

### **IBR Day -3 - The Cathedral, Trickling News & Iron Butt Rally 101**

Things are starting to come alive at the Sheraton Uptown in Albuquerque. The rear parking lot has been cordoned off for the 89 motorcycles expected over the next 72 hours. The “Welcome to the 2015 Iron Butt Rally” greeting has been added to the sign in the lobby. The hotel staff is preparing for the 250 or so guests and visitors anticipated for the Start on Monday. But, beyond that, the Sheraton Uptown in Albuquerque looks like it did last week for the Pipe Fitters Local conference, and what it will look like next weekend for the Dumbrosky –Chiller wedding.

Riders have started to trickle in this Friday, some competitors, some rally staff, some spectators. Already there has been breakage. Tom Spearman, notified the Command Center this morning that he was again dropping out before the Start. Tom had been drawn for the 2009 IBR, but had to withdraw prior to Start that year as well. Itching to rewrite that particular history, Tom has longed to get back to the Start finally getting drawn for the 2015 dance. Apparently he was overcome by the heat along the way from his home in Mooresville, IN, suggesting that after paying full freight for two IBRs so far, he didn’t have enough coin left for the optional ride air conditioning accessory offered on his BMW K1600GTL. But Tom’s an experienced rallyist, completing numerous IBA rides and regional rallies, including a finish in the 2014 Butt Lite 7, sponsored by Team Strange. If he has reason to believe he won’t finish before he even starts, better to swallow hard and make the call before the real pressure of the clock clouds judgment. A man’s got to know his limitations. Hopefully his recovery will be quick so he can begin flogging himself for another two years.

John Coons is likewise out. After a DNF in 2011, John came back to finish 10<sup>th</sup> in 2013. This morning, the pressures of life outside the IBR conspired to force him to withdraw before he got the chance to test himself once again. Like Spearman, John will have some 300 nights to replay the decision in his head before being able to apply again. We hope to see him here in 2017.

Mike Langford failed to finish in 2009, after racking up over 8300 miles on his K1200LT, the same bike he rode to 26<sup>th</sup> place in 2007. As of this morning, Mike was still in Chula Vista, CA, (750 miles from the Start) assembling plastic parts on his 2013 Triumph Trophy after having had a major service performed earlier this week. Or, maybe he just hasn’t packed yet. Either way, he still has a 12 hour ride in triple digit high heat to knock out just to get to the Start of a grueling 11 day ride. The Command Center hopes he is thinking about banking some sleep to start Monday well-rested. Time will tell.

Jim Owen’s IBR rallying resume reads like a Big Dog’s should: Heartbreaking DNF while in the lead just hours from the finish in 2005, 2<sup>nd</sup> (2007), Winner (2009). Owen is a Vegas bookmaker’s dream, favored to be on the podium again this year, or any year he gets to play. So, why is this accomplished rider sweating in the parking lot, furiously trying to fix a failed

auxiliary fuel cell mount? Could it be because the accessory was recently installed and his ride from Easton, PA, was the shakedown? Nah...that can't be it. It's not like Jim hasn't been here before like 2009 when his auxiliary wiring harness caught fire in the parking lot at the Start. Of course, he did still go on to win...

The spigot will open tomorrow. More riders, more activity and, guaranteed, more issues. By Sunday afternoon, the Sheraton Uptown in Albuquerque will be bustling with the activity of a major league sports event or Broadway production. But, on this Friday morning, it is what baseball players call the Cathedral. A quiet, holy place.

This is a good time to go over some IBR basics.

The Iron Butt Rally is a long distance motorcycle competition that pits rider against the map and his or her wits, to accumulate as many points as possible in a fixed period of time. Unlike a race, finishing first is not analogous to winning. In fact, it almost guarantees a low final standing. Nor does riding the most miles matter much. Just ask Jim Frens. He rode a monster 14,185 miles in 2011, surpassing the next closest finisher, Curt Gran, by 328 miles, and *still* didn't win. Neither did Curt. Both were bested by Winner Peter Behm riding "just" 13,544. Even Eric Jewell placed higher with just 13,162 miles, more than 1000 miles less than Frens. No, the Iron Butt Rally is about maximizing the *point* value of those miles. While the format has evolved since the 1984 inaugural event, the emphasis on smart and efficient routing for points has not.

For this 18<sup>th</sup> IBR, 89 motorcycles will leave the Sheraton Uptown in Albuquerque at 10 AM on Monday June 29. All they know today is they will need to be back in the same parking lot 84 hours later. They don't yet know where they will have ridden in those 84 hours. They won't start to see that piece of the puzzle until Sunday evening's rider's banquet when each will receive a list of several hundred possible destinations to visit, each with a different point value reflecting its difficulty to attain. Then the theme for this year's rally will become clear. Past rally themes have including Famous Crime Scenes and National Monuments. In 2013, riders had to touch all 48 contiguous states to be considered a finisher. Bonus points were extra.

Equipped with digital cameras and rally flags bearing their assigned number, riders will follow detailed instructions to prove having ridden to their chosen destinations and bonuses. A photo of the historic Hotel del Coronado in San Diego, some 778 miles to the west, may be worth 500 points. The ride there and back within the allotted 84 hours would require an average speed of 18.5 mph, barely the equivalent of the daily commute on the Stevenson freeway in Chicago traffic for 3 ½ days. Even allocating 10 hours of every 24 for sleeping, fueling, eating, peeing and checking in at home, the average required speed increases to 31.75 mph, or the pickup truck speed through any Home Depot parking lot on a Saturday. Detour north for a photo of the

Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, worth 1500 points, and that needed average speed rises to 48.4 mph. Since excessive speed on public roads is not permitted (nor effective), the time to sleep, fuel, eat, pee and call home starts to matter.

After scoring is tabulated in Albuquerque, riders will again receive another list of bonuses to be considered in the 62 hours to ride to the Meadowview Conference Resort in Kingsport, Tennessee. A photo of the East Gate at the Outdoor Symbolic Memorial in Oklahoma City may be good for 50 points. After all, it's on the way, easy to get to and available 24 hours a day. However, the same photo taken *from inside* the Memorial Museum there may be worth 250 points as the museum is only open between 9AM-6PM, requiring more precise time management. At the far extreme, a photo of the continental marker in Key West, 90 miles from Cuba, may be worth 5000 points, vaulting you to the lead, assuming you don't need to sleep, fuel, eat or pee as often. After scoring again in Kingsport, riders will have 102 hours to return to Albuquerque, choosing bonuses from yet another list of multiple options.

The potential combinations of bonuses are incalculable, limited only by the rider's ability to accurately project timing to each location and still remain within the allotted time to arrive at each checkpoint. Oh, and, the rally gods do not care that you hit Atlanta in rush hour, followed an RV through a national park over the holiday, final drive failure in Fargo, Montezuma's Revenge on Day 5, a bow echo of severe storms while crossing Kansas, road closures, an inability to calculate time zone conversions, a tank of bad gas (or Diesel!), hangnail, etc. Show up on time or go home.

Many will, go home that is. Historically, attrition will claim 25% of the field. Some will fail to make the first checkpoint, some dropping off within sight of the Finish. Others will ride many miles, yet still fail to Finish. In the end, the rider with the most points at the Finish, wins. No money, mind you. The Iron Butt Rally is an amateur event with no prize purse, corporate sponsorship deals or other such professional inducements. Riders pay to play, risking DNF, machine and marital harmony for the selfish satisfaction of having accomplished what fewer than 506 other motorcyclists have done. More people have circumnavigated the Earth in space than have finished The World's Toughest Motorcycle Rally™. It's rarified air. The ultimate bragging rights.

If this is your first IBR, I highly recommend you read the reports from prior years, along with much of the content available at [www.ironbutt.com](http://www.ironbutt.com), the web home of the Iron Butt Association. Even if you are not (yet) a long distance motorcyclist, it will provide deeper context for the discussion here as the next two weeks unfold. Also, if don't already instinctively know where Interstate 40 separates from its underlying US Route 66 origins, or are still unsure of the number of curves on US 129 between Tabcot Bridge and Deals Gap, or can't plot a speed route around Sedona when 89A is closed for landslides, without Google, you might also keep a

map handy, maybe with some way of marking rider locations. As with every IBR before, there will come a time when you will need a visual reference to fully appreciate a rider's predicament. Just make sure it covers Canada. Alaska, too.

Of course, there will be snafus and epic Fubars. There are rules, and there will be those who attempt to stretch those rules. Where appropriate, or just damn funny, we will highlight some of these attempts. There will be drama, disappointment, displays of exceedingly poor judgment, heartbreak, tedium, heroics, exalted victories over adversity – all the pathos that accompanies human endeavor and achievement. Over the next 14 days, we will report what we see, what we hear, what we know, what we think we know and ultimately what we learn. We will offer up conjecture and theory, hopefully, with a fair amount levity, to feed the estimated 50,000 IBA members riding along on their keyboard devouring this year's rally through these reports. Along the way, I also intend to focus attention on just some of the many extraordinary people who put this event together and pull it off.

Stay tuned...

*Chris Cimino*

*Iron Butt Association ©*