

July 03 Sidebar 5 One of them?

Bob Higdon is a former IBR scribe and the most entertaining writer I have known. In the forward to Ron Ayres 1997 book, *Against the Wind*, he attempts to answer a difficult question: Why do we ride the Iron Butt Rally? The following is an excerpt from what Bob wrote to answer that question:

“The answer could be, in this most sublimely solitary of sports, ironically a question of companionship. The riders rarely see each other, dancing as they do across the country in chaotic, Brownian motion. “

snip

“But think of the end. Think how glorious it will be to get off the bike and not have to count the minutes until you have to strap yourself onto it again. When you turn off the key for the last time, there aren’t 100 people on earth who can seriously appreciate what you have undergone. About 40 of them will show up at a motel west of Salt Lake City, looking as pounded as you do. The rest of us can only guess. *You ride this endless ride to be one of them.* “

Bob wrote those words in reference to the 1995 IBR. At the time, he had not yet completed his IBR. He would eventually become “*one of them*” in 2001, as did your current scribe. The 1995 IBR was the first IBR start that I attended. After the riders departed, I was riding east on I-80, in the company of “*one of them*”. As we shared a lane with an IBR rider heading for their first bonus of the rally, I spoke to my wife through the intercom. I simply said, “I have to do that one day.” Her response was equally simple, “Why?”

I did not have the answer at that moment, but when I read Bob’s comments in Ron’s book in 1997, I realized he had finally put into words much of what I felt back in 1995. I would go on to become friends with Bob and enjoy BBQ picnics at Ron’s home in Plano, Texas. I would even convince Mike Kneebone to allow me to enter the rally, which I would go on to finish, twice.

While I have never been one of the elite ‘big dogs’ of the IBR, I have certainly pushed my personal limits in the rally. I have never just wanted to ride around and finish. Each time, I have reached into the deepest depths of my being, searching for the fortitude to continue. I have stared down that fierce inner voice clawing at me to give up, relentlessly pounding inside my brain, attempting to coerce me into admitting that my goals for Day 8 or 9 were simply beyond my tired (and no doubt odorous) reach.

Some call it luck, but I do not believe in luck. Through an unexplainable granting of grace and strength, I was somehow been able to overcome the deep, lonely depths of darkness to actually “*ride that endless ride to be one of them*”. I persevered to the finish line. Becoming a finisher, no matter what position, and knowing deep down in your soul that you gave it everything you

had for 11 days, is something very special. Something shared by those few riders that have become *“one of them”*.

Mike, Bob, Ron, and countless others have had a hand in many riders achieving finisher status, yet the total number remains very small in the world of motorcycling. There are a number of rookies out there on Day 8 of the 2017 IBR, entering a realm that few have attempted and fewer still have completed. There are also a few riders with the proverbial “monkey on their back” trying once again to become a finisher. They are all trying to see their way through the depths of darkness to become *“one of them”*. There are also vets pushing through the night that cannot get enough of this pressure cooker and believe they can catch lightning in a bottle once again. If you are so inclined, say a prayer or send some good thoughts their way over the next few nights.

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