

## Day 9 – Parks & Recreation

Tom Austin is a serious man. He is an engineer's engineer. BMW sends him a Christmas card every year (or should). His photo is on the wall in the design lab at Audi over the caption "This is the Man." He once weaved the history of William Thomas, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Kelvin (father of the Kelvin absolute temperature scale) into an argument concluding that "anyone who can't express their position with numbers is flapping his gums." Boom! Drop the mic. He is exacting in a "there's-a-time-and-place-for-spontaneity" sort of way. The Dos Equis Most Interesting Man in the World calls Tom for advice.

He is also an avid, rabid motorcyclist having owned and ridden many BMWs dating back to his first R75/6. After the multiple BMW failures in the 2007 rally, Tom added a Honda Gold Wing to his garage that now has over 85,000 trouble free miles. An accomplished rider but new to rallying, he convinced Mike Kneebone to give him a slot in the 1999 Iron Butt Rally by offering to design the testing procedures for exhaust sound levels for future rallies. Those of us who were new to rallying had to entice Kneebone for slots back then. Mike let me in the 1997 rally with the promise of a feature article in *Motorcyclist*. The concept continues today with the Hopeless Class. Offer to ride something unexpected rather than *another* FJR and your application may stand out. Just ask Kurt Worden or Jack Cheasty. Tom finished 25<sup>th</sup> in 1999 and made good on his promise by developing the sound testing process for future rallies, thus preventing the blanket prohibition on aftermarket exhaust systems. Then he revamped the fuel capacity measurement testing. Then the call-in bonus. Then the rules. Then the scoring process. Unfinished puzzles taunt him. Tom deserves the credit for many of the efficiency improvements in the IBA today that make for a more level playing field than ever before.

*(Right – It's amazing what a bottle of good Chardonnay can do for Tom...)*



This year's National Parks theme is the culmination of an idea percolating in Tom's brain for years. Unimpressed with the stamp collecting inaccuracy of the passport program from the US National Parks Service, Tom began looking at ways to improve the Iron Butt Association's National Parks Tour, particularly when he could find no consistency in how national parks stamps were maintained. Park stamps were rarely accounted for and easily lost or stolen. Also, many of the units in the National Parks System were utterly inaccessible by motorcycle. As he continued to reengineer the NPT, the idea began of using a subset of parks more conducive to a rally stop as the

basis for a national rally. He and Lisa Landry pitched the concept to Kneebone in March 2011 and the rest is history unfolding.

Many riders have commented on the cleverness and difficulty of this year's theme. Never before had riders known the location of all the bonuses that would be available for all legs at the Start of the rally. For the rider looking to finish without regard for point standing, he or she could have routed the entire rally after the banquet last Sunday, collected their 50 parks in 25 states over the course of the three legs and claimed their finisher status. Austin projected *that* rider would likely ride 8,500-9,000 miles, with more competitive riders wanting finish higher in the standings, riding closer to 11,000 miles. As of the end of Leg 2, the Top Ten riders had so far averaged 6,753 miles. Only five riders had exceeded 7000 miles through Leg 2; Will Barclay (7,780), Josh Mountain (7,595), Mark Crane (7,243), Kirsten Talken-Spaulding (7,114) and Tonie Cowen (7,082). But, only Josh and Kirsten were in the Top Ten. At the other extreme, only four riders have ridden less than 5,000 miles; Chris Rooney (4,998), Jack Cheasty (4,884), Jerome Byrd (4,773) and Rob Jaime (4,502). Interestingly, Jaime is highest in the point standings although he still needs more states than the other low milers.

Riders were surprised when the bonus point values were distributed Monday morning as the point value for 60% of the bonuses had not changed from Leg 2. The 40% of bonuses that had changed were mainly located in the north and east, but not all. Clearly Tom is hoping to lure riders into the traffic and congestion of the northeast. For the 18 riders who still need 10 or more states, they will need to take the bait. Based on the initial tracking data late Monday, all but 10 riders had chosen northerly or easterly routes. Some of the 10 riders who headed north and west are Big Dogs on the hunt. Hammy Tan went to have dinner with a friend in St. Louis (Sorry Hammy. What gets posted on Facebook during the rally is fair game for your humble scribe.) It will be interesting to see how their routes pan out over the next two days. All will continue to deal with heavy rain for the next 2-3 days.

Robert Bolger won't have that worry. Unfortunately, the front wheel swap on his Connie 14 did not solve the problem and he has withdrawn. Many thanks to the LDriders who helped Robert secure shipping for his bike home to Round Rock, Texas. He'll be back. He has unfinished business. *(Right – Robert Bolger transfers fuel from his auxiliary cell before shipping his wounded Connie home.)*



Tonie Cowen was fighting a fuel leak on her Super Tenere possibly from the bulkhead fitting on the main tank. What started as a minor drip at the checkpoint had grown more steady over the day. Lisa did receive a text from Tonie late Monday that she was back on the road although we're not sure of the repairs made.

Mark Crane reported a stop to a hospital in White Plains, New York, Tuesday morning to deal with a problem with his eyes. But, the doctors couldn't figure out his route either and he is back on the road.

Daryl Doughty reported witnessing a GS riding motorcyclist crash next to him on a highway in a Washington, DC Tuesday morning. Doughty reports the rider seemed to recognize him although he did not know who it was. He doubled backed and determined it was not a rally participant. We are hoping it was not a Spot following admirer. Thank you, Daryl for the extra effort. Now, turn your bike west and get going!

Rider mechanical issues have been few compared to prior rallies. However, we do expect the sustained rains riders are facing may start impacting electronics. It always does. Even Jack Cheasty's paper maps may get wet.

Beyond mechanical issues, the last few days of the Iron Butt Rally are often the most difficult for the rider. Call it the Iron Butt Funk. Multiday rallies wear on a rider, both physically and mentally. Fatigue creeps in. Adrenaline has long since worn off. Failure to properly condition ahead of time, or maintain diet (or other habits) starts to impact the rider. Undeveloped routines breakdown. This is when riders start forgetting to record miles or time at bonuses, or collect necessary receipts or read instructions. What Mike Kneebone described in the rider's meeting as "where the weird stuff starts to happen." I expect the failure rate for the Call In bonuses tomorrow to jump. It always does.

Doubt creeps in as well, nagging in the back of your helmet like an itch you cannot scratch. "I won't have enough states." "I won't make that park in time." "This was a bad idea." The voices can be relentless, amplifying a simple mistake such as losing your rally flag, into an epic meltdown on the side of the road of pent up frustration over a disagreement you had with your spouse, in 2009. Day 9 is when some riders start practicing their "failure speech," the story they will tell others about why they did not finish the Iron Butt Rally. It will be rehearsed over and over until they either believe it themselves and quit, or fight their way out and rally. It's a "dig deep" moment when we learn something about ourselves.

Experienced riders have had more practice on how to develop and stick to a plan, usually gained through prior failure. The rookies have not. 'Plan your ride, ride your plan' is the cornerstone manta of the long distance rider. Any competent rider can pound out miles when the destination is clear or the route prepackaged, limited only by physical condition and bladder control. Riders who have completed a 10/10's ride (10 consecutive 1000 mile days) frequently underestimate this issue because they know they can ride the miles. But, often they aren't prepared for the mental

demands of routing throughout the rally. Riders with high attention demand occupations, such as emergency room doctors, pilots or military may be better prepared initially than riders with more structured daily routines. But, Day 9 is the great equalizer. Little can prepare a rider for the rigors of the Iron Butt Funk. You just need to push through it.

Overheard in the Rally van:

“Don’t pull that strap, Dave. It flips my seat into the floor.”

“The Days Inn sign said Free Breakfast. We should stop there and eat.”

Sorry it’s not more humorous. It’s rather subdued today. I think we all got too much sleep last night. I’m sure by Wednesday there will be to report. Harrison and Hobart have constructed a sign that reads “You’re a Girl” to flash at Lisa every time she asks why men don’t listen to what she says.

Also, I need to post yet another correction. Yesterday I identified Garve Nelson as the oldest finisher of an Iron Butt Rally at the age of 69 when clearly it was John Frick who finished the 2013 IBR at the age of 70. I have two reasons for my screw-up. First, I relied upon information from Mike Kneebone who gave me his master file and said “here’s all the data on finishers and past events.” Yup, keeps biting me in the ass. I think he did it on purpose to mess with the rookie. Second, I just could not believe John Frick was 70 years old. Still don’t.

*Chris Cimino  
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