuki DL1000, 9,522, 227,164
34 Tom Skemp, Honda GL1500, 8,669, 225,515
35 Kevin J. Healey, Triumph Trophy 1200, 9,407, 225,439
36 Jim Bain, BMW K1200LT, 8,899, 223,659
37 Steve Branner, BMW R1200RT, 9,723, 223,595
38 Rebecca Vaughn, BMW R1100RS, 9,998, 222,607
39 Jim Winterer, Suzuki DL650, 10,209, 219,488
40 Mike Senty, BMW R1150RT, 10,121, 218,975
41 Bill Watt, Honda GL1800, 10,603, 217,078
42 Doug Bailey, BMW R1150GS, 10,353, 215,467
43 Paul Allison, Honda GL1800, 10,207, 214,733
44 Dennis Powell, Honda GL1800, 8,624, 213,250
45 Ken Morton, Honda GL1800, 10,271, 213,101
46 Tony DeLorenzo, BMW R1200GS-ADV, 8,521 208,659
47 Tom and Rosie Sperry, BMW K1200LT, 9,603 206,879
48 Charles "Tobie" Stevens, Yamaha FJR1300, 8,711 206,332
49 Lisa Stevens, Yamaha FJR1300, 8,719, 206,332
50 Don Catterton, BMW K1200GT, 10,218, 205,393
51 Bill Thweatt, Honda ST1300, 9,999, 205,319
52 Stephan Bolduc, Yamaha FJR1300, 9,897, 203,572
53 Chris Cimino, Kawasaki Concours 14, 7,915, 203,427

54 Karol Patzer, BMW K75C, 8,386, 201,741,
55 Rick Neeley, BMW R1200GSA, 9,354, 200,120
56 Peter Murray, BMW K1200LT, 10,255, 199,693
57 Bob Mueller, Suzuki DL1000, 10,272, 199,263
58 Richard Keegan, Honda GL1800, 8,906, 194,071
59 Fred Droegemueller, Honda GL1800, 10,124, 193,096
60 Dick Fish, Buell Ulysses, 9,900, 191,546
61 Joe DeRyke, Suzuki DL650, 10,095, 191,346
62 Rick Martin, Yamaha FJR1300, 9,595, 191,040
63 Robert & Sylvie Torter, BMW K1200GT, 9,318, 190,964
64 Alexander Schmitt, Honda ST1100, 10,584, 148,232
DNF David Bourdeaux, Honda GL1800, 8,570, 187,222
DNF Jim Simonet, BMW K1200LT, 10,987, 187,035
DNF Chris McGaffin, Kawasaki Concours, 8,690, 176,784
DNF Joel Rappoport, BMW R60/6, 8,885, 175,945
DNF Glenn K. Pancoast, BMW R1200GSA, 8,981 173,779
DNF Bob Collin, BMW R1200RT, 9,050, 157,920
DNF Jim Mulcahy, BMW K1200RS, 8,833, 150,023
DNF Mark W. Collins, H-D Electra Glide, 7,869, 147,905
DNF Maura Gatensby, Honda ST1300, 9,117, 147,868
DNF David Derrick, BMW R1100RT, 5,399, 112,249
DNF Chris Sakala, BMW R1150GS-ADV, 4,874, 108,861
DNF Mike Hutsal, BMW K1200GT, 4,501, 100,160
DNF Rob Nye, BMW R1200RTP, 4,492, 100,100
DNF Homer L. Krout, BMW R1200GS, 4,278, 83,758
DNF George Barnes, BMW K1200LT, 5,198, 79,131
DNF Gerhard Memmen-Krueger, BMW R1200GSA, 3,995, 77,872
DNF Doug Chapman, Yamaha FJR1300, 4,007, 76,026
DNF Norm Grills, BMW K1100LT, 3,852, 75,998
DNF Donald A. Jones, Honda GL1000, 3,475, 75,782
DNF Robert Joers, Honda GL1800, 3,758, 63,261
DNF Mike Getzendanner, Honda GL1500, 3,884, 60,489
DNF Steve Broadhead, Honda ST1300, 3,337, 60,123
DNF Alan Bennett, Kawasaki Ninja 250, 2,919, 53,225
DNF Arlen Brunsvold, Jr., H-D Road Glide, 4,202, 52,669
DNF Arlen Brunsvold, Sr., BMW R1200RT, 3,849, 51,155
DNF Don Kulwicki, Honda GL1800, 3,462, 50,691
DNF David Hinks, Yamaha FJR1300, 3,594, 45,903
DNF Hans Karlsson, Honda GL1800, 0, 0
DNF Don Wescott, BMW K1200GT, 0, 0
DNF Robert St.George, Yamaha FJR1300, 0, 0
DNF Charles "Chip" Hyde, Honda GL1800, 0, 0
DNF Bill Wade, BMW R1200RT, 0, 0
DNF Tom Loftus, Honda ST1300, 0, 0

Many Stories are Yet to Be Told

There are 97 stories from the 2007 Iron Butt Rally that only the individual riders know enough about to write. The snippets of information available to me can't possibly do justice to the experiences the riders have had. Hopefully, many of them will take the time to memorialize their ride in a trip report. Riders can send reports to austin@ironbutt.com. I will get them posted on the IBA website after they are reviewed and edited as necessary to remove objectionable references to things that shouldn't be in print, like disparaging comments about my daily reports.

Tom Austin

September 3, 2007

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