

## The 2013 Iron Butt Rally: Day 9

### How the Public Sees Us



I could write a master's thesis about this picture. It is perfect in its simplicity. A caption is unnecessary because everything you need to know about it is there in the image. The woman has survived something difficult, to the inexpressible joy of her mate. A calf roping contest at the state fair, a marathon, a tour of duty in Afghanistan? It doesn't matter. She has returned and at least for this 1/250th of a second their lives are again normal.

As I write this on the ninth day of this IBR, tens of thousands of photographs of the rally are circulating. If I could pick just one to show the world who we are, this would be it: *Mr. Wendy Crockett and An Unidentified Rider*. It says everything about the rally that I myself have tried to say for twenty-something years and one hundred thousand words. This does it in a single unforgettable picture.

But yesterday Tobie Stevens' magnificent shot wasn't the one that was receiving attention on a few web sites that I check from time to time. No, what I was seeing were photographs of Iron Butt Rally rider #25, Keith Keating, being stuffed into an ambulance by a couple of paramedics. His wasn't a case of being hammered by a drunk or an inattentive driver. His bike didn't blow up and crash. He hadn't been washed out in a monsoon or flash flood. He had merely crossed a desert without drinking sufficient quantities of fluids and wound up in a sun-stricken and dehydrated state at the finish. An ambulance was called --- Mike Kneebone says that it would have been faster and less dramatic just to stick

Keith in a car and take him to the nearest doc-in-a-box --- and the rider was hauled off to a hospital for examination. That's how #25 is known today on any number of motorcycle web sites: the guy in the ambulance.

So when an energetic reporter from the local paper is scurrying around looking for an exciting story about the drug-addled motorcyclists who race their hopped-up choppers all around the country, terrorizing widows and orphans on the Iron Butt Rally, which photograph do you think will end up on the front page? Yeah, that's what I think too. And people wonder I'm so cranky all the damned time.

### **Mark My Words**

For the first four days of the rally we had just two withdrawals, one voluntary and one via accident. Five more dropped out in the following three days. Yesterday we lost two more. Today another pair dropped out. For Donald Jones it had been a case of slow melt-down. He managed barely 400 miles yesterday and, facing the prospect of crossing Death Valley today, is unable to continue. Doug Tessendor has also withdrawn, so far down on points that it just wasn't fun anymore. That is always the final measure of the worth of a ride, whether it be to visit your sister in the next town or to enter an eleven-day scavenger hunt throughout North America.

Just before 3:00 p.m. MDT today near Deming, New Mexico, Shuey Wolfe and his motorcycle left the pavement of I-10 for the dirt of not I-10, creating a spectacular splatter of debris. Lisa Landry refers to these sorts of crashes as "yard sales." I wouldn't repeat that joke if Shuey had been badly dented. First on the scene to help clean up the mess and retrieve some of the more valuable items from what is now a crumpled ST1300 was Brian Walters, one of our riders. Big props to you, Brian, for coming to the aid of a fellow in distress. We owe you one.

For Mark Crane the end was almost peaceful. Realizing that he needed a monster second leg to make up for the incessant disasters of the first leg, he determined to hit both Pikes Peak and all 34 of the Pony Express stops. This route had rewarded Eric Jewell and Matt Watkins with about 33,000 points each.

But, like everything else that Mark has touched recently, there was a problem. Make that a couple of problems. Well, three things, now that I think of it. He'd forgotten to stick his bike in the picture at the top of Pikes Peak. That was #1. Then at the scoring table he lost 2,880 points for a mistake in the rest bonus. He called me about the worst problem last night.

"I got all 34 Pony Express stops," Mark said. "I had the 10,500 combo bonus."

"Shut up," I explained. "Only Eric and Matt --- and almost Bob Lilley --- got that."

“I’m serious. I did them all. But like at Pikes Peak, my bike wasn’t in the photo at the express station in Silver Springs, Nevada. I’ll never figure out how that happened.”

I looked at the scoring spreadsheet. He was right. In a single leg he’d thrown 30,488 points into the toilet. “It has to be a record, Mark,” I laughed. “No one will ever equal that. You’d have gone from 86th overall to 12th, but after that stunning ride you’re still 86th.”

“I’m bailing. I can’t even imagine what you’re going to write.”

“Oh, that’ll be easy. I’ll write that there aren’t ten people on the face of the Earth who can ride the way you do. Forget it. You made an Iron Butt career’s worth of unbelievable mistakes in one week, each one more laughably awful than the last. You’ll probably win the damned thing next time. You know you can do it. We all do.”

Mark Crane went home today, but he’ll be back.

## **Metal Fatigue**

Tom Loftus’ Honda ST1300 began exhibiting symptoms of a croaking fuel pump yesterday in Shasta, California. Emergency calls went out for help. He made it to Redding under his own power, hoping to obtain a replacement at an auto parts store. He was not optimistic about his chances of making it to the finish. We have no updates as we go to press tonight.

Steve McCaa gained 24 positions in the rally’s second leg. He’s going to give back all that and more on the last leg when he loses half his total points for switching bikes. His Versys developed electrical problems. He will finish the rally on a friend’s Triumph Explorer. Now that’s a friend.

Mark Starrett had brake caliper woes. A friend came to his aid and replaced them. Mark returned to the road but we are hearing that problems remain.

Marc Beaulac’s Gold Wing has forks that are trying to seize. Phil O’Connor may have the same problem. The fog of war does not permit me to peer through to see what is actually going on with either of these riders because I don’t take very good notes when people are shooting at me.

Robert Koeber lost the top gear in his Honda XBR500. Since his initial report we have heard nothing further from him. Something makes me believe he has an international following. I got an e-mail today from a fan of his in Sweden.

## Where Are They?

All over the map, that's where. At the start the pack broke up into two groups. One-third of the riders headed north on I-5 toward Oregon, Washington, and Canada. The other two-thirds steamed southwest toward San Francisco, then began wending down toward Los Angeles and points east.

In the northwest there are seven basic bonuses, four in Canada and three in the U.S., worth 22,507 points. An eighth in eastern Oregon and extremely difficult to reach is worth another 2,500. That drew one rider, and we at Iron Butt Central are still wondering how he did it. What these riders do after they've swept up those seven or eight plums will be interesting, for there is not a single bonus available to them at that point in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, or any Canadian province.

On the southern route the combinations are almost limitless. Most riders taking that path found themselves at the Titan Missile Museum in Sahuarita, Arizona, this morning. A large pack of riders had arrived an hour before the museum opened. They were required to tour the facility and have their photos taken as they sat in the command chair of the missile silo. But the tours were limited and the riders had clearly overwhelmed the place. In such straits you appoint someone to call Lisa. Let's pick the guy who's got more points in the crowd than anyone else. Maybe that will give us some credibility.

Ring ring ring.

"This is Lisa."

"This is Tim Pawlowski, Lisa. We're at the Titan bonus. There are so many of us here that the museum is willing to open up an hour early. Do you think it would be all right if they did that so we wouldn't be tying up this place all day?"

Tim listened to the directive from the boss. He turned to the crowd of eager museum-goers. "I don't think this is going to work, guys. She said, 'You know the rules,' and then she started laughing at us."

If this were an easy game, I guess anyone could play it.

Bob Higdon