

The 2009 Iron Butt Rally – Day -3
Friday, August 21, 2009

Hundreds of motorcyclists have begun gathering at the Marriott Hotel in Spartanburg, South Carolina for the start of the 2009 Iron Butt Rally, “The World’s Toughest Motorcycle Competition.” Beginning at 10 a.m. on Monday, about 100 competitors will ride a combined total of approximately 1 million miles during the subsequent 11 days in an attempt to be listed as a finisher, if not a medalist, in this extraordinary test of endurance, riding skill, and route planning proficiency.

2009 marks the 25th anniversary of the first Iron Butt Rally, a motorcycle competition typically requiring each rider to travel at least 9,000 miles in 11 days to qualify as a finisher. In 1984, only ten riders entered, hoping to win the \$40,000 prize for first place that was withdrawn at the last minute because of the lack of participation. The lack of opportunity for riders to score additional points for extraordinary performance resulted in a 4-way tie for first place. Despite the problems with the first rally, the concept caught on and this 11-day motorcycle endurance event has become legendary within the motorcycling community.

The original concept for the Iron Butt Rally was to have riders visit checkpoints located around the perimeter of the 48 contiguous states while maintaining a schedule that would allow them to complete the trip in 11 days. Due to the combination of higher speed limits, reduced motorcycle maintenance requirements, and the ever-increasing capabilities of the riders, the modern day Iron Butt Rally has become much more than a simple ride around the perimeter of the lower 48 states.

In recent Iron Butt Rallies, riders have had to choose from literally hundreds of optional “bonus” locations and select routes between the checkpoints that will score the most points. Bonus locations with the highest point values are typically in remote locations. (For example, to place well in the 2001 Rally, riders had to document a visit to Prudhoe Bay, Alaska.) Despite travelling to remote locations over slow roads, top finishers typically average at least 1,000 miles per day. To the average person, even to the average motorcycle rider, the idea that someone could ride a motorcycle 1,000 miles a day for 11 days in row is unimaginable. But these are not average riders.

Pre-Rally Activities

Today, many riders will be anxiously awaiting last minute maintenance and tire changes on their motorcycles being done at local motorcycle dealers they are unfamiliar with. Others will be trying to fix problems with last minute modifications to their motorcycles that cropped up on their ride to Spartanburg.

Driving into the hotel parking lot yesterday, I saw former 2nd place Rally finisher Chris Sakala standing over a pile of rubble that looked like the aftermath of an Improvised Explosive Device detonation. This is not the way your bike should look just days before the start of the Iron Butt Rally. Chris was in the process of trying to resolve a problem with his communications system. Something wasn’t quite right with the integration of

his CB, cell phone, GPS, XM radio, and radar detector; imagine that. (I don't think I've yet met anyone that has such a complex system completely sorted out.)

Chris Sakala and BMW R1200RT Debris



The Grand Champion of last minute modifications is Paul Allison, a returning Rally veteran from the United Kingdom, who just started the auxiliary fuel system installation on his rented Gold Wing at 5 a.m. this morning. Paul is actually ahead of schedule compared to 2007.

On Saturday and Sunday, before facing the obstacles of the 11-day ride, the contestants will be going through technical inspection, having their insurance and registration documents checked, and receiving detailed explanations of how this year's rally is being conducted.

One element of technical inspection is the odometer check. Each rider is required to ride a specific route after zeroing the trip odometer on their bike. The mileage recorded by the odometer is compared to the known actual distance of the route to create an odometer correction factor that will be used to determine exactly how far each rider travelled during the 11 day rally.



Paul Allison Aboard the Rental Wing

It's best if the odometer check route is easy for riders to follow. Unfortunately, the Marriott in Spartanburg is not located close to a freeway interchange. The question is not "if" any riders will be unable to follow the directions, but "how many" riders will be unable to follow the directions. The directions each rider will receive are as follows:

1. Place the front axle of the bike over the Start Line and zero out your trip odometer.
2. Exit the Tech Inspection lot and turn RIGHT onto N. Church Street.
3. At ~ 0.7 miles you come to a large 'Y' intersection. Do not bear right, stay STRAIGHT onto Ashville Hwy.
4. At ~ 3 miles, you come across a large traffic circle. TAKE BUSINESS 85 SOUTH TOWARDS GREENVILLE (from where you entered the traffic circle, this exit is approx 270-degrees around the traffic circle).
5. Travel south on this highway (it will turn into I-85 at some point) and take exit 68 (Greer Street). This is a long 2-lane "frontage" road that parallels the highway. Stay in the left lane, ending with a stop sign.
6. Turn LEFT at this stop sign, pass over the highway, then RIGHT onto the onramp to head back north on I-85 towards Spartanburg.
7. Take the first exit you come to (Exit 69) which is Business 85 toward Spartanburg.
8. Stay on this road to Exit 4. Take Exit 4 (which will display as exit 4a) toward Ashville Hwy and Hwys 176 and 56.
9. This Exit 4 off ramp places you back into the traffic circle. Depart the circle by taking 56 East towards Spartanburg.
10. Stay on this 56 East which eventually turns into N. Church Street at the 'Y' intersection mentioned above. Continue on N. Church Street toward the Marriott.
11. Turn LEFT at the intersection of N Church Street and Daniel Morgan Avenue.
12. Make an immediate RIGHT into the Tech Inspection parking lot and place front axle over the Start Line

The current record for the most attempts necessary to successfully complete an Iron Butt Rally odometer check stands at 4. The record has remained unbroken for 10 years. This year, that record is destined to fall.

The complexity of the rest of the Tech Inspection process depends on how extensively a motorcycle has been modified and how close riders are pushing the 11.5 gallon limit on fuel capacity. Riders close to the limit must have the capacity of their auxiliary fuel system measured. The process involves the use of hydrometers to measure fuel density and a laboratory grade electronic scale that is used to measure the weight of fuel required to fill the system to one one-hundredth of a pound.

Motorcycles with aftermarket exhaust systems will have to pass a sound test. Since 1999, the Iron Butt Rally has required all participants to use relatively quiet exhaust systems that not only reduce rider fatigue but leave a good impression with the hotels used for the start, finish, and the checkpoints.

While I would have preferred to be riding a motorcycle on this trip, I'm travelling by car this year. Between the equipment necessary to do the measurements at Tech Inspection and a collection of women's shoes that would be the envy of Imelda Marcos, there was barely enough room for me and my wife Helen on the trip from Sacramento to Spartanburg in our SUV.

Rally Staff and Volunteers

Today, Rallymaster Lisa Landry and other Rally Staff were putting the finishing touches on the schedule for this weekend. Chief Technical Inspector Dale “Warchild” Wilson worked on the odometer check today. During the next two days, he will undoubtedly have some good stories of rider efforts to get through tech inspection. Assisting Dale this year will be Tobie and Lisa Stevens, Bob Broeking, Jim Culp, and Greg Roberts. John Harrison will be doing noise and fuel capacity checks.

Rallymaster Lisa Landry and Dale “Warchild” Wilson Put the Finishing Touches on the Odometer Check From Hell



Bill Watt will be doing a seminar for riders regarding how to deal with the media. The recently retired Surgeon General of the Navy, Don Arthur, will be doing a seminar on fatigue management. Ed Otto will be providing assistance with any insurance issues.

With assistance from Bill Shaw, Dave McQueeney will be in charge of verifying that each rider using a digital camera this year (almost everyone) is starting with an empty memory card, a correct date and time setting, and the proper resolution setting (640x480). At each checkpoint, Bill and Dave will be collecting rider’s memory cards, transferring the images to a thumb drive, and checking to see that each image has been recorded with the proper resolution. This will simplify the tasks required at the scoring table. The

assignment to run this all-new part of the process went to McQueeney because he's not only a computer nerd, he is meticulous at whatever task he is given. Few people realize the enormous contribution he makes to every Iron Butt Rally by riding all over the country to check bonus locations and carefully reviewing the final bonus listings.

Other Iron Butt Rally Staff and volunteers involved in this weekend's check-in process include Jim and Donna Fousek, Jim and Donna Phillips, Roger and Karen Van Santan, Verne and Bonnie Hauck, Ira Agins, Dennis Bitner, Jerry Harris, Susan Murphy, and Helen Austin.

Dean and Colin Tanji will be shooting video all weekend for the DVD that will be subsequently produced. Dean will be riding his FJR1300 to a number of bonus locations where riders are expected to show up. Colin will be driving to each of the checkpoints and the finish.

Recently retired California Highway Patrol Sergeant Steve Hobart is serving as the official staff photographer this weekend. During the rest of the rally, Steve will be running the scoring table. With Steve handling this job, riders who are unable to accurately complete bonus instructions can count on receiving the same degree of sympathy and compassion Steve has shown to thousands of California motorists who haven't quite managed to comply with the California Vehicle Code. In other words, they're screwed. The most boneheaded mistakes Steve identifies should make for good reading.

IBA Chief Counsel Bob Higdon normally assists Michael Kneebone with the operation of the scoring computer. Ira Agins is taking over that important job this year. Bob has worked long and hard developing the bonus locations for this rally (more about that on Sunday), but, until today, he didn't really have a job assignment for this weekend. A last minute decision has been made to have Bob deliver an important message to all riders at tomorrow's media seminar regarding the rules that will apply with respect to rider communications with the public during the course of the rally. Few riders like Bob anyway, so he is the perfect choice for this particular assignment. Rookies who don't understand the meaning of the phrase "Higdon Three Veiner" will also learn something.

Checkpoints

At this point, riders have no idea where they will be going on Monday morning. They know that the first checkpoint is in St. Charles, Illinois (a suburb of Chicago), but it's only 747 miles to St. Charles and they have until 9 p.m. on Wednesday, August 26th to get there. Accounting for the time zone change, that's 60 hours after the start. There is time available to consider bonus locations all over the country. No one hoping to score enough points to be listed as a finisher will be heading directly to St. Charles.

There is a mandatory layover in St. Charles that will give riders the opportunity to start the second leg well-rested. If they get in a little early and finish with scoring by 9 p.m., they will have 7 hours of down time before the bonus listing for leg 2 is handed out at 4 a.m. on Thursday morning.

By 9 p.m. on Sunday, August 30th, the riders need to be in Santa Ana, California. Accounting for the time zone change, total time from when the bonuses are handed out in St. Charles to the opening of the Santa Ana checkpoint is 91 hours. The most direct route from St. Charles to Santa Ana is 1,989 miles, requiring an average speed of just 22 mph. As with leg 1, there will be lots of time available for side trips to far flung bonus locations.

As at the first checkpoint, there is a mandatory layover in Santa Ana that will give riders the opportunity to start the final leg well-rested. If they get in a little early and finish with scoring by 9 p.m., they will have another 7 hours of down time before the bonus listing for leg 3 is handed out at 4 a.m. on Monday morning, August 31st.

To avoid penalty points at the finish, the riders need to be in Spokane by 7 a.m. on Friday, September 4th. The most direct route from Santa Ana to the finish is only 1,241 miles, but they have 99 hours from the time the bonus listing is handed out in Santa Ana. Given the time available, riders can expect to see bonuses that are all over North America, including Canada and Alaska.

Taking the most direct route between the start and the required checkpoints, the minimum distance is just under 4,000 miles. Only Rally staff will be taking the direct route. The routes required to score well will be rather indirect, to say the least.

Daily Reports

As during the 2007 Rally, IBR staff will be keeping track of riders' progress with the use of "call-in bonuses." Riders will periodically be leaving voicemail on the telephone system at my office in Sacramento, California. 24 separate telephone lines are serving a dedicated call-in number. On five separate occasions, riders will be given the opportunity to earn big bonus points just by calling the number and leaving a brief message telling us where they are, where they have recently been, and where the next bonus is that they are heading for. As soon as they hang up, each rider's voicemail message will be converted to a ".wav" file and attached to an e-mail automatically sent to me and the Rallymaster. The time stamp on the e-mail message will indicate exactly when the call was completed.

I'll also be monitoring the progress of some riders through the trail of "breadcrumbs" they are leaving with their "Find-Me-Spot" satellite tracking systems.

This weekend, I will be collecting information obtained during the rider check-in process from Rallymaster Lisa Landry, IBA President Michael Kneebone, and numerous other IBR staff who make this event possible.

Upcoming Reports

In tomorrow's report, I'll tell you who all of the riders are, what motorcycles they will be riding, and what problems anyone is having getting through Tech Inspection. On Sunday, I'll provide some insight into what transpires at the private Riders Meeting and report on the activities at the evening banquet when the bonus listings are handed out. Although the detailed bonus listing won't be published until after the end of each leg, I

will provide highlights of what's included in order to provide some idea as to the routing options the riders have to consider.

Tom Austin

August 21, 2009

Copyright © 2009 Iron Butt Rally, Inc., Chicago, IL USA