



I don't want to leave an erroneous impression either. While it may seem that I'm simply having fun here at my friend's expense, what I am actually trying to convey in my customary ham-handed manner is that with the information available to followers of the rally these days --- Spot tracks, internet forums, motorcycle mailing lists, insider tips, and lucky sightings --- more data abounds concerning the rally's progress than has ever before been available. And some of it is even accurate.

Last evening I saw a particularly good piece of investigative reporting about the identity of Rider X in Key West. With Google Earth, street view, some search engines, and other data drawn from who knows where, the writer came up with some truly gifted conclusions. It reminded me of a story that a lawyer once told me about a bar exam question that had stopped him cold: How many judges were on the state's court of appeals? "I didn't have the slightest idea, so I wrote that it couldn't be an even number or you'd have ties and we can't have that. And it wouldn't be more than the nine there are on the U. S. Supreme Court. It would obviously be more than three. So I said there were five." And you were right? "Nah, it was seven, but I received excellent marks for my reasoning."

Getting your hands on real information during a circus like the Iron Butt creates speculation frenzies. By almost frightening coincidence last night, at the same moment that I was posting the daily IBR report that contained a map of bonus sites for the final leg, Marc Crane was uploading a message to one of the moto subscription lists. Noting the mountain of conjecture that was emanating from a molehill of actual evidence, he laughed that he had the complete bonus package for the last leg --- having paid a serious price for it, I might add --- but wasn't authorized to divulge it. "Nothing so sweet as having something others want and getting to keep it to yourself," he chuckled.

Only six or seven people know with reasonable certainty who is riding where at any given moment, but drawing conclusions from even solid facts is uncertain. At 2:25 this morning I sent an e-mail to my IB Central associates. Here's how it's going to conclude, I boldly predicted. Thirty minutes later I followed that with an e-mail telling them that everything I'd just written about Rider A was completely and incomprehensibly wrong.

So I'll give Mr. White an attaboy for his effort. Instead of tossing up another load of wild-ass guesses, he at least took the time to put together an impressive and visually appealing model of one possible outcome. I like it. I really do. And if I could wrestle as easily with Photoshop as Jerry seems able to do, it probably wouldn't have taken me 20 minutes to figure out how to put an "X" in the Key West rider's location in my own chart last night.

## **Blowback**

It was inevitable: George Swetland has taken me to task for vilifying one of his favorite goat tracks, Jungo Road. Yeah, he says, it was a little gnarly in the old days but there's so much mining and truck traffic in the area these days that they've practically turned it into a western equivalent of an interstate highway. If I were you, I'd take this advice with a grain of salt. I've seen George chew up really long stretches of the Black Rock Desert in very little time on his KTM. You don't ride the way he does off-road. And you probably don't ride the way he does on-road either. His IBA number is 005. Yeah, he was in the first one.

## **The DNF Countdown Continues**

It's that time of the Iron Butt Rally when riders and machines begin to drop like refrigerators tossed out of a plane. We've been well under the average rate of attrition for the past week, but in the last few days the snowball has begun to roll. Today we've got at least seven new cases of bad news.

When we last looked in on Rony Baenziger, he was steaming ahead on a bike he'd borrowed from Bill Norris. After only ten miles he turned back toward Norris' place. *Another bike problem?* No, he'd left his identification flag in the saddlebag of the broken bike. Sighs of relief, but it wouldn't last. This morning Ray King, who has helped more riders out of trouble in this rally than I can count, told me that Rony had begun to backtrack south of Abilene, Texas. I checked the private Spot links against our private data. It was the same. At noon he had over 1,400 miles to go and 22 hours to make it. Count him out.

Pat Ford and his daughter, Becky Martinez, will not finish. She has experienced severe dehydration.

Cliff Wall has run out of time and fun. DNF. Joe Green has run out of time --- he's 1,114 miles from the finish with 13.5 hours to go --- but he was having fun right to the end. He'll be here by the banquet, but count him as another DNF.

The gearbox on Michiel Kerkof's Harley has failed. He cannot have the problem repaired in time. Phil O'Connor is also out with front forks that have made his continuing unsafe.

Kurt Worden will make it to the finish, but won't have enough points to be classified as a finisher. Sal Terranova is either on the edge (according to Austin) or in a happy place (according to Landry).

There are more, I know it, but I'll probably update the report later this evening.

## **A Long Last Night**

The checkpoint at the Marriott hotel in Cranberry Township opens for early scoring tomorrow morning at 4:00 EDT. Time penalties will begin one second after 8:00 a.m. at a rate of 20 points per minute. Any riders not checked in by the time that Mickey's hands are pointing to ten will be time-barred. They will be welcome at the final banquet, but they won't hear their names being called.

I will try to put up some interim reports during the day as the fog of war begins to lift. The last post of the day will issue shortly after the winner's name is revealed. Until then we'll leave you with Bette Davis' immortal words in *All about Eve*:  
"Fasten your seatbelts. It's going to be a bumpy night,"

Bob Higdon