

Sunday June 25 SIDEBAR #1

BEHIND THE SCENES

In addition to the daily reports that will focus on the riders and rally, we plan to publish a few sidebars during the next two weeks. The sidebars will reveal some of the behind the scenes happenings that don't make it into the daily reports. Whether it turns out to be stories of hilarity within the staff, background info, exceptional volunteer efforts, or perhaps other "opportunities" that are unforeseen, we hope to add to your IBR armchair experience.

A daunting task ...

While contemplating the assigned task of riding a staff keyboard for two weeks, it became clear that composing reports about the IBR will be very different than the enjoyment of reading the talented musings of my predecessors. Some very gifted writers have applied their talents to relate the details of the Iron Butt Rally, as well as entertain the long distance enthusiasts that follow this epic event every two years. I am the first to acknowledge that I do not compose in the rarified air occupied by prior scribes. Perhaps what I most have in common with them is the love of being a part of the IBR for the last couple of decades.

Each scribe brings their own style and unique perspective to this task; each has struggled through the fog of limited information to cover the riders and events for posterity. Or if not posterity, at least for a LD community that wants every possible detail, preferably as it happens.

Social media is changing the face of event communication at a rapid pace. My generation is on Facebook, but my son's generation is on Instagram and Snapchat because they tell me "only old people still use Facebook". Several folks here at the start venue have been posting info on FB, YouTube, and blog sites. As a result, followers of the rally have a lot more sources of information compared to eight, or even four, years ago. Some have asked if the daily report format is outdated. I suppose time will provide the answer to that question, but I think there is still a place for the type of info and perspective provided in the traditional daily reports.

We are adding a couple of features besides the daily reports for 2017. One is this sidebar format. It will be used as needed, which means it could be every few days or multiple times per day. The other added feature is not scheduled to debut until Day 1, so stay tuned.

For the first time in many years, Tom and Helen Austin were unable to participate in the rally this year. Tom has been on IBR staff for decades and is the Chief Technical Officer of the IBA. He has written the rally rules designed and implemented the aux fuel and sound testing procedures, designed the scoring system, designed the 2011 and 2015 rallies, strategized the 2013 rally, and served on the IBA magazine editorial staff. Helen

has been a gracious and helpful volunteer, as well as a reliable and accurate scorer for many of the rallies. They are sorely missed.

We also miss having photographers, or should I say artists, Steve Hobart and Tobie Stevens here this year. So while we don't have an official staff photographer, we do plan to add more photos to the reports as they become available.

Once the rally starts, accurate details tend to become sparse, at least compared to the start venue. Rider calls to the Rallymaster, call in bonuses, Jason's great Spotwalla program, and spectator reports all help piece together what is happening between the checkpoints. It might also be fair to say that pouring perspective through a keyboard while riding in the middle seat of a crowded staff van at 75mph on the slab, in a thunderstorm, has never been an easy task.

No pity party here though. One only has to think about the tired and lonely rally riders suffering in damp boots, fighting soggy spirits, and struggling to properly balance conflicting needs on Day 8. As precious minutes drain from the clock, they choose between adjusting their route for the most remaining bonus opportunities and getting the sleep that their body and mind are craving.

Smart riders know that they need rest to ride safely; they have learned to recognize the signals that make it clear when that choice needs to be rest. Whether they choose rest or find themselves able to get an extra bonus or two, most IBR vets would probably agree that riding in the rally with soggy boots would be preferable to riding a keyboard! There really is nothing else like being in "the big dance".

Nevertheless, we are looking forward to the challenge of bringing you as much as we can process about the riders and events of the 2017 IBR. I use "we" because getting the story of the rally out is a cooperative effort. The riders, staff, volunteers, and spectators all make contributions to the 11 days of details that stream through the scribe's keyboard.

For those who do not know me, I have been on the editorial staff for the IBA Magazine since the beginning, but I am not a writer by trade or training. I am a Senior Engineer for a civil consulting firm in Alabama. I am pretty sure that I am the first IBR scribe to type with a southern accent. Hopefully, y'all will not need an interpreter to follow along.

When not designing/consulting, or riding my Super Tenere on m/c trips with my two college age sons, or helping out with IBA functions, I serve as the Director and Head Coach of the OMHS Mountain Bike Team. I also guide tours as a Docent at the Barber Museum and I host the Annual Last Ride of the Year at the Stagecoach Café in Stockton, Alabama every December 30th.

I have been a member of the IBA since 1996. I have worked as a volunteer during every IBR since 1997, except for 2001 and 2011, when I was fortunate enough to compete. As a rookie, I made the ride to Denali, Alaska on Leg 3 to earn an 18th place, gold medal finish.

I finished 12th in 2011, which was an improvement over my effort 10 years earlier, but still somewhat disappointing after getting in to the top 10 at the last checkpoint. Watching the trials and tribulations of the riders always rekindles the memories of being a competitor in the IBR.

During the 2015 rally, in addition to sharing rally van driving duties with Sargent Hobart as we chauffeured the RallyMom and crew across the country, I also managed the newly revised scoring process. It was redesigned for 2015 by Tom Austin to be more rider focused. We were successful in getting most of the riders processed much more efficiently, which allowed them to allocate more time for rest. As will become clear in the coming days, rest is a very valuable commodity during the IBR.

OK, enough about your scribe. As will become evident, the rally is for the riders. As much as we need the generous volunteers and appreciate the enthusiastic spectators, the IBR is all about the riders. These folks typically commit almost two years to preparation for the event of a lifetime. The entry fee may seem steep, but it pales in comparison to the cost in time needed for a rider to properly prepare for being on a motorcycle for 11,000 miles in 11 days.

Those who take their preparation seriously tend to do well, sometimes even better than they expect. Those who fail to take their prep time seriously tend to find the wheels coming off their big adventure in a variety of less than pleasant ways. And those who fail to listen to the wisdom, directions, and advice of the RallyMom do so at their own peril.

Here's hoping that the 2017 riders listen closely during the rider meetings today. Also hoping that they have prepared properly to have a successful adventure and return safely as finishers of the 2017 Iron Butt Rally.

#203