

Day 9 was a travel day for the staff, returning to Greenville, South Carolina, from Kennewick, Washington. Some of the rally staff found themselves once again experiencing the nirvana of traversing the country in modern, jet-powered cattle cars. It should have been no surprise such circumstances would result in clinging to almost anything to avoid becoming stir crazy. The respite of choice? Being amused by the rampant social media speculation posted by armchair rallyists and keyboard riders. Those attempting to hold court with facts not in evidence were many, but they were not the main source of entertainment.

IBR vet Paul Pelland (longhaulpaul.com) has apparently made it his mission to apply his considerable talent for off the wall humor to spoofing Facebook posts, the Rally, and yes, your rally scribe and these daily reports. A couple of newcomers to spectating the Big Dance, who apparently have no idea of Paul's history with the IBR, seemed to take offense at his brand of humor. Butt rally staff would have been rolling on the floor if the plane seats were not jammed so close together. It was a banner day.

Roy Kjendal and Marc Bialt formed a team on their departure from Kennewick. Rally staff questioned the wisdom of a rider in 24th place teaming with a rider in 88th place, but at this point in the rally, it is not unusual for riders to make poor choices, at least from the view at Rally Central. Approximately 30 hours later, Lisa received a call and an email informing her of the dissolution of the team and asking about the hit on penalty points, or to put it another way, how high was the tax for this seemingly ill-advised union? High level deliberations ensued. Even though the "team" had not collected a single bonus during their brief interlude, they would still be subject to the penalty listed in the rule book: 20% of their points for the leg. The riders' orange dots diverged, tracking their chosen paths, although we are not sure if they were in the yellow woods or not.

The replacement FireCreek windscreen, which had just been installed in Kennewick, broke away from the Wing ridden by Jeffrey Gebler. The departing windscreen was reported to have taken off his helmet visor before shattering to pieces on the highway. His wife was on the phone with him when it happened. The noise and his vocalization at the impact on his helmet caused her understandable concern. Jeffrey is continuing on but hoping to score a better set of earplugs as the wind noise is considerable.

Andrew Byrd called late Tuesday night reporting his Concours 1400 was electrically dead. He was amazingly clear headed and had worked the diagnosis steps to determine the problem. He has a plan and we hope it will succeed in getting him back to Greenville on time. He's strapped not one, but two batteries – a car battery and an ATV battery – onto his bike to power it.

Don Stadtler, who was late on the return to Kennewick and not up to the only remaining option available to secure a finish, was riding his 250,000 Harley Softtail back east when the transmission failed. He indicated it was not worth the cost to fix the tranny, so he might be leaving the bike and finding alternate means of transportation.

Wendy Crockett called to say she and the cluster of riders hitting a couple of bonuses with her were *NOT* a team. Lisa reminded her of the rule stating riders collecting the same bonuses at the same time for 24 hours may considered to be a team. Lisa then asked Wendy about the name of her team, to which Wendy laughingly replied, "Team Hell Yeah!". No, Wendy is not part of a team, but she still has a sense of humor on this Day 9.

The Wellers reported the tire on their replacement wheel was unbalanced and shaking the bike and riders apart. They had to stop and get a new rear tire, so Kevin decided it was safer to get both tires replaced. They are expected to be back on the road soon.

Riders were told at the rider meeting in Kennewick there would be no allowance for weather, road conditions, wildfires, or anything else for any rider choosing to go for the far north bonuses, above the 60th parallel. Whereas a rider chasing bonuses south of the 60th parallel might find the only road to a bonus blocked with snow or floodwaters would have the ability to take a photo of their flag showing the closed road condition or a closed gate and still claim the bonus, riders going to the far north and finding a road to a bonus closed would be unable to claim such a bonus.

The internet is buzzing with speculation on exactly how many riders went north to Alaska. Are all the rider Spot tracks visible on the public Spotwalla page? How long is the time delay and where are the riders actually located? Could the rally staff be using volunteer decoys to focus attention away from podium contenders? Are there enough points available in the north to even make such a risk worthwhile? Which road will end up being the road not taken for a disappointed rider? Which road will make all the difference for a successful rider?

A new internet sensation was created as spectators melted the refresh button on the Spotwalla page. Their efforts were centered around trying to read the tea leaves for the rider at the tail end of the riders who risked the North option. A connection was somehow made between the bonus on the Homer spit in Alaska and Homer Simpson, earning the trailing rider a nickname which will likely stick. Will the rider dubbed "Homer" be a hero and the stuff of legends? Only time will tell the tale.

As we were descending from 33,000 feet into the pattern above Greenville this evening, a nice sunset was painted across the sky. On rare occasions in the summer, the Saharan Air Layer makes its way across the Atlantic and curls across the Gulf of Mexico to park itself over the southeastern United States. Most of the long-distance dust from Africa tends to be floating at altitudes ranging from 5,000 to 20,000 feet, although some of the particulates can settle lower and cause some low-level haze. The greatest observable effects of the influx of these dust particles from the Saharan desert are especially beautiful sunsets.

We hope the riders have an opportunity to look up from following the little pink lines on their GPS screens and enjoy the show in the western sky as they return to Dixieland.

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