

The 2013 Iron Butt Rally: Day 4

With Friends Like These

Apart from posting these reports directly to the IBA web site, I was also sending them by e-mail to 50+ friends and two list servers (the LD Rider group and another restricted to previous IBR finishers). One problem with e-mail was that I couldn't attach photos or use anything other than basic type formats. Another was that I never knew what cutting and pasting from my word processor into the e-mail message would look like on the receiving end. So last night I just began referring e-mail recipients to the web. It's efficient, it bypasses the middleman, and it's foolproof.

Or so I thought. The first mail I opened this morning was from a friend who can't reach the IBA web site with his 10 year-old computer and Internet Explorer. I gave him Best Buy's telephone number and told him that when he's set up his new computer he should install a browser on it that is an improvement over the smoke signals that I.E. churns out. That would include just about anything, including crayons and carbon paper.

Another reader suggested I use Facebook. I considered how that might work, for I am not a Luddite. I do have a Facebook account. My name is Lasciata Speranza. I am a 24 year-old Ukrainian woman who attended the Happy Peasant high school in my home town of Kievpetrovsky Port (Kyyivs'Ka Oblast). I came to this country on a student visa, graduated from the University of San Francisco with a degree in particle physics, and now live in Des Moines, Iowa. I am unemployed because my visa has expired. I believe that the FBI and immigration officials are looking for me. If I could find a rich American husband like my sister did, my prospects might improve.

Being a fake person, I am reluctant to have friends. I once had a Facebook friend, but he was a fake person too. In reality he was Andy Goldfine of Aerostich, Inc. When he found out last night that I was planning to write about Facebook today, he defriended me --- I was going to say "unfriended," but Lisa Landry advised that "to unfriend" is not a proper Facebook verb --- apparently fearing that my uncertain immigration status could somehow link back to his account and create no end of issues for us with the NSA officials who monitor our fake lives. You might think that being defriended by the only friend you've ever had would be an emotionally trying experience, but we have agreed that he will refriend me after the IBR concludes. Besides, we remain friended in our real lives, for what that is worth.

My name is taken from Dante's poem, *The Inferno*. He writes that over the gates of Hell these words are inscribed: *Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate* (Abandon all hope, ye who enter here). I have thought this would make an

admirable motto for the Iron Butt Rally, and if you were wondering what all this scribbling has to do with this year's event, that is it.

Troubles in River City

Two minutes after I'd finished wasting your time with the above-nonsense, we learned that Larry Meeker from Jacksonville, Florida, had an accident just before six this morning on the outskirts of Hershey, Pennsylvania, and is out of the rally. The circumstances surrounding the incident remain unclear. Larry sustained a concussion but will soon be flying back to Florida. He was the president of the BMW Motorcycle Owners of Northeast Florida forever, so he'll have a lot of fellow riders nearby who'll be wishing him a smooth, speedy recovery.

A 1,000-point bonus was available to riders for making one telephone call to Tom Austin's answering machine in California. They were to leave their name, their rider number, where they were, where they had just been, and where they next intended to go. The call was to be made yesterday between noon and midnight, Pacific Daylight Time. Can we agree that these instructions are not devilishly intricate? Ninety-three riders made their calls successfully. One called in but not within the specified window. Another didn't call at all. Wave bye-bye to a lot of easy points, kids.

The Spot tracker map has begun to show the riders turning for the barn here in Cranberry Township and three have already arrived. As I write this at two in the afternoon, the rest of them have just six hours to make it through the hotel's front door. After 8:00 p.m. points are deducted at the rate of ten per minute. Oops.

Details to follow later this evening.

The Scoring Cave

I have been assigned the task of stacking up the incoming riders and processing them into the scoring room in an orderly manner. My first thought was to put a sign over the door: *Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch'entrate*.

When I appeared at my post precisely at 4:00 p.m., Ian McPhee of Australia was waiting. I stuck out my hand. "Congratulations," I said. "My name is Cerberus. I am the three-headed dog who guards the gates of the Underworld. What is your rider number?" Ian produced proof that he is indeed Rider #41. "I intend to give you an examination to assess your rank on the Glasgow coma scale and to determine whether you are sufficiently alert to continue in the rally. Do you consent to this test?" He did. "Answer this question: if Arlene is three times as old as Becky when Charlemagne was crowned the king of the Holy Roman Empire

on Christmas Day 800 A.D., how old will Danielle be when Evangeline graduates from nursing school in 2016?" Ian paused, then said, "42." I permitted him to continue.

Steve Bennett, #59, was next. I waved him in after he correctly answered that the Chrysler Building is heavier than the Great Pyramid of Giza.

Todd and Diane LeClair, #72 and two-up, were able to perform a passable imitation of a Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers dance sequence from *Flying Down to Rio*. Enter.

I asked Howard Entman, #14, to name the Three Stooges. "There were four altogether," he corrected. "Five, actually. Name any three," I said. "Manny, Moe, and Jack," he stated. "Those were the Pep Boys," I let him through with a warning.



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Cerberus explains things to Josh Miller and Dave Legnoski

And so it went. In the first hour after opening the gate I'd sent about 17 riders into the cave. None had emerged. Then Steve Bennett came out. I shook his hand. "Congratulations," I said. "You're in first place!" He laughed. "You remember Austin said to aim for at least 14,000 points on this leg?" I agreed that was the minimum to be desired. "Well," Steve sighed, "I have 14,002." I sighed in sympathy. "My son, your struggle must continue. You are not yet out of the woods, and they may grow darker and deeper still."

And So To Bed

About 30 minutes ago, 00:30 a.m. EDT, the scoring crew sorted the spreadsheet for the last time. We have results for the first leg. Ninety-four riders were scored. The results are tight. We'll report them in full soon after the riders receive their bonus listings for the second leg about five hours from now.

Stay tuned. It'll be worth the wait.

Bob Higdon