

July 06 Sidebar 7 Difficulty, naysayers, effort

To say Mike Kneebone's Iron Butt Rally has become an iconic event is an understatement. The relative handful of riders who have successfully solved the on-the-clock puzzle of time, distance, and points to become finishers Those in the long distance community who revere the epic stories riders have generated and are legion. However, there are a few folks who have written about the IBR in a way that indicates they do not respect the challenge of being a finisher.

One group of riders, which I will call naysayers, as we are in polite company, tend to see the IBR as so far outside their comfort level that their eyes glaze over. 11,000 miles in 11 days is just too extreme for them to wrap their minds around, so they dismiss it as too ridiculous to even consider. They resort to labeling the rally as something that only crazy people would do.

The 'naysayers' are somewhat understandable, they are not a part of this community and just don't get it. Another group, although very small, is more disheartening. They surface from time to time, creating ripples in the community that belies their small numbers. There are a few riders who have completed the IBR and tell anyone who will listen that it is not all that difficult to be a finisher.

There was a time when one could be a checkpoint to checkpoint rider and finish the rally while covering much, much less than 1000 miles per day. Some riders did that in order to get themselves a three digit number. It is a sad fact that claiming the IBR is not difficult is simply an admission that the rider did not challenge themselves sufficiently when they had their shot.

Riders who claim the IBR is no big deal have surely missed the point of the rally. For many of us, it is about challenging yourself to see what you can accomplish when you give a difficult task your best effort. There is always a waiting list for the rally, a list of riders that very much want to give it their best effort. Some, your scribe included, might say that those who do get drawn for "The Big Dance" owe it to themselves ... and to those who desperately wanted to be drawn, but were not ... to give it their very best effort.

Some very good riders have added additional challenges through the years to raise the level of difficulty for themselves, such as trying to nurse a 'hopeless class' bike to the finish. Some have had significant physical or personal limitations to overcome in order to reach finisher status. Some have doggedly persevered, going to extreme efforts to overcome bike failures or accidents, just to be counted as a finisher. 'Pulling a Manny' comes to mind.

Or perhaps Paul Pelland continuing without a windscreen after a death wobble crash, making a replacement pushrod out of a drill bit in order to get back on the road, and having the engine replaced, twice, to finish on his hopeless class Ural. Not to mention surviving questionable wardrobe choices. I could go on and on with iconic examples of riders that refuse to give up in the face of difficulty.

Some of the greatest stories that the IBR scribes have related over the years have been about riders who gave it their best effort in the face of difficulty, yet were still unsuccessful. What George Barnes went through coming back from Deadhorse, Alaska, trying for the repeat win in

2001, is one example. Such efforts have added to the lore of the IBR and set the standard for future riders to give their best effort.

Weather is almost always an issue for riders in the IBR. In 2005, many riders were dealing with the drenching, gale force remnants of Hurricane Katrina, some for over 1500 miles. In 2007, some riders were engulfed in torrential rain for 9 days, never getting dried out because every piece of gear they had was completely soaked through. In 2011, the Midwest was flooding and riders were having to route through flooded back roads to get around closed interstates.

Some riders have had the opportunity to try again and successfully settle unfinished business, to get the proverbial monkey off their back, but some riders have not. I assure you, riders that have given their very best and still not been able to finish, in spite of those efforts, do not think that becoming an IBR finisher is easy.

Although recent rallies have been challenging, one can still finish the rally under the current minimum points system while riding less than 1000 miles per day. However, the rules changes mean that riders typically have to execute smart planning and significant miles to get the minimum points needed to be a finisher. If riders finish the rally and then claim it was easy, some of us tend to conclude that they failed to give it their best effort. Hopefully, everyone that achieves finisher status this year will have given it their best effort.