

2009 Iron Butt Rally, Day 2
Tuesday, August 25, 2009

Now that the riders are committed to their route choices, we can provide some more detail on what the options were for Leg 1. There are 60 hours between the 10 a.m. start in Spartanburg, SC, on Monday morning and the 9 p.m. opening of the Checkpoint 1 window in St. Charles, IL, tomorrow night. If a rider plans to take an 8 hour rest stop on both Monday and Tuesday nights, that would leave 44 hours of riding and bonus collection time.

Assuming a rider's bonus choices are limited to locations that are relatively easy to get to, that don't require much time to be spent on slow, local roadways, it might be reasonable to expect an average speed of 55-60 mph. At that speed, a Leg 1 route length of about 2,500 miles would appear to be reasonable. Holding the rest periods down to about 12 hours total, a 60 mph average for the remaining available time results in a total travel distance of about 2,900 miles. Experienced riders should have been evaluating the Leg 1 bonus options with numbers like these in mind.

As noted in earlier reports, a quick skim through the Leg 1 bonus listing shows the two biggest bonuses to be Saanich Hospital in British Columbia (12,683 points) and Dike Bridge on Martha's Vineyard (6,652 points). Riders would also quickly determine that only 5 other bonuses on Leg 1 exceed 1,000 points. The biggest of those is the 1,807 point Sloppy Joe's Bar bonus in Key West, Florida, the next biggest is the 1,525 point Miccosukee Resort bonus in Miami, and the next biggest is the 1,306 point Charleston Square bonus in Boynton Beach, Florida.

The remaining bonuses above 1,000 points are the 1,031 point Sturgis House bonus in East Liverpool, Ohio, (with a 9 a.m. to noon time window on Wednesday) and the 1,014 point Meriwether Lewis National Monument bonus in Hohenwald, Tennessee.

Ignoring more than 100 smaller bonuses for time being, and since going to British Columbia is clearly out of the question, there are two basic options that emerge: (1) build a route around Martha's Vineyard, or (2) build a route around the high point bonuses in Florida. Before getting down to detailed routing, it is clear that the 1,013 point bonus in East Liverpool, Ohio, is not far off the most direct route back from Martha's Vineyard and the 1,014 point bonus in Hohenwald, TN, is not far off the most direct route back from Florida.

Keeping in mind that riders were told they should have a 9,000 point target for Leg 1 to be a finisher, and recalling that the gas log and call-in bonus are good for 1,250 points, it is apparent that Martha's Vineyard and Sturgis House, just two bonus locations, can give a rider almost enough (8,933 points) to make the finisher target. It is also apparent that Key West, Miami, Boynton Beach, FL, and Hohenwald, TN, are good for almost 7,000 points when added to the gas log and the call-in bonus.

Now let's look at these two options in more detail.

Is Key West a Good Choice?

The trip from Spartanburg to Key West to St. Charles is 2,458 miles, which is within the 2,500 mile route length for a rider wanting to get 8-hour rest periods on both Monday and Tuesday night. But the most direct route won't hit all of the other 1,000+ point bonus locations available. Spending some time with a mapping program, it can be seen that the point total available with a route based on Key West can be in the neighborhood of 13,000 points with a total route distance of just under 3,000 miles. Since that's slightly over the 2,900 mile distance associated with maintaining a 60 mph pace with just 12 hours off the bike, it's a hard ride, but the points are 44% above the finisher target, putting the total well into the Gold Medal range.

So we can answer the question about whether Key West is a good choice with a "definite maybe" as long as a rider pays attention to the time windows for the other bonuses along the route and makes the run out to Key West at night when the traffic is lighter and speeds will be higher. But it's too hard a ride for many of the riders more focused on just being a finisher.

Turning Around Short of Key West

Those who have made the ride to Key West know it's a long way to go over a relatively slow roadway for the 1,807 points that are available on this year's Rally. A turn around in Miami provides a lot of time for side trips to other bonus locations while keeping the total route distance closer to the 2,500 mile target that riders seeking to achieve finisher status should have in mind.

One option involving a turn around in Miami is good for 9,098 points (including the gas log and call-in bonuses) with a total route distance of only 2,347 miles. This route requires riders to stop at a total of only 13 bonus locations. The first stop would be the 666 point BMW bonus right after the start. The rest of the bonus stops in the order they would occur are as follows:

- The Last Resort Bar in Harbor Oaks, FL (504 points)
- Veterans' Memorial Park in Titusville, FL (713 points)
- Charleston Square in Boynton Beach, FL (1,306 points)
- Miccosukee Resort in Miami, FL (1,525 points)
- Orlando Airport in Orlando, FL (556 points)
- Gator Joe's Bar in Ocklawaha, FL (418 points)
- Emerson Alumni Hall in Gainesville, FL (317 points)
- Macedonia Cemetery in Macclenny, FL (399 points)
- County Line Sign in Armuchee, GA (646 points)
- BB&T Bank in Russellville, KY (511 points)
- Drifter's Restaurant in Portage, IN (143 points)
- Dillingham Museum in Hammond, IN (144 points)

Well over 95% of the miles are on Interstates 26, 95, 75, 24, and 65. This is the route on which the 9,000 points for finisher status are based. It's simple, low risk, and leaves plenty of time for rest.

Is Martha's Vineyard Too Risky?

At the Sunday evening banquet, riders were told that the Martha's Vineyard (Dike Bridge) bonus requires a ride on a ferry that doesn't take reservations for motorcycles. They were also told that weather could be an issue and that President Obama will be vacationing on the island at the time the riders need to be there. Within about two milliseconds of hearing all of that, the majority of the riders scratched Martha's Vineyard off of the list of possible destinations. It's a pity they didn't run some numbers first.

The route from Spartanburg to Martha's Vineyard to St. Charles is only 2,100 miles, 300 miles shorter than the "finishers" route with a turn around in Miami. In addition, there are lots of relatively high point bonuses along the base route. With a few minutes on Google, it's possible to find information about the ferries like the following:

Woods Hole is the only port that can carry both passengers and cars. Service is offered numerous times daily, with greater frequency in the busy summer months. Reservations for cars are recommended in the low-season and required in the high-season.

The cost for a motorcycle and rider is \$67. Information is also readily available on the passage times. The voyage time for the Woods Hole ferry is only 45 minutes. The first ferry with auto carrying capability leaves every morning at 6 a.m. The next ferry is at 7 a.m. Departure times are staggered a bit after 7, but there is generally one ferry per hour available. As the riders were told, the ferries don't take reservations for motorcycles, but as Jeff Earls figured out Sunday night, you can pay more and reserve a spot for a car.

While the bulk of the field was scared away from Martha's Vineyard, the list of riders who included Martha's Vineyard in their route reads like the Who's Who of long distance riding. In addition to Earls, the list included Jim Owen, Chris Sakala, George Barnes, Eric Jewell, Alan Barbic, Greg Marbach, Brian Roberts, Terry Neale, Tom and Rosie Sperry, Andy Mills, Mike Hutsal, Mark Crane, Paul Allison, Bob St. George, Rick Miller, Chris McGaffin, Rick Sauter, Thane Silliker, Bob Lyskowski, Roger Sinclair, and Derek Dickson. Michael Evans and Tom Loftus were the only former top ten finishers that did not include Martha's Vineyard on their route.

The most seasoned veterans selected a route based around Martha's Vineyard because they understood that the time delays associated with the ferry rides were well worth it. They also had the experience necessary to know that bonuses requiring ferry rides are often "must do" bonuses on the Iron Butt Rally. In contrast, less experience riders shied away from the unknown.

The bonus selections along the route for those who headed for Martha's Vineyard are staggering. No less than 13 bonuses are available on the way to the island and at least 15 more are available between Martha's Vineyard and St. Charles. With a total route length of about 2,600 miles, about 15,000 points or more are available. Whether the riders who went to Martha's Vineyard will meet or exceed this total depends on how much they sacrificed to ensure they were near the head of the line for the first ferry out this morning

at 6 a.m. Riders who wanted to arrive in Woods Hole early will have blown off some of the possible bonuses along the way.

The Report from Woods Hole and Martha's Vineyard

As it turns out, reservations on the ferry weren't necessary this morning. Videographer Dean Tanji, who left Spartanburg on Sunday to get to Woods Hole early, reports that there was enough space on the 6 a.m. ferry to have accommodated everyone in the Rally. It only took about three hours for riders to make the round trip and they got to nap on the ferry ride to boot. The 22 riders who made Martha's Vineyard the focus of their Leg 1 route are likely to be at the top of the pack when they arrive in St. Charles tomorrow night.

The First Suzuki Rotary Bites the Dust

Not that it's any big surprise, but Barry Bertram's RE-5 has died in West Palm Beach, Florida, before the end of Day 1. Since the report is not coming from an RE-5 expert, we are not sure exactly what happened, but it apparently involves a broken engine casting, bad noises, and lots of oil, so it can't be good. In the spirit of comradeship not found among other competitive groups, fellow rider Kevin Healey has graciously loaned Barry his wife's BMW F650GS that was sitting on a charger at his nearby home. Barry will ride that bike to St. Charles while arrangements are made for another bike on which Barry hopes to finish the Rally.

The First BMW is Out

Kudos to Bob Wooldridge for getting Jim Bain back on the road today, but Jim is headed home rather than to St. Charles. To quote Jim, "I don't trust this bike." Hopefully, we will see Jim back in 2011 on a bike he can trust.

The Oldest BMW is Rockin'

Joel Rappoport made it to Key West on his R60/6 and is headed for St. Charles. He is on schedule and feeling good.

The First Rally Flag is Lost

Scorers will be looking for Jeff Earls' mug in a lot of bonus photos for the rest of the Rally. The normally flawless Mr. Earls left his top case unlatched and it has gone bye-bye somewhere along the road.

Call-In Bonuses

There has been a flurry of activity on the call-in bonus line starting at noon Pacific time today. Rather than delay today's report, I'll summarize the call-in information later and get it posted tomorrow.

Tomorrow

The Checkpoint 1 window opens at 9:00 p.m. Central time tomorrow. Many riders are likely to arrive early in order to get a good night's sleep before the bonus listings for Leg 2 are handed out at 4:00 a.m. on Thursday morning. We will make up for the lack of photos in today's report with lots of photos of riders at the Checkpoint.

Tom Austin

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