

2009 Iron Butt Rally, Day 4
Thursday, August 27, 2009

A very brief riders meeting was held at 4 a.m. this morning. At the beginning of the meeting, Michael Kneebone read the names of the top ten finishers. There was absolutely no surprise about Jeff Earls and Jim Owen being the top two riders, but you could actually see the jaws of many of the rookies dropping when the point totals for the top ten riders were announced. The top ten have approximately double the points earned by the bottom ten riders. Dozens of riders who were hoping to finish near the top of the pack have just had a reality check.

Although most of the top ten are familiar, there were several people asking “Who is this guy Derek Dickson?” 2007 IBR winner Marty Leir tells me that seeing Derek in third place is no surprise at all. Marty describes Dickson as a “fierce” competitor with an excellent chance of a podium finish. Similarly, 7th place rider Roger Sinclair is commonly known as Bob Higdon’s mechanic. Roger doesn’t have lot of rally experience, but he lives and breathes motorcycles. He doesn’t even own a car and rides about 45,000 miles a year. Overnight, he has gone from being “Bob Higdon’s mechanic” to one of the Big Dogs on the long distance riding scene. The next leg will determine whether he is really in the same league as the other top riders.

At 30 years of age, 4th place rider Andy Mills is the youngest rider in this year’s Rally. His position is no surprise to anyone who has followed his progress. His 15th place finish in the 2007 Rally was an indication of his potential, although his upcoming nuptials make put a crimp in his rally future.

In 5th place at the end of Leg 1, Eric Jewell is also a candidate for an outright win. He has consistently been a strong finisher since winning the first 5-day Butt Lite Rally in 1999 and finishing 5th in the IBR that same year.

In 6th place, 9th place, and 10th place respectively, Greg Marbach, Chris Sakala, and Alan Barbic have all finished in the top ten before. Although Mike Hutsal has never had a podium finish, his 8th place at the end of Leg 1 is totally consistent with the very strong ride he was having in 2007 before T-boning a deer.

After Kneebone announced the top ten, I announced that the “finisher” level point target for this leg will be 27,000. As described in more detail below, I told the riders that this was no ordinary leg in that the biggest bonuses would be in reach for virtually all of the riders.

By about 4:15 a.m., the Leg 2 bonus listings and the Leg 2 thumb drives were distributed. Riders headed back to their rooms to plan the next 3 ½ days of their lives.

Not Your Ordinary Bonus Listing

Generally, an Iron Butt Rally Bonus listing contains at least one extremely high point bonus that is physically impossible and several very high point bonuses that are out of the

question for all but the strongest riders. This is not the case with Leg 2 on the 2009 Rally.

None of the bonuses on Leg 2 have as high a point value as either the impossible Saanich Hospital bonus or the 6,652 point bonus on Martha's Vineyard, but there are a greater number of >1,000 point bonuses. The biggest of the 18 1,000+ point bonuses is the 5,125 point bonus in Minot, North Dakota. That bonus is in the general vicinity of a 2,665 point bonus in Bismarck, ND, and not too far from a 4,116 bonus at the Little Big Horn Battlefield Memorial in Montana. Just these three bonuses are worth a total of 11,906 points.

Another attractive cluster of bonuses is associated with a Southern route. Riders can earn 4,145 points for visiting 2005 IBR winner Shane Smith at his home in McComb, Mississippi, and performing the following bonus instructions:

Spend a minimum of one hour asking the 2005 Iron Butt Rally winner why he isn't defending his title these days. This bonus will be open for 12 hours from 5:00 pm on Friday, August 28 until 5:00 am on Saturday, August 29. To fulfill this bonus you MUST arrive no later than 4:00 am.

On the way to Shane's is a 4,235 point bonus for taking a 1-hour tour of a former house of prostitution sometime on Friday. Just a few miles from Shane's is Nyla's Burger Basket in Osyka, Mississippi. It's worth a whopping 3,647 points and there is no time window to worry about.

The combination of the three bonuses centered around Shane's house total 12,027 points.

The above-described three bonus combination worth about 12,000 points are mutually exclusive; riders either need to head for North Dakota or head for Shane's. Even Jeff Earls and Jim Owen can't do both combinations. However, what the riders are going to quickly discover is that virtually everyone, even riders currently at the bottom of the pack, will have the time to make one of these 12,000 point combinations on Leg 2.

As shown on the figure below, there are once again more than 100 bonuses to choose from and, like on Leg 1, they are spread over about one-third of the country. Unlike on Leg 1, there are no bonuses in Canada. Those who head for the high point cluster to the northwest will undoubtedly be coming down through Colorado on their way to Santa Ana. Those who head south appear to have a number of options available as they head west along I-10 or I-40.

Another significant factor on Leg 2 is that one of the biggest bonuses is for documenting a 4-hour rest period. Since this is a 3 ½ day leg, every single rider is going to absolutely need more than that amount of rest and, at 4,001 points, a rider would have to be crazy to pass this bonus up given that it requires just a few minutes of paperwork.

The gas bonus on Leg 2 is increased to 1,500 points. In addition, there are two Call-In bonuses on this leg and they are each worth twice as much as the Call-In bonus on Leg 1.

The combination of the rest bonus, gas bonus, and Call-In bonuses provide riders the opportunity to score 6,501 points for extremely little effort.

Leg 2 Bonus Options



The Leg 2 Rest Bonus

Rest Bonus *no specific location* 4,001 Must start on Friday, August 28, 2009

Stop for four (4) or more hours. Document this stop as follows:

___ at the start of the rest period, obtain a machine generated receipt with date and time from a location, for example, a gas station, a motel, a store, etc.

___ at the end of the rest period, obtain a dated, time receipt from the same or nearby location in the same town.

Our preference is that you also include your motel receipt with this bonus if you motel it, however, it is not required.

WARNING: We are giving you wide latitude on this bonus with few restrictions so that you may have the flexibility to use it as needed. However, we want to stress that if you are caught bending the rules in the slightest, you will be expelled from the rally. This bonus DOES NOT mean ‘get a receipt and go collect bonuses.’ It means stop and rest.

Date: _____ Time: _____ Odometer: _____ Code: R4 Approved: _____

Adding 6,501 points for paperwork and a couple of 2-minute phone calls to one of the 12,000 point, 3-bonus combinations brings a rider to over 18,000 points. Less than 9,000 additional points will be required to reach the “finisher” target and any rider with the ability to route their way out of a wet paper bag will be able to come up with a route that does this while providing 8-hours per night off the bike.

One of the routes that exceeds 27,000 points is under 3,600 miles and requires only 15 total bonuses, in addition to the rest bonus, the gas bonus, and the Call-In bonuses. With 91 hours between the distribution of the bonus listing and the opening of the Checkpoint 2 window, the average speed required over this route is 40 mph. Accounting for 24 hours of down time of the bike, the average speed while on the bike is just 54 mph. Given the relatively few bonus stops required, it’s within the capabilities of almost everyone in the Rally.

Messages from the Riders

I know this will come as a complete surprise, but the second Suzuki RE5, being ridden by Alex Harper, has broken down in Iowa on Day 4. Lisa is unable to provide additional details because her calls to Alex are being dumped into voicemail.

Two more riders are out. Kendall Anderson and Phil Becker have withdrawn from the rally for personal reasons.

Tomorrow

The first Call-In bonus is from 12:01 a.m. until noon tomorrow Pacific Time. I’ll post a summary of where everyone is headed tomorrow night.

Tom Austin

August 27, 2009

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