

Saturday June 15 Sidebar 1

During the 2017 IBR, your scribe wanted to cover a few topics which might not have meshed well with the content of the daily reports. The result was publishing a few “sidebars”. The additional commentary was generally well received, so we plan to issue a few sidebars during this rally, with this being the first.

Sidebars may not be posted every day, but there could be more than one on any given day. Your scribe hopes they will provide additional insight into the rally, covering topics which may be beyond the scope of the more news oriented daily reports.

During the lead up to the rally, riders have an opportunity to participate in a private IBR forum, located within the IBA Forum, and for registered riders and senior staff only. This is a place to discuss rally topics, ask questions of staff and veteran riders, speculate on the rally, share farkle ideas, discuss routing methods, and generally get to know those who will be sharing the upcoming 11 days with you.

Sharing information is great, but there is more involved. A great camaraderie is developed among the participants and the forum facilitates this, months before everyone gathers for the event. Many lasting friendships are created. Beyond the latest farkles, riders share thoughts and feelings, along with the anticipation, stress, elation, disappointment, goals, and pressure involved in rally preparation. Hopefully, the rookies will also share in the tranquility, satisfaction, and celebration of successfully attaining a finish in the World’s Toughest Rally.

Rookies who utilize the forum become better informed and better prepared for success in the rally. As always, there are several IBR veterans willing to share their knowledge and experience with rookies. It has been an interesting place with good information and revealing insights provided by the participants. The 2019 participants continued that tradition.

Your scribe posted a list of questions to the participants of the forum and requested a response from all riders, however it was not a rally requirement. Many took the time to reply. However, those who did not were duly warned that the scribe would be free to create answers for any who failed to provide their own responses. Heh.

The overall answers to the questions were, not surprisingly, very consistent. This group of riders has widely varying careers and interests, but their reasons for competing in the rally are similar. Their riding histories are generally similar. Their rally skills self-assessments are very similar. Their humility, for the most part, is similar. There are some amazingly interesting people, who have done some amazing things, who feel they are not interesting or exceptional at all.

“Big Dogs” is a term used in this sport to denote those who have demonstrated the ability to successfully look for the edge of the envelope, to explore what could be done at the edge, develop a plan to do it successfully, and most importantly, return safely from that accomplishment. The term is not to be applied to oneself, it is an honor conferred on those deserving of it by their peers.

One of the traits I have frequently discussed is the quiet humility of those who reach the top of this sport. Typically, they will not be heard pounding their chest about what they have done. They will share stories, if you have the time and interest to pull it out of them, but they are not in the parking lot telling everyone who will listen about all the great rides they have done. Completing a few certificate rides,

reading about the successful exploits of other riders until convinced being a top finisher is a walk in the park, having all the latest and greatest farkles on a motorcycle, these things do not a Big Dog make.

Before the start of every rally, it is not uncommon for a few rookie riders to fail to understand the culture of the Iron Butt Rally. For those who have never rallied at their best effort for 11 consecutive days, the rally will be quite a learning experience. Of those who fail to understand the IBR culture, or perhaps fail to respect the challenge they have signed up to attempt, a few may find a way to become finishers. Putting in the best effort possible for 11 days on a motorcycle is a humbling, often life changing, experience. If the past is any indication, not many, if any, of the riders who achieve finisher status will have the same outlook at the finisher banquet as they have today going through the check in process.

Riders who have won the rally, as well as many of the top finishers, have set a great example of what it takes to be a Big Dog in this sport. Riders like Tom Loftus and Peter Behm, who were both quiet and unassuming, but set a high bar and a great example when competing in the IBR and other long distance rallies. They are fondly remembered and missed by many.

There are some Big Dogs competing in this rally. There may be some others who will earn Big Dog status during this rally. But they will not be the ones telling everyone how great they are. Results and demeanor speak for themselves.

John Harrison

IBR Scribe

Iron Butt Rally©