

Friday June 28 Sidebar 2

As modern technology advances, habits change. Taking time to look back at history seems to be falling by the wayside, surrendering to the latest Facebook meme or fleeting Instagram post. I wrote a sidebar for the 2017 rally which still applies for the 2019 rally. I thought it worth posting a slightly revised version of that perspective for those following this rally.

As noted in Sidebar 1 for the 2019 rally, I posted a rider survey on the private IBR Rally forum. It was not surprising to find similarities in the replies to questions regarding why we ride the IBR. There are shared traits which seem to draw people into this sport.

As an aside, it was surprising to find a common theme when asked about what riders most dreaded on Day 1 of the rally. Coverage of Mark Crane's dropped bike and the resulting domino effect at the '17 start made quite an impression on riders in this year's event. Almost all the respondents were most worried about dropping their bike due to nervous excitement at the start. Mark may or may not be glad to know more riders seem to recall the '17 tip over incident than his missed Mississippi bonus in the 2011 rally.

The old sidebar was titled "One of them?" It was a reflection on the forward to Ron Ayres 1997 book *"Against the Wind"*, where Bob Higdon attempted 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 the 2001 rally, as did your current scribe and Rallymaster. 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 and intensity 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 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*”.

As the 2019 rally comes to an end, the total number of IBR finishers remains very small in the world of motorcycling. There are several rookies hoping to receive their 3-digit number at the banquet this evening. There are a few riders with the proverbial “monkey on their back” trying once again to become a finisher. They are all hoping to become “*one of them*”.

Thanks for following along with us on the 2019 Iron Butt Rally. Stay tuned for the Epilog covering the final hours, the finish, and the final rankings.

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