

2011 Iron Butt Rally, Day 11
Thursday, June 30, 2011

Meese is Out

After building up a commanding lead on the first two legs, Ken Meese is out of the rally. On Thursday evening, shortly after I confirmed that his Spot track indicated he was on schedule to make the finish, Ken was involved in an accident while heading west across Nevada on The Loneliest Road in America: highway US 50. No details regarding the circumstances associated with the accident are yet available.

Ken was transported from Austin, Nevada, by air to a hospital in Reno where he required surgery to deal with internal injuries. Word we have is that he was alert upon arrival at the hospital and that the surgery was successful. His wife is en route to Reno. Many thanks to Nevadans Brian Roberts and Reno John Austin for providing on-site assistance.

Rob Jaime is Out

At the other end of the pack, Rob Jaime, in 78th place at the end of leg 2, was also involved in an accident on Thursday evening. Rob hit a mountain lion - yes, a mountain lion - about 9 p.m. 40 miles east of Kingman, Arizona. Unfortunately, Rob was unable to keep his Gold Wing upright. He was alert at the scene of the accident, but he sustained injuries requiring him to be air transported to a hospital in Flagstaff.

A 14,000 mile Iron Butt Rally?

In the 1999 Iron Butt Rally, George Barnes became the first finisher of an Iron Butt Rally to exceed 13,000 miles. George's winning 13,346 mile ride was 566 miles farther than the distance travelled by any other rider in the rally. Two years later, George finished the 2001 Iron Butt Rally with 13,357 miles, but he was late to the finish and didn't complete the ride in 11 days.

In the 2005 Iron Butt Rally, three finishers broke the 13,000 mile barrier: 6th place finisher Marty Leir rode 13,256 miles; 1st place finisher Shane Smith rode 13,277 miles; and 4th place finisher Mark Kiecker set a new record for 11 days of 13,354 miles.

No other Iron Butt Rally finishers have ridden more than 13,000 miles. Not only will the number of finishers exceeding 13,000 miles increase tomorrow morning, there is a good chance that at least one rider will break the 14,000 mile barrier for the first time in Iron Butt Rally history. Barring a problem during the final hours of the rally, Jim Frens is almost certain to come in with more than 14,000 miles.

The staggering number of miles being ridden this year is in part due to the fact that a higher than average percentage of the miles are being ridden on the U.S. Interstate system, which not only allows for higher average speeds, but has the safest roads in the country. Nevertheless, exceeding 13,000 miles is quite a feat and logging 14,000 miles in 11 days while documenting visits to dozens of state capitol buildings is simply amazing.

Finishing on Borrowed Bikes

Wallace French was fortunate to find a total stranger willing to loan him a motorcycle to replace his ailing BMW. Bill Norris of Lubbock, Texas, responded to the notice posted on the LD Riders list and loaned Wallace his 1997 Kawasaki Vulcan 500 LTD. Bill did a SaddleSore 1,000 on the bike just a couple of weeks ago, so it should be capable of getting Wallace to the finish.

Nancy Oswald is another rider who changed bikes on the last leg. Already in California and heading west on I-10, Nancy's R1200GS had a rear tire blow out which caused a "tank slapper." The bike went down, but not at a high rate of speed. Nancy will undoubtedly have some bruises, but was not seriously injured. After Nancy called in to report the accident, Steve Hobart rode his R1200GS to the scene of the accident and loaned his bike to Nancy, who rode Steve's bike to the finish. Steve was driven back to Ontario by Nancy's husband, who was waiting for her at the finish and drove to the scene of the accident after Nancy called.

Tomorrow

Scoring starts at 7 a.m. and, based on some of the Spot tracks we are following, will likely run until at least noon because several riders will probably be arriving late. One of the late arrivals is likely to be Jim Frens. With Meese out, Frens will almost certainly win if he can make it in by 10 a.m., but he is likely to be late. Jim's route left Arizona as his last state. Riding south from Sacramento, Jim has to ride past Ontario to document the final corner of his Four Corners Tour in San Ysidro. He then has to head east to the Arizona border before turning around and heading back to Ontario.

With a late penalty of 20 points per minute, other top ten riders could end up with more points than Frens. It's going to be an exciting finish.

Tom Austin

June 30, 2011

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