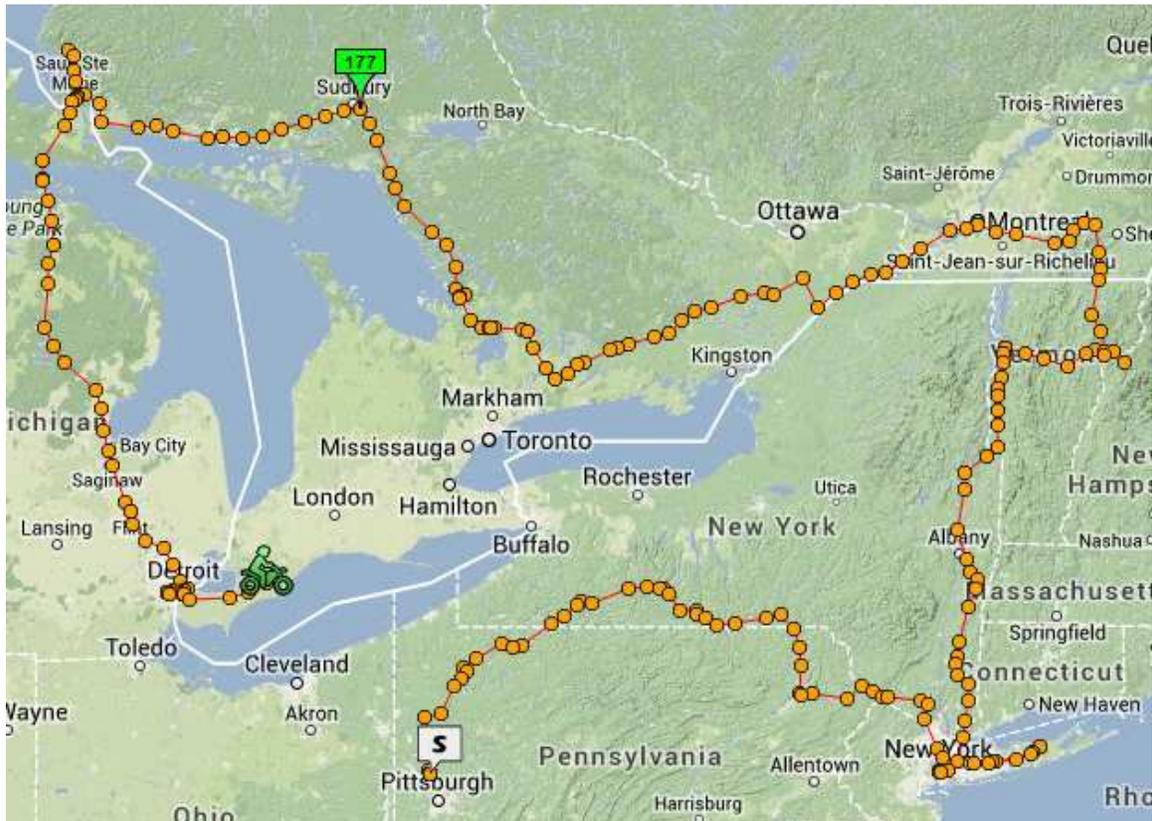


## The 2013 Iron Butt Rally: Day 3

### What, Never?

It's been a slow day here at Admin Central. We dote on days like these. Slow days mean a relative absence of news, and while that might be a hurdle for your esteemed rally scribe, it's good news for the riders and staff.

We spend a lot of time watching the Spot tracking pages. The riders float like dust motes in a ray of late afternoon sunshine --- now here, now there, now up, now down --- and it is a joy to watch the patterns evolve. To think that there is a purpose to the endless zigging and zagging is wondrous. It reminds me of Dr. Samuel Johnson's quote about a dog walking on its hind legs. It doesn't have to be done well; the astonishing thing is that it is done at all. I never tire of looking at it. The track of the riders, that is, not the dog.



How One Rider Spent Two Days of His Summer Vacation

The dizzying ballet of these machines launching out of the gate on Monday morning affected one of our tech crew, John Harrison, in a nostalgic way. Now back home in his beloved Alabama, he posted a note this morning to the Long-Distance Rider list, reminiscing about his two IBRs and wondering idly whether

another rally might possibly lie in his future. It was a curiously poignant letter, and it immediately evoked several sympathetic responses. But he went a step too far: "Maybe I can talk Higdon into riding it again. Hey, he said he was done with daily reports too. Never say never."

I never have trouble saying "never." Indeed, as soon as I saw John's post, I responded: "Have fun in '15, if you must, but as for me, from where the sun now stands I will ride the IBR no more forever." Once was enough for me by six orders of magnitude, but others never tire of it. Tom Loftus started his 9th IBR Monday, Eric Jewell his 8th, Germany's Gerhard Memmen-Krueger his 7th in a row. Such numbers are unimaginable to me. You have to be able to function in a clear-headed and focused manner, not just on the morning of the first day (when your heart is pounding like a trip hammer) but on the night of the tenth (when your brain is operating with the intellectual acuity of a flatworm). Guys like these can do it; most people don't even want to try.

Whatever impairs focus can become a ride-ending problem, as it has this afternoon for Dave Hembroff, the American Motorcyclist Association's national riding manager. He has unfortunately withdrawn from the rally after an excellent start due to circumstances beyond his control. The problems of other riders have not been so ruinous. J. P. Mountain has some leaking boots. A call for help broadcast on the internet will probably produce 23 pair of them at tomorrow night's checkpoint. Bob Lilley's helmet took a hard hit from a bird, destroying his Bluetooth connection.

Alex Ciurczak continues to sail along, though how we know not. First he mislaid his camera, but another rider found it and returned it before Alex even knew it was gone. Then, after taking a bonus photo, he forgot to stow his rally flag securely. It flapped in the wind, hanging from the bike by a thread or two, for 50 miles before Ciurczak luckily reeled it back in. Later a brake failure warning light stopped him on the side of the road. He called Roger Sinclair, an electrical engineer who finished 4th overall on the IBR two years ago. Roger walked Alex through a quick fix and got him refloated. Stories that begin like this often don't end well, but I won't say they never do.

Sinclair has been hovering in the area like a non-denominational guardian angel. He showed up days before the start, did some major electrical tear downs on two or three bikes in the parking lot, and checked lighting and wiring harnesses on some other bikes he'd prepped months ago. Maybe half the bikes in the rally have his fingerprints on them, including my own clunker. When Lilley shows up tomorrow evening, Roger will fix his Bluetooth. He's also got some boots for the web-footed J. P. Mountain. I'm almost certain a movie was made about Roger, but I'll be damned if I can remember the name of it.



Alex Ciurczak's new BFF

As I said, it's been a slow day. Tomorrow won't be. Tomorrow the birds return to the nest.

### **Well, Hardly Ever**

Gilbert & Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore* opened in May 1878. In the first act Captain Corcoran greets his crew and explains that because he likes them so much, he will never swear at them:

Crew (disbelieving): What, never?

Capt. Corcoran: No, never!

Crew (more disbelieving): What, never?

Capt. Corcoran: Well, hardly ever!

It is difficult to describe today the effect that these simple lyrics had on London society. In the following weeks you could not say the word "never" without a laughing chorus of "What, never?" greeting you. I smile today when I think about it. I really was born 100 years too late. You never hear people say that. Well . . .

Bob Higdon