

The 2013 Iron Butt Rally: Day -1

And so it begins . . .



At the conclusion of the 2005 Iron Butt Rally I retired from writing daily reports of the rally's progress. I'd been in the business of covering the biennial event since Mike Kneebone and Jan Cutler revived it from the ashes in 1991. After seven rallies (I was a participant myself in 2001) I had reached the point of repeating myself, a wall that no writer ever wants to face. Worse, it was taking me all day merely to crank out 500 words. So I walked away.

In the three Iron Butts since my departure as rally scribe, Tom Austin graciously took over my scribbling chores and did an exemplary job. As he was in 2011, Tom is this year's routemaster, but unlike 2011 he has also assumed the duties of chief scorer. Thus have I been conscripted.

The eyes of the endurance riding community now focus upon Cranberry Township, a town just north of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Ninety individual riders and six two-up teams will set out Monday morning at 10:00 a.m. EDT on the 16th running of what must surely be the most demanding motorcycle tour ever imagined, essentially a scavenger hunt that has at one time or another covered every navigable highway in North America. More people have been shot into orbit around the Earth than have finished the Iron Butt Rally.

The pre-rally drills are well-organized. The riders receive a package of instructions at the outset. They'll then run their bikes through a technical inspection, sign waivers in front of video cameras, have photo IDs taken, and submit their camera cards for approval. Almost all of the rally staff have finished at least one IBR.

The 45 rookie pilots sat through an hour-long lecture by Jeff Earls, one of the game's most successful players. He patiently explained to them that they are about to embark upon a life-altering experience. I hope they were listening. The attrition rate in the rally always approaches 25%, but first-time riders are invariably over-represented in the list of non-finishers. He saved the best advice for last: get a good night's sleep tonight. Tomorrow, after the riders' meeting in the late afternoon, the traditional opening night banquet will raise the curtain. The first list of bonuses will be handed out, at which point the cost of sleep will have risen dramatically.

Bob Higdon