

The 2009 Iron Butt Rally

August 14th, 2009

Ten days. Ten days and counting. After more than a year of preparation, only ten days remain before the start of the 2009 Iron Butt Rally. This year's Rally will depart from Spartanburg, SC on August 24th and finish in Spokane, WA eleven days later. Along the way there will be checkpoints in Illinois and California and probably more than a few stops in many out of way places to see such interesting things as the World's Largest This and the World's Longest That. Surely there will be at least one trip to Canada and the omnipresent Key West Bonus will surely sound its' siren call for riders gathered from around the world.

Nearly a year ago, I sat at home still unsure what bike to ride. I had spent considerable time and energy rebuilding the 2002 BMW GS I had ridden in the Rally in 2005 and 2007. The once shredded transmission had been replaced along with a slew of other ailments. Although approaching 100K on the odometer, I was pretty confident in the bike's worthiness for a third try. Still, I was beginning to feel like I needed a change. BMW was coming out with a new GT that had gotten some good reviews but that bike also gave me some concern. As the clock ticked on toward the Rally, I waited.

In the fall of 2008, I received an email from Bill Shaw. Bill is a successful writer and fellow long distance rider. He knew I was looking for a new bike and he happened to be selling one for another rider. We went over the history of the bike and its' current setup. I knew both the previous owners, especially the original owner's reputation for the meticulous way he maintains his bikes. By the weekend, I was the proud owner of a new-to-me 2007 BMW R1200RT.

Though the bike was pretty well set up as a Rally bike, I spent the winter months tearing the bike down and setting it up to my own personal tastes. Many of the accessories went right from the old bike to the new one. I swapped components on the J&M System (several times), added a BLM Auxiliary fuel tank, several sets of lights including 2 sets of Motolights, a couple GPS units and the normal assortment of wallet draining accessories found on your normal rally bike.

A dry run during the 2009 Mason Dixon Rally produced mixed results. Some things like the extra fuel tank worked well, others did not work

well at all. The mount for the radar detector came loose, the CB worked only intermittently and other minor annoyances announced their presence. Through June and July all these items were remedied.

The major maintenance work was again handled by Roger Sinclair. All fluids were changed, valves set and some electrical wiring redone. Since the start of the Rally is so close to home, I put new tires on the bike just a few days ago. Though I will probably need new tires before returning home, I hope to finish the Rally on this set, something that did not happen in 2007 that cost me severely in riding time.

Over the next few days, I will be loading the bike with the essential 63 items on my Rally list, carefully checking off each item as I put it on the bike. One more oil change and a new battery will complete the work before heading off for South Carolina.

For those that are interested, Nancy will be doing her regular blogging right here during the Rally. She will provide updates when she feels like it, but usually once or twice a day. And unfortunately, she gets to control what is written with no editorial control on my part. I am sure whatever mistakes I blunder in to will be properly documented for the general amusement. If you wish to drop a note to her, please feel free.

The concept for this year's Rally was devised by IBA consigliere guru Bob Higdon, one of the previous owners of my new bike. Bob spent most of the past few years, visiting every courthouse in America, a task I am sure no sane person will ever duplicate. Whether his wanderings will influence this year's bonus listings is anyone's guess. Trying to guess at this point is an exercise in futility and tends to only add to the building anxiety. After all, there is no need to guess. In ten days, we will know.



Chris' story is to be continued after the rally.....

For the official rally news and updates visit:
<http://www.ironbuttrally.com/IBR/2009.cfm>

For Nancy's blog please read on.....

August 20-21, 2009

Chris left for the start of the rally today. From here I'm sure our stories will defer, depending on who you talk to.

Chris arrived at the rally hotel in Spartanburg Ga by 3:00 pm the same day and already has problems. The radar detector doesn't work and he can't figure out what's causing the problem. And to make things worse, he has already warned me that he was probably going to whine a lot for the next foreseeable future.

By Friday something called a CFRG, whatever that is, is causing a problem so he is having a new one overnighted. \$\$\$

Thought you might want to see what the bike looks like as of Friday afternoon.....



August 23, 2009

Well its Sunday, and only one day before the official start. Yesterday Chris got all the electronics working on the bike, or so it seems. And apparently he's not the only person with a bike in pieces. Several other riders are doing final preparations on their own bikes.

Chris' bike passed inspection, he's gased and ready to go. Tonight at the kick off dinner he will get his rally flag and packet of locations. He will then spend the next several hours, probably most of the night, deciding where to ride in order to gain the most points.

So far everything appears calm.....

Monday August 24, 2009

And they're off.....The rally officially started this morning at 10:00 am eastern time. Everyone got their flag and packet of bonus locations at the kick off dinner last night. Chris is rider #20.

If you don't know, each rally has a theme. This year's is "CSI". Every bonus location revolves around some sort of infamous murder or event.

Day one was uneventful in my opinion. Chris was calm, the bike is working well, and the weather is cooperating compared to the start of his 2007 rally in which I think it rained for the first 3 days straight. His first day of bonus point gathering went well. I would tell you where he is, but he wants to keep alot of that to himself. Let's just say there are at least eight other riders going to the same location as he is.

I did just learn from Chris that while enroute to his first bonus of the day the GPS mount was loose on the bike and he almost lost the whole thing. Then he managed to take his first bonus picture one minute earlier than time allowed. He also reread his directions and had to retake the picture.

Tuesday August 25, 2009

How many ferry's can one person on his motorcycle take in one day? If you are keeping up with the official rally postings the word ferry should tell you that Chris went to Martha's Vineyard with a pack of other riders. After the first four

ferry's Chris seemed to be riding all by himself and didn't know where the others had disappeared to. But he continued on, crossing three more ferries, through New York, West Virginia, and Kentucky (I think). He did say somewhere in our conversations last night when he still had not encountered other riders that "this was either a brilliant move or the worse decision possible". But on he rides a little tired and a little hungry.

Wednesday August 26, 2009

As of now Chris has ridden about 2,922 miles since the start of the rally. Caught the first rain of the rally today outside Chicago. Better than the 2007 rally where it rained from the start. Chris was waterlogged and his electronics were failing. At least this time he's dry and looking forward to a good meal at the St. Charles checkpoint. He is due there by 9:00 central time, if I understood him correctly. As of right now he is only 79 miles out and has enough time to get there. Once at the checkpoint he can eat, sleep, and wait for the Leg 2 bonus locations. Not sure what time that will start, but I believe morning.

Thursday August 27, 2009

Checkpoint #1 put Chris in 9th place last night. He seems to think that he's in a good position. I seem to think that he has been a slacker and needs to collect more bonus points. Despite a short night he was well rested this morning with a full stomach of pasta and took off in the pouring rain. It has rained most of the day so far.

As of today nothing has broken, nothing has been lost, and Chris has yet to whine. All of these things have been quite a disappointment for my blogging.

Friday August 28, 2009

Since the start of the rally this past Monday Chris has ridden 5,000+ miles so far. Today he went to a bordello in the south where the ladies cost \$3.00. The bordello at one time was a hotel and is listed on the historic registry. They give tours of the house if you are interested in stopping by, its located in Ft. Smith, Arkansas.

Chris chose the southern along with several other riders. At least this time he's seen them on the road compared to the first leg where he was on a different trek then they were. One of the bonus locations was Shane Smith's house. Shane was the 2005 winner, when Chris placed second. Shane's house was open to the riders from 5:00 pm to 5:00 am. He provided food, drink, and encouragement for which Chris is grateful.

Although he's still not whining, he got a few phone calls on the bike reminding him that his first leg put him in 9th place, which helped him refocus on his objective.....win.

Saturday August 29, 2009

It's 10:00 pm and Chris is currently around 1,100 miles from checkpoint #2. He's ridden over 6,000 miles so far. He whined today because he rode through the desert and it took hours. Very hot he says, 105 degrees.

He's actually in good spirits, and plans on getting a hotel room for as least a few hours rest. No bike or electrical problems, amazing!!!!

Sunday August 30, 2009

Not surprising but the whining may be starting. His biggest complaint has been the two hotel rooms on leg 2. The first had no hot water, the second had the heat turned on full blast, the room smelled of urine, and when he flipped the heat to the AC it made banging noises through the night. Why any hotel in the desert would have the heat on is beyond me.

Thought he almost had his first electronic failure this morning. I could hear him, but he couldn't hear me. Within a half hour or so he called back. It appears he went over some bumps in the road and knocked some of the plugs loose. So the electronics are still a go.

The hotel rooms might be the biggest complaint so far, but the heat complaint is gaining quickly as number one. He's in pacific time now, so there are still several hours before the sunset starts to set. He's due at the checkpoint at 9:00 pm pacific time, and still has a few hundred miles to go according to him, but he doesn't seem worried.

Monday August 31, 2009

Leg number 2 = 7th Place. Was he happy, not particularly. But knows that he had a hand in it when he made the decision early in the leg not to go to a 1,000+ bonus location. But what can you do, push forward, don't worry about the past.

Chris started out of checkpoint 2 onto the 3rd and last leg of the rally. He was a little annoyed at me this morning because I didn't answer the phone. Problem was, he was calling home and I was at work. He has lost track of the days.

So today as he sees other riders there seems to be a new sense of commitment in him, but also thinks it may not be possible to catch up to the top three riders, point wise. So, plan the ride, ride the plan.

Tuesday September 1, 2009

Ok, so this is cute. Chris decided to stop late last night and catch a quick nap. So he found himself a nice picnic table (Chris can sleep pretty much anywhere). In the middle of his slumber it starts to rain. Chris jumps up to run under the shelter nearby. He then realizes that he is already under the shelter at the table and can't figure out whats going on. As his senses come alive he all of a sudden gets hit in the back with more rain. Turns out Chris decided to sleep near some sprinklers that apparently were on automatic timers to go off in the middle of the night.

Wednesday September 2, 2009

From one extreme to another. Heat in the desert, freezing in the mountains. Somewhere around 35 degrees at night. Chris at least had enough sense not to try and sleep on another picnic table, he opted for a room. Guess what, no complaints!

Today the biggest issue is the the right headphone in his helmet went out so he can't hear the radar detector and you have to yell into the phone so he can hear you. Gives me a headache.

He has turned over 10,000 miles on the rally since the start and says he probably has another 1,500 miles to go.

Unfortunately this blog stops here as I am travelling tomorrow to the finish in Spokane, WA. I will post as soon as I can and give you all the updates. Until then, keep reading from the official rally news link at the top of this blog.

See ya.

Straight to the Finish.....

Friday September 4, 2009

Chris finished 4th overall. He looked like he had been run over a hundred times and was very tired when he pulled into the finish site. He along with about 20 other riders ended up at the last bonus location when the window opened. From there they all rode the last miles together. It was quite a site as they pulled in one after another.

Each rider checked in to stop the clock which had to be by 7:00 am pacific time or penalty points would be assessed. From there they went to corners of the hotel, rooms, or where ever they could put their receipts and papers in order. From there to the scoring table and conversation with each other.

After scoring we got some food in Chris since he had not eaten for more than 24 hours, and he fell asleep within about 3 minutes. You could hear the snoring almost immediately.

If you ask Chris if he's pleased he will give you varying answers, so I can't really tell. I think its wonderful and he has proven to be one of those "Top Dogs" Iron Butt riders talk about. Even Bob Higdon said at the awards dinner that Chris always surprises him.