

The 2013 Iron Butt Rally: Day 0 (Part II)

Release the Hounds

For 90 individual riders and six two-up teams, their long night's journey into day has begun. Having survived a lengthy riders' meeting, a haircut contest, banquet jitters, and the eventual distribution of the first leg's bonus package, they now plot the first leg of their odyssey that begins tomorrow morning at 10:00 a.m. and concludes not later than 8:00 p.m. back here on Thursday.

They are, as usual, a varied lot. Four of the entrants come from Australia, two from Germany, three from the U.K., and one from Belgium. Minnesota's Team Strange again has produced a strong group of riders. Veterans outnumber rookies 51 to 45. Breakdown by marque gives 35 to BMW, 24 each to Honda and Yamaha, 8 for Kawasaki, 3 for Harley, and one each for Moto Guzzi and Victory.

The Hopeless Class --- always populated by riders who will be lucky even to make it to the first checkpoint --- this year is led by Kurt Worden on a 250cc Ninja. He will be joined in prayer by Scott Thornton on a 1978 Yamaha XS1100, Robert Koeber and his '86 Honda XBR500 single, and Keith Keating on a '94 BMW K75 police bike. In 2001 Keating, a retired cop, was one of two riders who rode 125cc bikes to a successful finish, plotting routes not by bonus point value but by which roads had the least changes in elevation. Such feats will likely not be repeated because Mike Kneebone has since barred bikes from the rally that are unable to produce 40 hp or pass an equivalent performance test.

The theme of this year's event is transportation, particularly planes, trains, and automobiles. It was originally the brainchild of Bill Watt who, because of various business commitments, was unable to finish the project that he had begun several years ago. Tom Austin picked up the banner and carried it through to conclusion with his usual engineer's precision. I'll save an analysis of the possible routing combinations until later. Possibly the only person who may have a serious clue to the puzzle is Tom Austin, but he's being unusually Sphinx-like at the moment.

When Mike Kneebone took the podium this evening, he told the riders that their carefree days were behind them and that a door had just slammed shut. "At eight tomorrow morning --- not 8:01 --- you have posted to your Facebook page for the last time until the rally ends. You've tweeted your last tweet. You go dark, especially you, Dianne Fox, who apparently can't walk a dog without a Facebook update." There was some nervous laughter, finally broken by the distribution of rally packets.

The first one was handed out to Eric Jewell, the highest placing finisher of the 2011 IBR. Rider #65's name was soon called: rookie Dianne Fox. She cautiously made her way to the front of the room, the proverbial deer in the headlights,

accepted the rider packet, and turned back toward her table. Mike Kneebone couldn't let that pass. "What?" he yelled. "Finally speechless?" She didn't miss a beat. "I think that I'm about to throw up." It was the laugh of the night, because she was clearly speaking not just for herself.



(L-R: Dave McQueeney, Mike Kneebone, and a reasonably relaxed Dianne Fox)

Howard's Return

I am pleased to report that Dr. Entman has brought not only his surgical but his mechanical and engineering skills to bear upon the problem of the unstable fuel cell. He has rendered it immobile, passed inspection, and is refocused on what brought him to Cranberry Township to begin with: a structured ride around North America for the next eleven days. We never had any doubt about the outcome.

And for those nervous riders who tonight might be feeling as shaky as Dianne Fox as they sift through a mountain of potential bonuses, I can recommend a good medic.

Bob Higdon