

Friday June 23 Day -3 Anticipation, nerves, and teamwork

Mike Kneebone ...

Lisa Landry ...

Jeff Earls ...

For the past year and a half, these three people have pretty much been living rent free inside the heads of the riders who submitted their applications, hoping to be drawn for a coveted spot in the 2017 Iron Butt Rally.

During months of practice rides and rallies, bike preparation, mapping and spreadsheet practice, packing dilemmas, online discussions, and uncounted sleepless nights, the riders have all been wondering what Kneebone, Landry, and in particular, rally designer Earls, have been conjuring for the 18th edition of the Big Dance. All of the anticipation, excitement, and perhaps even a bit of dread experienced by these riders over the last 14 months is converging this weekend in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As Lisa so aptly stated in a recent post on Facebook, "The excitement is palpable."

The 2017 Iron Butt Rally will start from the parking lot of the Minneapolis Marriott West, in the heart of Team Strange territory. As if pre-rally jitters and last minute preparations were not distracting enough, the nervous riders will find themselves dealing with massive road construction projects surrounding the start venue. Why expect anything less? It is, after all, the World's Toughest Motorcycle Rally for the World's Toughest Riders.

There are 117 riders scheduled to roll out Monday morning, June 26th at 10:00 a.m. local time. Each and every one of them will be hoping that their bike starts. When they get the signal to launch from Dale Wilson, each one will also be desperately hoping that they do stall out, tip over, or miss a shift as they attempt to gracefully exit the parking lot. The police escort, representing two local departments, will stop traffic along the route to the interstate, making the way seamless. No one wants to be 'the one' who mucks that up. They will also be hoping to get through the maze of construction zones quickly as they make their way towards the first of their bonus selections. That, folks, is a lot of hoping!

Those 117 riders will be on 107 motorcycles. This will be the largest field of starters since 2003. Monday morning should also see a record of 8 women riders starting the 11 day adventure that is the IBR, beating the prior record set in 2001, when the current Rallymaster rode her first IBR.

2017 appears to be "the year of the team". There are eight two-up teams declared at this point, the most ever, including the first ever all male two-up team. There was an entertaining discussion on the IBR rider forum about Peter Green and Paul Tong deciding to ride together, including various suggestions as to how they should decide who would be the pillion. Peter, the

pillion, did not want to be referred to as “pillion”, which pretty much guaranteed being called that in the daily reports. Somewhere along the way, it was noted that they would need a team name.

One suggestion was Peter, Paul, and Mary, after the singing group from the 60's. But there was no way to add a Mary to Peter's pillion spot, even if they could find a Mary crazy enough to participate with them. Then someone recalled the Peter-Paul company that makes Mounds and Almond Joy candy bars. The advertising jingle from years ago was “Almond Joy's got nuts, Mounds don't.” So, for the purposes of the daily reports, our two-up team of guys will be known as “Team Almond Joy”.

There is also a three rider team on three bikes. John Carrel (BMW R12RT), Timothy Mahoney (Honda F6B), and Tim Hayosh (C14) have ridden together in a number of shorter rallies and call themselves Team Rescue Dog. The name came from the originator of the group that can no longer ride and his kind act of picking up a dog near the Four Corners area that had been tossed out of a car and abandoned. He carried the dog on their trip for several days before returning home. These three guys are looking to overcome the odds and all arrive back at the finish together.

As if that was not enough firsts, there is yet another. The inimitable and adventurous Boge family completed an Ultimate Coast to Coast ride (Prudhoe Bay, AK to Key West, FL) traveling as a family, on a Harley with a sidecar. Michael, Anavel, and daughter Laura have apparently decided that the Haul Road was not enough of a challenge and that more togetherness on the road would be a good thing. They will be at the start as the first three-up team in Iron Butt Rally history. Michael and Anavel are two of the nicest people that you will ever meet. Many of you will remember the adorable Laura as an avid participant in IBA Cop Cones competition at a couple of IBA National Meets, first on a kick and go scooter and then on a TTR90 trail bike. This family is all about having fun together.

The riders will have a busy day on Saturday getting processed by the rally staff and doing last minute things to be ready for the start of what could, and should, be the adventure of a lifetime. Ed Otto will no doubt find a few insurance certificates that do not match the VIN on the rider's bike, or that do not show the proper amount of coverage specified in the rules, either of which can send a rider into a tailspin of frantic calls, emails, and faxes. Ah yes, what is a little extra stress added into the mix just a couple of days from the start of the big dance?

With the rally start taking place deep in Team Strange territory, it is appropriate that Marty Leir and Derick Dickson, two past IBR winners and Team Strange alumni, will be assisting Dale Wilson with tech duties. Marty will be conducting the odometer check. Riders will have to navigate through some grotesque road construction near the host hotel during the odo check.

The current over/under estimate from the staff sits a three for riders that will have to ride the odo course more than once to get it right. Derick will also be assisting Dale with tech, making sure everyone has actually followed the instructions and gathered all their crap into the proverbial one sock.

The check in process really should be simple for all of the riders. But it never seems to work out that way. Riders chosen in the draw have had around 14 months to prepare. A few others, who earned their spots through other rallies, have had less time. However, everything they need to know and do has been laid out in very detailed newsletters. The finer points of preparation have been discussed ad nauseum in the private IBR rider forum. But at every Iron Butt Rally start, there are always rookies shaking in their boots.

There always seem to be a few rookies who haven't taken it seriously and will find themselves behind the curve this weekend. Oh well. They will no doubt be joined by a few experienced, but procrastinating vets expending vast amounts of energy tying up loose ends, fixing bike problems, and generally being stressed to the max in the host hotel parking lot. Those who have exercised appropriate reading comprehension and prepared thoroughly for the last 14 months should sail through tech smoothly, with time to relax and enjoy the company of friends and family that always gather to support their favorite riders.

Things start to get much more serious on Sunday, even for the well prepared. There will be a mandatory rookie rider's meeting, then a mandatory rider's meeting, and then the rider's banquet on Sunday evening. An excellent, three course, catered dinner will be served to the riders. It will be the last chance for a normal meal before switching to "rally diets" of culinary delights such as trail mix, dried beef jerky, Micky Dee's cheeseburgers, and all manner of other concoctions whose chief attributes tend to be the ease of scarfing down calories while on a moving motorcycle.

Following the 'last meal' consumption and the sharing of irreverent banter to help take the edge off fraying nerves, the riders can expect to hear admonitions and advice from the three people who have been living rent free in their heads for what seems like an eternity. They will want to pay special attention to the words from Jeff Earls, the designer of the puzzle they will be trying to solve for the next 11 days. The rally theme will be announced and they will be given their rally numbers and rally books. Then it will be off to secluded rooms as the riders attempt to juggle that delicate balance between planning the perfect first leg route and getting enough sleep to be fresh and ready to ride said route on Monday morning. The folks with the deer-in-the-headlights look, hanging around after everyone else has left, will be those choosing to take advantage of the Rallymaster's offer of limited assistance for rookies that overwhelmed and just not sure where to start.

As this is being written, one rider has already withdrawn due to a health issue. Returning veteran Alex Ciurczak has informed Lisa Landry that he would not make the start. He is no doubt deeply disappointed, but making smart choices is what the IBR is all about. The Rallymaster expects that there will be more in the next 48 hours; there always are.

For the numbers folks out there, here is an overall summary of the bikes that the 117, now 116, riders have told us they plan to ride. Note that the numbers listed may not be exact and may not add up to 107, now 106, because some riders may not have updated the staff on their final decision on which bike to ride. We plan to post an update on this after the start on Monday.

BMW is by far the go-to choice of the most riders in the 2017 rally. One would rather not go there, but past results beg the questions to be asked. Has BMW gotten past the FD monkey on their back? Will the all encompassing Beemer integrated electronic CANBUS computer system snatch another finish from a disappointed rider? Or will the blue Kool-Aid be flowing to the tune of "Happy Days are Here Again" at the Finisher's banquet? The thirty-seven Beemers include seventeen of the GS adventure bike variety, ten of the various years of RT's, three versions of the K-bikes, and a few additional R variants (some oil cooled, some airheads).

The next most chosen brand for this rally is Honda. There are twenty four of them on the list, which includes a dozen or so Wings, a half dozen ST1300's, an ST1100, and a few additional models.

Yamaha checks in with twenty one bikes, including eighteen representatives of the proven FJR platform from various years, along with a few Super Tenere adventure bikes in the mix.

Harley is the number one brand in terms of the bike of choice for riders doing the IBA Saddlesore 1000, but only eight riders in this field have chosen to rally for eleven days on the HD brand. They are mostly variations on the larger, dresser style FLH hogs, including one with a sidecar. But there is one Sportster in the mix, complete with a very recent engine replacement.

Most of the eight Kawasaki's entered are the Gen2 C14 Connies, with a couple of Ninja's rounding out the group. Some might consider a Ninja 250 a hopeless class bike, but in 2003, Leon Begeman's 12th place Gold Medal finish proved what could be done by a determined rider on a quarter liter parallel twin.

Three of the four Triumphs entered are Trophy 1200 triples, with one chain drive Tiger 800 twin making another trip to the USA from across the pond.

Should both of the Suzuki's that are entered be listed as members of the hopeless class? We shall see. There is a vintage two-stroke, water-cooled triple, GT750 "Water Buffalo" and a Burgman 400cc scooter. Vintage two stroke triples have typically been quite a challenge to

remain operational for 11 days in a row, but how will this “Water Buffalo” do under rookie Jerold Anderson? He has acknowledged that he will no doubt need his piloting skills, engineering credentials, and perhaps some duct tape and bailing wire to get to the finish. Scooters under good riders have managed to defy the odds and finish in prior IBR’s. Rider Yohinori Ishii is hoping to add one more scooter rider to that list. He has reported that this particular Burgman has successfully carried him over 105,000 miles already.

Even though Polaris has dropped Victory in favor of the Indian brand going forward, there are 2 die hard Victory’s entered.

And last but not least, there is one Aprilia representing the Italian marques.

There are only seven sub-liter bikes included in the above numbers, but perhaps not all of them should be considered “hopeless class” machines. As far as we know right now, there are no Indian’s, no KTM’s, and no Ducati’s.

Without getting down to the exact month and date of birth, there are four riders that are tied for the oldest rider in this rally. Martin Cover (vet riding a BMWK16GTL); George Doughty (vet riding a BMW 1150); Patrick Ford (vet riding an 1800 Wing); and Ken Schleman (riding a BMWK12LT 2-up with Linda) are all 71 years young. The youngest rider is Dillon Spink (ST1300) checking in at 29 years old. The youngest passenger, ever, will be Miss Laura Boge. The current count is 62 returning vets and 54 rookies planning to start on Monday. The average age of the field is around 54 years old.

The rally staff always enjoys seeing the greatness of the LD community shine when rally riders are in need of assistance. If you have followed the reports of prior scribes, you have read about some amazing efforts and sacrifices to help riders in various states of need or distress. We sometimes have to wait until the rally starts, or at least Sunday afternoon, to be able to talk about how great the support and teamwork in the LD community is for IBR riders that are having problems. Well, not this year.

Garmin Basecamp guru and IBR vet Maura Gatensby was hauling her ST1300 to the start in the back of a pickup. What? Yes, hauling her bike to the start. Several riders choose endure the derision and verbal jabs from their friends and fellow riders regarding hauling their bike in order to save wear on the tires. Doing so might even keep them from having to change tires during the rally. Maura, and a few others opting for the haul mode, are likely thinking that time on the clock is best spent riding, planning, or sleeping instead of changing tires.

However, somewhere on the way from her home in British Columbia to a layover at Bob and Sylvie Torter’s posh V-twin abode in Big Sky, Montana, the seat on Maura’s ST managed to take flight. Maura is an Iron Butt rider, but the lady would have a hard time riding the frame rails for

11 days, as would we all. Lisa, ever the RallyMom, put out a call for help and within a few minutes, they had a seat lined up for Maura. Not just any old seat either, but a Russell Day Long.

Kudos to IBR vet Brant Moteelall for finding Rich Reid and working together to make arrangements to get Rich's RDL ST1300 saddle to Maura at the start venue. With results like that, half the field in 2019 may find a way to "lose" their seats on the way to the start and then call Lisa for assistance.

Much deeper into the category of "Why ME?", word reached the rally staff late Thursday that Rob Wilensky's BMW GS had taken a fall. Rob is fine, or as fine as a rider can be under the circumstances. He simply stopped at the BMW dealer in South Minneapolis for a pre-rally service.

The tech apparently did not feel a need to secure the big GS to the lift prior to raising the bike several feet off the shop floor. Murphy's Law immediately recognized a prime opportunity and sprang into action. The GS fell off the lift and landed upside down on the concrete. The damage is significant. Last word has the repair cost exceeding \$6000, not including labor and lots of overnight shipping charges for various parts and accessories. Ouch.



From what the staff has been able to gather, the owners of Leo's South appear to be stepping up to the plate and doing everything they can to get Rob's GS repaired and back on the road in time for the start Monday morning. Rob also happens to be one half of a declared team, with IBR vet and Bun Burner Gold aficionado Greg Rice being the other half. Obviously, this is not how Rob and Greg planned to spend their weekend.

A few riders requested that Dale schedule some time on Friday morning for fuel tank measurements and mounting security checks, ahead of Saturday's busy day of verifications. The photos taken by Ira Agins suggest that Dale may not have been pleased with everything he found. The reports are that a few riders were told that their vent tubing was too short. Not exactly the kind of thing a guy wants to hear before starting the Big Dance.



As always, more details as they become available.

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