If At First You Don’t Succeed....

The dream always starts the same. I am riding to a bonus during a rally. I can see the lighthouse on the horizon, but I never get there. Time is slipping away. I need to catch a ferry, but I have to get to the lighthouse. But I never do. The lighthouse fades into dreamland and the dream goes on to something else.

It’s been nearly two years now and the dream doesn’t visit as often as it once did. One lighthouse. One lighthouse between first and second. So close but in reality, not close at all. Even in my waking hours, the lighthouse seemed to visit. In December, ’05 I was shopping for calendars for holiday gifts. As I browsed the calendars, there it was. A lighthouse calendar with the Currituck Lighthouse glaring back at me. Mocking me. There it was. The Currituck Lighthouse bonus I failed to collect during the 2005 Iron Butt Rally that cost me a chance to win.

Time passes, memories fade. It all seems so easy now. I only needed to pick up that bonus and have a leisurely ride to the finish. No memories of pain and fatigue remain.

I have spent many hours over the past two years analyzing every part of my ride in 2005. I listed every mistake I made and worked hard to make sure those mistakes would not be repeated. I had several serious mental mistakes, but also 3 significant equipment failures. The equipment failures were the easiest to fix.

The Autocomm system I had used reliably for years, failed miserably. After getting home, I purchased another Autocomm, but never installed it. After wrangling about it for nearly a year, I switched over to a J&M system. This has two advantages over the Autocomm. The J&M allows me to use soft ear plugs rather than the powered ear monitors I had been using. When the monitors did not fit just right, hours of ear pain were sure to follow. I was also now CB capable and completely waterproof. Torrential rain had done in the Autocomm in 2005, when the audio splitter became rain soaked during the final leg.

My aging and trusty Street Pilot III had let me down in 2005 when it got stuck in a GPS loop outside Boston. This cost me nearly an hour at a crucial time during the Rally. I replaced the unit with a new Garmin 2820. This has numerous advantages over the old unit. I can now use it as an XM receiver for music, traffic and weather. The old XM receiver (not waterproof) was removed from the bike. The 2820 also has faster routing and no maps to upload. Most importantly, the new unit is GPSU compatible. This simple feature allows routes and bonuses to be directly uploaded into the unit from popular routing software. This feature would have saved me around 4 hours in 2005.

My high beam light of choice in 2005 was the Piaa 910. These are powerful lights that have been the standard of the long distance riding community for years. There main drawback was the difficulty in aiming them accurately for optimum performance. Using them with an Aeroflow windshield also produces tremendous glare up through the windshield at night. In 2005, I used a shielding cowl to solve this problem, but the cowls failed early in the Rally, rendering the 910’s useless.

For 2007, I have dumped the Piaa’s and switched to the Phillips HID lights for my high beam light. However, I still had the problem with the glare coming from the lights and up through the windshield. Enter Roger Sinclair. Roger had prepped my bike in 2005 and has again in 2007. Roger came up with a simple but bombproof system to shield the PHID’s from the windshield. One afternoon in his shop was all it took to solve the problem.
For those that do not know Roger, he is quickly becoming known in the long distance community for his mechanical and electrical abilities. Roger is an electrical engineer by trade, but also a top flight mechanic. He does everything by the book. Every bolt is torqued exactly to manufacturer specifications. He leaves nothing to chance. For this Rally, he has gone over my bike from top to bottom. As the miles have piled up on the GS, I became increasingly worried about the rear drive, a notorious problem for BMW's. Roger examined the rear drive from every possible angle and has pronounced it fit. Anything can happen during a rally, but I feel pretty confident at this point.

Unfortunately, Roger is so good, several other riders in this year’s Rally have also used him to work on their bike. He has been swamped with business. If you are interested in him working on your bike, you can reach him at Theirishspanner@comcast.net.

Roger Sinclair “The Irish Spanner”

I made some other minor changes, including switching from an inner rain lining to an outer rain shell. The equipment fixes were the easy ones. Earlier this year I started working on the mental failures. The number one failure came in routing on the first leg. I was determined to not make this mistake again. I developed a routing system to choose high point routes in a minimal amount of time. Testing the system was obviously problematic. The Iron Butt Association provided a perfect testing ground.

I began downloading every bonus list from every previous Iron Butt Rally. I printed every set of bonus locations and went to work. Over the next several months I began working through the legs. I timed myself as I opened every packet. Once I thought I had the route I would ride, I would then grade the route against the routes actually run by the top riders for that leg. The more I did it, the easier it got. And the better and quicker I got. I also gained confidence in the route I was selecting. Whatever route I run in 2007 may not be the winning route, but I feel the chances of me committing the same routing blunder I did in 2005 have been greatly diminished.

The other major mental hurdle to overcome for 2007 was the desire to compete. In 2005, the desire was strong and the drive to succeed pushed me through the Rally. I had told Nancy and other close friends that if I thought I could not successfully compete, I would not ride the Rally. The costs and risks are just too great. Everyone rides in the Iron Butt Rally for their own reasons and no one reason is more important than any other. Many ride for charity, many to test themselves and try to finish. I ride for the competition. Once again, I want to ride against the best in the world.

With only a few days to go before the start, I feel as ready as I can be. If this Rally is anything like the last, the upcoming weekend will be a blur of activity. After months of preparation, the start of the Rally will be a welcome relief. Nancy will be updating these pages from her perspective. Hopefully my whining
and complaining will not be too overwhelming. If it does, then I am sure she will let you know. I know she will let me know when it does. We are going to see very shortly if there is any room for improvement.

“This is the way the world ends, not with a bang but a whimper.”
T.S. Eliott

The Beginning

In the end, the Titanic sank. It still made a pretty good movie. So perhaps it really is the voyage and not the destination. My voyage abruptly ended in a small town in Colorado as night began to fall on Day 9 of the 2007 Iron Butt Rally. Despite massive amounts of preparation, I would be relegated to DNF status, along with dozens of other riders in what would turn out to be a brutal rally. Did Not Finish. Now that the destination is known, those that are interested in the voyage are welcome to read on. One note, many of the photos here are very blurry, mainly because they are digital scans of Polaroid pictures. Though I had a digital camera with me, I rarely took the time to use it.

For those that are not familiar with the Iron Butt Rally, the concept is fairly simple. Over an 11 day period, riders crisscross North America visiting assorted locations to obtain bonus points, similar to a giant scavenger hunt. The more difficult the locations will usually garner the riders the most points. At the end of 11 days, the rider with the most points wins. This Rally was slightly different from those in years past. There would only be one checkpoint. Riders would start from St. Louis on a Monday morning and return to St. Louis for the one checkpoint Friday afternoon. Riders would then head out for the second leg returning back to St. Louis one week later. Essentially, each rider would be riding two large circuitous routes starting and ending in St. Louis.

Chapter 1
Meet Me in St. Louis

I left home early on the morning of Thursday, August 18th. Nancy met me at my house to wish me luck. I had spent much of the previous days packing and checking the bike against my checklist. Unlike 2005, I was packing much lighter and carrying less in the way of clothes, even if I carried slightly more in the way of tools and other supplies. I planned to ride most of the day and into the night, arriving outside St. Louis sometime that night. I had a tire change scheduled at Gateway BMW for the next morning, before heading to the Rally Headquarters.
With a kiss for luck and an updated weather report for thunderstorms to the west, I left home for what turned out to be a three week odyssey. Heading west into the mountains of Maryland, I made a few telephone calls to friends, using the new Bluetooth J&M set-up. The unit had worked perfectly since being installed a few months earlier.

Nancy’s prediction of thunderstorms turned out to be right on target. I stopped at an exit west of Cumberland, Maryland and quickly put on my new one piece rain suit. Within 5 minutes, I was back on the road riding into a steady downpour. The suit was an improvement over the gore-tex liner I previously
used. It could go on and off quickly and without removing any other clothing. If need be, I could even put it on without removing my helmet.

Approaching Deep Creek Lake, I felt the slightest vibration in the engine. It was almost unperceivable at first. I convinced myself that the vibration was a result of a rough spot in the road and nothing more. My self delusion came to an abrupt end when the engine quit a few miles later. I coasted the bike to a stop on the shoulder of I-68. I now know there is something worse than putting your head down and riding through a violent thunderstorm. Sitting on the shoulder of an interstate at the top of a mountain as the storm rages on, is definitely a notch or two up the “this sucks” scale.

I had no idea what the problem was, but it closely resembled a fuel starvation problem. I had filled up at a small gas station about 100 miles back and thought it was possible I had gotten some bad fuel. I called my mechanic, Roger Sinclair to see if he had any suggestions. Unfortunately, in addition to being in a full blown storm, I also had intermittent cell phone coverage. I managed to get a phone call out for a tow truck before losing service completely. After that there was nothing to do but find whatever shelter there was and wait.

I climbed a small hill to a clump of trees and waited. After an hour of waiting, no help was coming, but at least the storms had passed. I went back down to the bike. Not really expecting it to start, I pushed the starter button and it fired right up. I hopped on and headed down the road. Perhaps the bad fuel had passed. A slight delay and nothing else I mused. But it was not to be as the engine began acting up not a mile further down the road. It finally quit as I coasted down an exit ramp and into a gas station parking lot.

I tried a couple cans of Dry Gas to see if this would solve the bad gas problem. Once again, the bike started up. I let the bike idle for nearly 10 minutes with no noticeable problems. I was beginning to think that I may have solved the problem. I tried riding the bike up and down the road in front of the station. As soon as I got some speed up, the bike would die. I spoke to Roger again. The nearest dealership that would work on the bike immediately was in Pittsburgh, PA nearly 150 miles away. There was little to do but wait for the tow truck to haul the bike up there.

Almost on cue the truck arrived. We loaded the bike on the truck and headed for Pittsburgh. I talked with Bill, the driver, but I was only slightly connected to the conversation. I was still stunned that
after so much preparation, I had not even made it out of Maryland without breaking down. My mind was
going over a dozen different options to get to St. Louis for the start of the Rally.

Bill told me he was recovering from his sixth heart attack as he fired up one cigarette after
another. He went on to tell me he had just buried his son who had recently died after battling a life long
illness. As he spoke about his son, I could see him fighting back his tears. It was also clear that he was
extremely proud of his son, who would never make his college graduation. It was a sobering
conversation. It made me realize that I really had no problems.

Bill asked me where I was going. I told him I was headed to St. Louis to compete in the Iron Butt
Rally. I explained what the Rally was, using the “Mother of All Scavenger Hunts” analogy. He then asked
me, “So how do you get involved in something like that.” Once again, Bill had pushed me back in
thought. How the heck did I get here? Riding through the mountains of western Maryland in an old
rickety tow truck, desperate to fix a broken bike to ride across the country to do something no one in their
right mind would want to do.

Bill would be the first of many people that would come to me aid in the next two weeks. I am
indebted to each and every one of them. Though it may sound a little strange, I would not have been
able to fail so spectacularly without their assistance. It would become a tragic comedy of Shakespearean
proportions.

We arrived a few hours later at Pittsburgh BMW. The service manager had cleared a spot on
their schedule for me. I explained the problem, unloaded the bike and started browsing motorcycles in
the showroom, just in case. Less than an hour later, the problem had been diagnosed and fixed. I had
been having problems with the Rider Information Display (RID) on the bike. It had been freezing up
intermittently. Though not a major problem, this would deprive me of both my fuel gauge and more
importantly, the clock on the bike.

Roger had suggesting changing the relay to fix the problem. About a week before leaving, I had
done just that. However I had failed to secure the new relay firmly in place. The more I rode the bike, the
more vibration it got. This caused the relay to gradually work loose. Once the relay lost contact, the fuel
pump stopped working and the bike lost all fuel pressure and died. The mechanic merely had to snap the
relay back in place. Problem solved.

I appropriately felt like a moron. But I was a happy moron, even if my wallet was now some
$600 lighter for the experience. This would only be the first of many unexpected expenses for the Rally.

I quickly headed west on I-70. I added a relay check to my list of things to do when the bike
breaks down. Sounds pretty simple, but I had never thought about it before. I stopped east of St.
Louis Thursday night. The ride had been fairly forgettable. I was ready to go. The waiting was nearly
over.

The next morning, I headed to Gateway BMW to have a new set of tires put on the bike. I
planned on running Metzler Tourance Tires for the entire Rally. Though the rear tire would probably get a
little thin near the end, I was pretty confident I would make it through the Rally on one set. I was
mistaken.

I ran into Jim Owen and a couple other riders at the dealership. We talked briefly. Jim had been
in excellent position to win the 2005 Rally when his bike suffered a catastrophic breakdown on the last
leg. I looked at his bike and was impressed by the set-up. I made some mental notes about some of the
things I liked. Many long distance bikes are set up with way too many gadgets. Every time you add
something to your bike, it is just one more thing to fail or distract you. You need to weigh that cost
against the benefit you will get from the accessory. Jim’s bike seemed to strike a good balance.
A couple of hours later I was back on the road for the short ride to the Rally Hotel. As I rode into the lot, I saw a couple dozen other bikes already there. People were milling around, but things were as expected with three days to go to the start. I checked into the hotel and made some calls to friends and family. Nancy had started her blog about the Rally and was appropriately making fun of my “operator error” breakdown. Another problem had reared its ugly head.

The GPS tracker I was using was not working. The unit allowed Nancy to track me over the Internet and, in cases of emergency, locate me and send assistance. We tried everything to get it working, but it was useless. Once again, I got the credit card out and purchased another unit. I made arrangements for the overnight Saturday delivery. Roger would be arriving late Friday night and could help me with the install if necessary. Another $600 was gone with the wind. But there was no compromise on this one. I would not ride the Rally without a functioning unit. More importantly, Nancy would not let me ride it without one.

I spent the rest of the day catching up with friends and riders I had not seen for a while. Paul Taylor was working on a job in nearby town and would be around for the entire Rally. John Ryan, while not riding in the Rally, was nonetheless planning a monster ride of his own. He planned to ride eleven straight 1500 mile days to set yet another endurance record. Mad scientist Leon Begeman had helped John set up his FJR 1300 with a special long distance fuel tank. I believe Leon retrofitted a fuel tank from a 1963 Volkswagen Beetle so that John’s bike would now carry something like 43 gallons of gas allowing him to only stop every 3rd day for gas. If I ever doubted John’s sanity, this confirmed to me that he had truly lost his mind. I also had no doubt that if anyone could do it, he could.

I ran into Bill Shaw, Rebecca Vaughn, Jim Shaw, Paul and Voni Glaves, Ed Phelps, Vicki and Sherril Johnston and many others. If not for the little 11 day ride coming up, it would have been a very pleasant weekend. As it was, the weekend passed interminably slow. I met many of the riders and was more than pleasantly surprised to count more than twenty bikes with BeadRiders on them. Very cool. I tried to get as many pictures as possible.
Saturday tech inspection came and went without any major problems. Once again, riders waited in line for long periods as the check in process progressed. One new twist was a videotaped interview of every rider by Dean Tanji. Dean was working on some type of film of the Rally. Every rider was asked a series of questions, including what their goal was for the Rally. Having finished second in 2005, I was only interested in one goal. To win. Anything short of that would be disappointing.

After completing my check-in, I went out to the bike to replace the GPS Tracker. To replace the unit, I needed to remove the fuel tank, a fairly straight forward task, but one that leaves the bike looking...
somewhat “disassembled”. As I worked, Bob Higdon walked by and remarked, “Oh, this can’t be good.” I assured Bob that things were not as bad as they appeared. I completed the swap within an hour and after some quick testing, found the new unit to be working perfectly. Nancy could even identify what space the bike was parked in at the hotel.

As in 2005, many riders were working on their bikes in the lot over the weekend. Though this may seem to the casual observer that the bikes were not ready for the Rally, nothing could be further from the truth. Most of the bikes are very sophisticated machines, running multiple GPS units, laptop computers, Satellite trackers/Radios, Radar Detectors, XM weather, HID lights, CB Radios, etc. Sometimes gremlins seem to invade these items.
Though Roger had come to St. Louis to provide whatever support he could to me, he ended up working on the bikes of nearly two dozen riders. He was one of the busiest persons in the lot, working from early in the morning to well into the night. Many of the riders owe him debt of gratitude for his assistance.

Late on Saturday, Dean Tanji approached me and asked if I would be willing to allow him to videotape some of my route planning after the Bonus listings for the first leg were handed out Sunday night. I was hesitant to say yes and told him I would get back with him. In 2005, things were very hectic after the initial bonus packages were handed out. I was easily distracted and more than overwhelmed. This led to a horrible routing error during the first leg. I did not want a repeat of that scenario. I talked it over with Paul, Nancy, John and Roger. Dean also assured me that the intrusion would be minimal and that he only wanted to observe. Against my own advice, I agreed to let Dean videotape my route planning. I could only hope the distraction would not lead to another disaster like 2005. I anticipated this Rally would test the route planning skills of the even the best riders. I would not be disappointed.
Chapter 2

The Plotting Thickens

The Sunday banquet arrived soon enough. I sat by myself for the dinner, again not really wanting to hear the conversation of other riders. As soon as the route sheets were handed out, I got exactly what I expected. Thirty eight pages with over 100 bonus locations. Prior to the Rally, I had practiced routing using the bonus lists from every prior Rally. Having done that, I saw that this was the most complex leg of any Rally, easily surpassing the final legs in 2005 and 1999. The 1999 final leg had taken me nearly 90 minutes to plan, the longest of any that I had practiced.

As Lisa Landry and Mike Kneebone talked at the podium, I went to work. I quickly went through the bonuses counting points. As I did this, I made sure to listen for any new information coming from the podium. As the meeting was wrapping up, I had already divided the bonuses into small, medium and large quantities based upon point value. I retired to my room to start doing some serious number crunching.

People drifted in and out of the room. After a while, I got tired of answering the door and just propped the door open. Roger had brought a map of North America and was plotting bonuses on the map. Though this can be useful for seeing the big picture of what is where, it is not exceptionally conducive to coming up with a winning route. People talked, bonuses were discussed. I tried to block out as much as possible as I methodically entered every bonus into my laptop. Dean came to the room and asked me some questions about what I was doing. I explained the process, but told him I was no where near a route yet. I was not going to repeat 2005. He stated he would come back in a couple of hours to see where I was.

Mike Kneebone, Bob Higdon and other Rally officials stopped by to observe. I continued plotting. It was slow slogging, but I knew it would be worthwhile. After several hours of plotting, I finally had all the bonuses loaded into the computer. I started crunching even more numbers. I was looking for a route of 4800-5200 miles that would yield the most points.
There were two obvious choices. Ride to the northeast to large bonuses in New Brunswick or ride to the southeast to large bonuses in Louisiana and Florida. Many of the bonuses worked around daylight timing. The large bonuses in New Brunswick had to be obtained at low tide as they required a short walk across the ocean floor. It became very apparent there were not enough points on the southeast route to be competitive. Once again, it appeared that I would be riding to New Brunswick. It was déjà vu all over again.

Vicki Johnston stopped by. She concurred and had come to the same conclusion that northeast was the way to go. That was where the real work began. It seemed to me that the Rally planners were obviously pushing the riders in an easterly direction along I-70, then up to Maine and into Canada. Large bonuses dotted the route like breadcrumbs. Paul and Roger favored a more technical route picking up many of the smaller bonuses along the way. I was leaning toward a more sledge hammer route making a hard push for the large bonus in Maine at Reynolds Motorsports, arriving there at 9:00 AM on Tuesday morning, as soon as it opened.

From there I would head up to Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and over to New Brunswick. After that, things would get very tight going for a large bonus on the upper peninsula of Michigan and then dropping down into Chicago by Thursday night to snag 3 large bonuses there. The route was very tight but I thought doable. The key would be to hit the bonuses in Maine and New Brunswick early.

Unlike 2005, I could never get comfortable with this route. Timing was so crucial. The window in New Brunswick was only two hours. If I missed it, I might as well go home. The Rally would be over for me.

Dean came back. I gave him my route but was still not happy. I loaded the bonuses in the GPS and tried to sleep. The more I tried to sleep, the less it would come. I kept trying to make the windows in the route larger and easier to hit with no success. Finally around 3:00 AM, I came up with a different idea. Catching the ferry from Maine to Nova Scotia would save a ton of time. I would still need to be in Maine early Tuesday morning, but the route seemed very reasonable now. Finally by 4:30 AM I was pretty comfortable with the route and fell asleep. I awoke about two hours later to start preparing.

I called Nancy to have her check the ferry schedule as I did not have internet access. I was hoping it ran every hour or so, but would settle for twice a day. After talking with Nancy, I started packing the bike, getting ready to head out. After a quick breakfast, Nancy called back with the bad news. The ferry would not work. It departed late in the afternoon on Tuesday. I was crushed. I thought I had come up with a very good option and now I had to revert to original overland route. [Through miscommunication or some other mistake, the ferry schedule Nancy gave me was wrong. Alex Schmitt would successfully take the ferry on this exact route and be well positioned in 4th place after the first leg.]

Once again, I was not happy with my route. Though I thought it was a good one that would leave me in striking distance, I did not think it was a winning route. I spoke with Paul and Roger who again brought up the more technical route with a gazillion stops on the way to Maine. I still did not like that route. Too many stops would take too much time and I could miss the Maine window. If I missed Maine, I missed New Brunswick. If I missed New Brunswick, I missed Chicago…and yada yada yada. I stayed with the original plan.

Chapter 3
When It Rains....

As the riders readied themselves and their bikes, morning storm clouds rolled in from the west. Almost on cue, just minutes before the start, the clouds let loose a deluge. The start would be a soggy one, but it would be nothing compared to what awaited the riders heading east.
As the riders headed out, the rain would blow through almost as quickly as it had started. Nearly every rider would head for the Arch in St. Louis. It was a large bonus only minutes away from the start. Clearly the Rally planners wanted everyone to go there. Predictably, Dean and his ever present cameras were waiting for riders at the Arch. And just as predictably, I got lost going to the Arch and turned a 10 minute ride into a 30 minute ride. This was not starting well. This mistake was compounded by my decision to store my receipts in the left Jesse Bag, whereas every other Rally I had done, I had placed them in the right bag. This mistake would not become apparent for many, many hours.

The Arch Bonus. Strangers Kept Showing Up in My Pictures

Leaving the Arch I headed east on I-70 in beautiful sunshine. I checked the weather on the GPS and found that partly sunny skies were predicted all the way to New York. Once things settled down, I called Vicki to see what bonuses she had decided to go to on her way to Maine. When she failed to answer, I left her a message that I was riding in blue skies and singing my way to West Virginia. I would soon regret this message.

East of St. Louis the skies would begin to darken as I approached Indiana. Soon the blue skies were gone, quickly replaced by low hanging bands of grey clouds. And then the rain started. It rained and rained. And just when I thought I would push through the rain, it rained harder. I checked the GPS again. Once again the GPS confirmed the sun was out and it was not raining. I was not swayed by this evidence as I continued to ride east through more and more rain. I also made a mental note to immediately cancel my XM weather subscription when I got home.

I called Nancy who confirmed my worst fears. I was in the middle of a large green blob of rain that was moving east with me. There would be no “punching through” this rain band. I would only leave it when I headed north out of New York. It would turn out to be 1123 miles of continuous rain before I would see dry riding again. Had this not been the Iron Butt Rally, I would probably have ridden straight home, pulled the covers over my head and called the Rallymaster with a faked hamstring injury. As it was, there was nothing to do but ride on.

I stopped for a large Bonus at Hoagie’s Restaurant in Moundsville, West Virginia. The folks there had put out a huge spread for the riders. There were just a couple of riders milling about while I was
there. I really wish I could have spent more time thanking the hosts for their generosity, but I had to keep moving. I wolfed down two bananas and got back on the bike.

I was absolutely miserable, as I am sure every other rider was. At least I was hoping they were miserable. My water proof Seal Skinz gloves were useless. The one piece riding suit and my boots were doing their job, but water was slowly being absorbed by my helmet. Soon my head was soaked. I stopped to put my heated jacket on as the night air brought on a strong chill. Running the power cord for the jacket out of the rain suit forced me to keep the rain suit unzipped, only adding to my discomfort. I was wet, but at least I was warm....I guess moist was a good description. I could almost feel the fungus starting to incubate as I entered Pennsylvania.

Those of you that have read about some of my previous rides know how I feel about the Pennsylvania Turnpike. It is without question the most dangerous road in the universe. And to top it off, every time I am on it, it is raining and at night. This would be no exception. My pace decreased markedly. Trucks passed me. Buses passed me. Old ladies driving Winnebago’s passed me. Every rider in the Rally passed me, including those riding two up. I swallowed what was left of my pride and pushed on. Between my bad night vision and the rain, I never really threatened the speed limit. I also did not know it at the time, but I lost one of my Motolights that night and the Phillips HID lights were not working properly.

As midnight approached, the J&M CB Radio started acting up. Water had saturated the helmet, soaking the microphone. This led to a major problem. I could still receive telephone calls, but the person on the other end could not hear me. The microphone had failed. People would call me and the phone would answer. I would scream into the microphone, but no one could hear me. Call after call was simply “Hello?...Hello?... Chris, can you hear me?” This was incredibly frustrating. I had spent a considerable amount of money to switch from Autocom to J&M after the Autocom failed in 2005 halfway through the Rally.

Now the J&M had not even made it through the first night without failing. There was nothing to do but ride on. I did not want to take the time to stop and call Nancy to explain the problem. That could wait until the morning. I rode on through the night, rain continuing to fall.

I wanted to get through New York before morning rush hour. I could not afford to be delayed for several hours in traffic. New York was uneventful, but I was glad to have it in my rear view mirror. The rain had slowed my progress. I was nearly 90 minutes behind schedule for my planned arrival in Maine. Though my windows were slowly closing, they were far from shut. Given the horrible weather, I was hopeful that many of the riders had stopped at some point during the night. I knew many of the top riders would not stop, but I also felt that the herd had probably been thinned somewhat.

I finally broke out of the rain north of New York. I was thrilled. Almost instantly, I thought, “Well, that wasn’t so bad.” The riders that had stopped would still have to cope with the rain this morning. I pointed north, hoping to put some distance between them and me.

Two years ago, I had made this exact trek out of New York City to Buxton. All things considered, I thought I was in pretty good shape this time. I still felt very fresh and was making good time. My ETA to the Maine bonus was getting better with every mile. I would still be about an hour off my ideal time, but as they say, that was well within specs.

I called Nancy at a gas stop and informed her of the microphone failure. She would get in touch with Roger, who would overnight a new headset to the St. Louis, where it would be waiting for me. I asked her to pass along the news to my friends and family. I wanted them to call and urge me on, but it would be a one way conversation. I actually started to enjoy the calls in a strange way. Many of the calls were very short, while others would go on for some time as Nancy would read emails and rally updates to me. All this made the miles seem to fly by.
I pulled into the Maine bonus at Reynolds Motor Sport about an hour behind schedule. The bonus required a 30 minute stay, so I planned a short nap. I ran into Alex Schmitt who was getting ready to pull out. It was then that I found out about the mix-up in the Ferry schedule. I was disappointed, but not tremendously. In fact, the more I had thought about the Ferry route, there was true potential for disaster if the timing did not work out. It gets a little complicated, but it has to do with the timing of the rest bonuses and the day only bonus in Nova Scotia. Alex would make it, but only by the narrowest of margins. An unfavorable ruling at the scoring table would have seriously hurt his chances at winning.

After checking in at the dealership, I stripped down to my long johns and stretched out on the parking lot for a short nap. Fifteen minutes later, I awoke and forced some food down. Reynolds had graciously provided food for the riders that would make this bonus. Vicki Johnston arrived. She had taken a more southerly route, and hit almost no rain. I cursed under my breath. Had I known that, I would have dropped down south and done the same thing.

Thirty minutes after arriving I checked out and headed north. I stopped and picked up two quick bonuses in nearby Bath. I needed to get as far along as possible to be in position to hit the large bonus on Prince Edward Island at dawn Wednesday morning. I also needed to start my rest bonus before midnight for my route to work. I could then take a well deserved 6 hour nap. First a quick ride over to Nova Scotia for a large 24 hour bonus in Halifax.

Crossing the border was quick and easy. The Canadian Inspector asked me if I was on one of those Scavenger Hunts again. Two years ago, I had explained this to another Inspector as I was on my way to New Brunswick. I chuckled as I guess she must have noted it in my record. The record must say something like, "Likes to go to New Brunswick to visit obscure sites for something these Americans call a Scavenger Hunt." Given that this would be my third visit to New Brunswick in 2 years, I was beginning to suspect collusion between the IBA and the New Brunswick Bureau of Tourism.

I rode along many of the same roads I had seen two years ago, going through some of the same towns. As I crossed from New Brunswick into Nova Scotia I noted a bunch of convenient hotels
in Amherst that seemed to fit my need. I planned to shoot south to Halifax, grab the bonus there and make it back to Amherst by midnight. This would leave me well positioned to get the bonus on Prince Edward Island near dawn on Wednesday. Things were looking good. I should have known better.

I still could not talk to anyone, but Nancy and Paul kept me entertained with tidbits and information they uncovered about the Rally. Nancy would read me Tom Austin’s Rally reports which painted a pretty good picture of the Rally. Though I missed Bob Higdon’s reports, I thought Tom did an outstanding job with a difficult task. Nancy and Paul would also watch the Star Traxx riders and try to decipher who was who. I was not too concerned about the other riders. The Rally would not be won on this leg, but it could be lost. I was pretty confident in my ability to get stronger as the Rally wore on. I just wanted to be positioned to make a push for the win in the final days.

Chapter 4

No Room at the Inn

I arrived in Halifax, pretty close to on time. I grabbed the bonus and began backtracking toward Amherst. I arrived in Amherst shortly before midnight and picked up six double cheeseburgers from a McDonalds next to a hotel. I went into the hotel to get a room. Things were about to get bad. Not only did they not have any rooms, there were no rooms available in the entire town. There were no rooms in the next town. There were no rooms available within a thousand miles of where I stood with my 6 double cheeseburgers! I wanted to scream out, “For the love of God man, how can there be no rooms available? Who would want a room in this backwater, nothing town?” However, I realized that I now desperately wanted a room in this town.

I felt like crying. I had been riding hard for over 30 hours and had started the Rally with a sleep deficit. But there was nothing to do. I returned to the parking lot and pulled the bike into a dark corner. I ate half the hamburgers and threw the rest away, hopefully far enough to keep the rats on the other side of the lot. It was cold with the temperature hovering in the 40’s. I put on everything piece of clothing I could, including my rain suit. Using the bike cover as a blanket, I went to sleep on the pavement, setting the timer for 5 hours. I really needed some quality sleep, but this was as good as it was going to get.

My Sleeping Accomodations. Note the Screaming Meanie Next to the Cover.
Shortly before dawn, I woke the next morning. I walked back to the McDonalds and picked up another receipt to end my sleep bonus. I was cold and stiff, but I felt somewhat refreshed. I called Nancy and had her pull up the weather. She thought it looked reasonably good, but there was a slight chance of rain. I hopped on the bike and headed out for Prince Edward Island.

The Confederation Bridge to PEI is one very, very long bridge, but it is a pleasant ride across. I grabbed the Green Gable House bonus on the island back tracked toward New Brunswick. I was headed toward Campbellton and then on to the large bonus at Perce Rock, New Brunswick. I needed to hit the Perce Rock bonus around 1:30 PM to make the Chicagobonuses work. Much later than that, then the entire route would go down the drain.

I pulled into Campbellton later that morning. The directions on the bonus were not correct, but having been there in 2005, I knew the town wasn’t that big. After asking directions, I found the large Salmon bonus and took off for Perce Rock. Things started going awry quickly. The road to Perce rock was a two lane coastal road that wound around the Gaspe Peninsula in the extreme northeast of New Brunswick. Traffic moved at a snail's pace. To make matters worse, construction delays dotted the entire route. I crawled along the last 100 miles.
I finally pulled into Perce Rock a solid hour and a half behind schedule. I was anxious to get the bonus and start backtracking. I failed to anticipate the long walk out to the bonus across the ocean floor. This easily consumed another 45 minutes. By the time I returned to the bike, I knew my plan was in serious jeopardy. It was about to get much worse.
As I returned to the bike, I stopped in my tracks. The fuel cap for the auxiliary tank was gone. I had refueled 60 miles back outside of Campbellton. I instantly knew I had failed to replace the cap after refueling. The auxiliary tank was still filled with fuel. Amazingly, it did not appear as if any fuel had sloshed out during the past 60 miles.

A lot of success in long distance riding comes from doing the same thing all the time. Creating routines and staying with them is extremely important. When you are tired, it becomes easier to make mistakes, both physical and mental. My fuel stops are almost always identical, whether in a rally or not. Everything from where I put my helmet to which hand I pump fuel with is done the same way....all the time. Nancy always complains that I am always sitting back on my bike, ready to go, treating every stop like an Indy pit stop.

The routine had now been upset. Because of problems with the J&M Headset, I had to make telephone calls during gas stops, something I would never do normally. At the last stop, I had used the speaker phone on the cell to call Nancy. In talking with her, I became distracted and left the cap on top of the auxiliary tank as I rode off. I could picture it in my mind just sitting there.

I tried to think of anything I had to secure the opening, but never really came up with anything. Cursing myself over and over again for incredible stupidity, I started riding back to Campbellton. I needed to retrace my route anyway on my way to the Upper Peninsula in Michigan. I tried to not think about the three gallons of gas that would spill over the hot engine if I happened to drop the bike.

Heading out of Perce Rock, it soon became apparent that I had other problems. I was one of the last riders, if not the last rider to obtain the Perce Rock bonus. My calculations had not anticipated a long walk to obtain the bonus. I started running routes with the GPS. The Chicago bonuses were going to be a problem. Even with little or no stops, the timing was not looking good. Traffic was also becoming a problem. Every small town was putting me further and further behind. Every construction zone seemed to conspire against me.
I came to yet another red light, approximately one mile from where I had last refueled and lost the fuel cap. As I sat there, I looked at an object on the ground in the lane across from me. Amazingly enough, my fuel cap sat there, battered but still in one piece. I hopped off the bike and went over and picked it up. I pulled back into the same gas station I had left hours before and tried to mate the cap back with the tank. The threads were severely damaged. I could not get the cap to fit back on.

Using a pocketknife I was able to sufficiently repair the cap where I could get it back on the tank. It would only turn about a quarter turn, but at least fuel would not spill out if the bike went down. With that problem fixed for the time being, I pulled out the laptop to check the route. As I suspected, Chicago was not going to happen. I had lost at least two hours off my route. Without the large Chicago bonuses, the route was doomed. It was time for a change.

Chapter 5

Plan B

I called Nancy and had her contact Terry Smith from Sampson Sport Touring to ship a new fuel cap to St. Louis. I told her that my route was screwed up. As I spoke with her, I looked down at my jacket. I had been riding for the past few hours with one of my pockets unzipped. Unfortunately, I had $500 stored in that pocket for emergency funds. The money was gone, lost somewhere on Gaspe Peninsula. I think Nancy wanted to chastise me for yet another stupid error, but I beat her to it. Obviously I was trying to squeeze as many mistakes as possible into this leg.

There was no choice but to head south. I knew there were bunches of bonuses along the route I had just rode. I had skipped them all to make it to Perce Rock on time. The area would also be familiar, since I had just ridden it. I called Paul Taylor and spoke with him. Though I was dejected, Paul did not think it was all bad news. He thought there were a fairly large amount of points to be had along the route. Whether there was or not became academic, since I had no clear alternative.

I headed south toward the longest covered bridge in the world in Hartland, New Brunswick. South of Campbellton traffic had finally eased up and I was able to move along at a decent speed. Apparently it was just a tad too decent, because I encountered Canadian Mounted Trooper that took exception with my pace. I was a little surprised to see him, as I had not really seen any vehicles in the past 20 miles. It was a very desolate area of New Brunswick.

He politely informed me that he had clocked me at 120. I was stunned and immediately began to protest until he explained that it was 120 kilometers per hour, not miles per hour. He explained that he really had not thought I was going that fast, but that I should be very careful with night approaching, the critters would be coming out and they had a lot of moose in the area. Properly chastised with his warning, I continued on my way watching for four legged creatures of all sizes.

I arrived in Hartland, well after sunset. The bridge was a daytime bonus only. I stared out to where the bridge was supposed to be, but was rewarded with only the darkest of dark. I saw no bridge. There was nothing to do but continue south. So far, I was off to a smashing start on Plan B. First bonus….zero points.

Passing back into the United States in Houlton, Maine, the Customs Inspector would also issue me a moose warning. The ride down 95 toward Bangor is extremely desolate with few towns and even fewer lights. I was the only thing moving. I occasionally would come across another vehicle and would use them to “plow the field” against the critters of the night. No moose were sighted, but deer abounded. Mostly though, they grazed beside the road, barely acknowledging me as I passed.
As I rode, I weighed the pros and cons of the bonus in Boston, Paul Revere’s House. The bonus was sort of on the way to the New York bonuses, but would still eat a lot of time. I wanted to get to the New York bonuses at daybreak, collect them and get out of the city before rush hour fully developed. After much internal debate, I decided to try for the Boston bonus. It would be nearly 4:00 AM when I got there, so Boston traffic would not be an issue, so I thought.

The RID was continuing to give me problems, still locking up. To reset it, I had to pull the fuse under the seat at every stop. To say this became tedious would be an understatement, but there was nothing else to do. I was also having problems with Phillips HID lights. Though it was hard to tell while riding, it did not appear that both lights were igniting. With four HID lights on the bike, plus the Motolights, I should have been burning a hole in the night, but that was not the case. The light output seemed very dim.

I arrived in downtown Boston on schedule, but almost immediately regretted the choice to come there. The Sumner Tunnel was closed. The “Dig” was in full bloom. This massive construction project has an unique goal, to bury every road in the city at least one mile beneath the surface. This would somehow solve the traffic problem in the city. More immediately it was causing me serious navigation problems. I was in and out of tunnels constantly, making a consistent GPS signal impossible. I would come within a few tenths of a mile of the bonus and then end up back in a tunnel. Somehow I kept ending up at Logan International Airport. I saw signs for the Revere House, but never could find it. After an hour of useless searching, I gave up. As far as I could tell, Paul Revere never lived in Boston and no one will ever convince me otherwise. Plan B so far, two bonuses... zero points.

I headed out of Boston for New York. It now had become apparent that the only light working on the bike was the main low beam. Nothing else was working. At a fuel stop, I began pulling fuses and relays to see if I could find a common answer. Everything seemed normal. After replacing everything, all the lights worked again. I never would find the cause and the problem never resurfaced.

Near Hartford, I pulled into a church parking lot and slept for an hour. I knew this would probably put me in New York rush hour, but I needed a quick recharge. Afterward, I felt great and headed for the Big Apple. I was still bummed about Boston, but there was nothing else to do about it. I had made a mistake. It was time to move on. Every rider will make mistakes and have problems. To dwell on your mistakes is pointless and distracting.

I have noticed Rally Masters like to put bonuses in places where riders generally do not want to go. One of their favorite places is in big cities. Many riders will not go there, no matter the point value. New York is a favorite bonus location. In the 2005, there were four or five bonuses in New York that individually were not great, but together were substantial. This was the same again in 2007. However the points were much greater and the bonuses were not that far apart. Four were in Manhattan and two were on Coney Island. All told, they probably were not more than 10 miles apart. A good rider could probably collect them all in under an hour without traffic.

I hit the Manhattan bonuses first, taking them as they came. The second bonus, Carnegie Hall gave me the opportunity to do something I had always wanted to do, but had never had the opportunity to do. As I made my way to the bonus, I stopped as many people as I could to ask them “How do you get to Carnegie Hall?” After a few responses, I came across a man in a suit and posed the question to him. He started to answer and then stopped. He looked at me and said, “Practice, Practice, Practice.” I smiled, thanked him and rode off. “Practice, Practice, Practice” Now that’s funny. In fact, I happened to think it was downright hilarious as I laughed my way around Manhattan.
After a couple more stops in Manhattan, I rode over to Coney Island for two quick bonuses at Nathan’s and the Cyclone. I spent more time getting out of New York heading toward Atlantic City because of an accident. In reality, the New York bonuses were ridiculously easy and a good break from the endless droning of interstate miles.

I headed south on the Garden State Parkway, back in much more familiar territory. After turning east on the Atlantic City Expressway, I found myself riding beside a New Jersey State Trooper. I gave the trooper a friendly wave as we made our way to Atlantic City. I was a little surprised when he slowed down and fell in behind me. I was very surprised when he pulled me over a few minutes later. I certainly had not been speeding. In fact, I could not think of anything I had done. Perhaps he had heard of my exploits in New Brunswick.

After obtaining my license and registration, the trooper explained to me that he had pulled me over for “excessive leg swinging”. I almost started laughing, thinking that someone had put him up to this. With great restraint, I inquired as to what exactly was excessive leg swinging. In a very serious tone, he explained that should my foot actually hit the ground as I was swinging it, then there was an excellent chance that my leg would then act as a pole vault and throw me and the bike through the air. Once again, I fought back the urge to laugh out loud.

Now, as anyone that has ridden behind me knows, I routinely kick the ground riding down the road and not once in those tens of thousands of times have I flown through the air. Outside of the occasional painful raised lane marking, nothing remarkable has ever happened. I have kicked rocks, possums, a rabbit, dead deer and on one very smelly occasion, a skunk. But still, not one flying Wallenda off the bike. In fact, I was already well on my way to ruining another set of new boots during this Rally toe tapping my way across North America.

I would never want to speak ill of one of my brother officers, but this guy was clearly a boob. The more I feigned interest in what he was telling me, the more incredulous his statements became. I started thanking him for saving my life, saying I had no idea how close I had come to such a tragic accident. The more he talked, the more embarrassing he was to his profession. The trooper was obviously quite new and knew absolutely nothing about riding. He would have done better to heed the words of Abraham Lincoln. “Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.”
Once again properly chastised by law enforcement for my hazardous activity, I continued on my way to Atlantic City, happily toe tapping and leg swinging my way into town. I was careful to not swing my legs “excessively” though.

Back on the Atlantic City Expressway, I made my way to Philadelphia. Once again there were a good grouping of bonuses located pretty close to each other, as long as you didn’t mind a little urban riding. And as long as the points are there, that was where I was going.
The bonuses in Philadelphia were actually just about as easy as the New York bonuses. One of the bonuses was to obtain a receipt for a steak sandwich from Pat’s King of Steaks. When I arrived there was a long line at the counter. I had no interest in eating a steak sandwich at this time and went up to the first person in line. I asked him if he had ordered a steak sandwich. He stated that he had. I explained that I was on a scavenger hunt and would gladly pay for his dinner if I could have his receipt. He readily agreed. What I did not know was that he had ordered 7 steak sandwiches and that his dinner was over $50. A deal was a deal. I paid for his dinner and got one very expensive receipt. I had long ago ceased to be concerned about the money this Rally was costing.

The rest of the bonuses in Philadelphia were quite unremarkable. What was not unremarkable though was the traffic heading out of town toward the bonus in Reading, PA. It was the worse I saw the entire Rally. The back up lasted for miles and hours. By the time I got to Reading, I was pretty done in. I got to the area of the bonus, something called the “Pagoda”. I could not find it and was wondering aimlessly on some mountain roads. I pulled over, dejected tired and just plain done in. Darkness was falling and the daylight bonus was slipping through my fingers. The location I had plotted in the GPS was clearly not correct.

I sat there on a rock trying to sort out where this Pagoda might be. I re-read the directions in the bonus listings. None of the roads sounded like anything I had seen. Then I looked at the address, which was simply “The Pagoda, Skyline Drive.” Skyline meant up. I got back on the bike. Whenever I came to a turn, I took the road that went up. A few minutes later, the woods cleared and I came across the Pagoda with a stunning view of the Pennsylvania countryside.

Riding back down the mountain, I knew I was done and needed to get some sleep. I started searching for hotels between Reading and York. There were two bonuses in York I had hoped to get before dark. One was a day bonus at the Harley Factory and the other was a 24 hour bonus. I had decided to skip the day bonus and get the 24 hour bonus after grabbing some sleep.

As I searched the GPS for hotels, I got two phone calls, one from Nancy and one from Paul. Though I could still not speak with them, they were both offering words of encouragement and urging me on. Though they meant to encourage me, they had another effect. They really made me angry. After a good day riding, they still were pushing me on. I had not been in a bed since the Rally started and I had no intention of going any further. To say I was a little cranky was an understatement.

It’s a funny thing about being angry though. The angrier I was, the less tired I was. At some point in being angry I found myself halfway to York, with still time before sunset to get the Harley Factory day bonus. Many years before, Nancy and I had ridden this exact route as we were finishing her one and only endurance rally. I remembered she was pretty tired, yet managed to finish strong, literally running
out of gas as she arrived at the finish in York. I knew there was a hotel right next to the Harley Factory, so I continued on.

The bonus at the Harley Factory was to take a picture of a sign, which was mounted on the ground. Try as I might, I could not get a good picture of the sign with the sky to show the sun was still up. This was not a concern, since I could also get a receipt with the time printed on it as back up proof to show I had obtained the bonus during the allotted time.

I rode to the Days Inn next door, got a room, along with a timed receipt. I got to my room and barely undressed before falling into bed. I slept for about 5 hours, leaving the hotel around 3:00 AM Friday morning. I still had a bunch of bonuses to grab before getting to St. Louis later that afternoon.

Chapter 6

Back to St. Louis

I picked up the other York bonus before heading back once again to the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Of course, once again, it started raining. Between the rain and the fog, I never threatened the speed limit. Fortunately, the foul weather would be short lived as dawn approached. Making my way back across I-70 once again, I crisscrossed Ohio, picking up bonuses as I went.

I arrived in Marysville, Ohio where taking a picture of the Honda plant was a bonus location. I pulled up to the security gate of the Factory and explained to the guard that I was on a scavenger hunt and was going to take a picture of the Honda sign. The guard at the gate was an elderly gentleman. He said something, but because of my ear plugs, I could not hear what he said. I thought he waved me through. I rode to the middle of the parking lot and quickly snapped the picture. As I was finishing up, the security guard was quickly walking my way and didn’t look particularly happy.
I removed my plugs, just in time to hear, “I guess you don’t mind too well.” Now, it has been a few years since anyone told me that I didn’t “mind” too well, but I was pretty sure I knew what he meant. I guess he hadn’t waved me through after all. Once again I got a tongue lashing. Something about trespassing, arrests and violation of picture taking policies, but I really quit listening. It was clear he did not want me there, and I did not want to be there, so I decided to make us both happy and leave. Little did he know that there would be numerous other riders visiting him throughout the day. Perhaps they would mind him better.

Leaving Ohio, I dipped south for a few scattered bonuses in Kentucky. There was nothing spectacular about any of them, though I did get to stop at the home of the Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs. The track was disappointingly similar to just about every other track I have seen. I am not sure what I expected, but I was disappointed.
Yes, someone lives in the Spaceship House. Very strange.

One Very Serious Louisville Slugger
I started back for St. Louis heading out of Louisville. The ride was uneventful all the way back. Ironically, and annoyingly enough, I arrived back at the checkpoint in yet another rain storm. Starting and finishing in the rain. I was very surprised by the number of riders that seemed to have arrived very early. I arrived about 30 minutes before the penalty minutes started, which is not cutting it particularly close. However, given that we were facing a mandatory rest bonus, I don't know why so many riders chose to arrive so early.

Arriving at the Checkpoint, courtesy of Voni Glaives

After checking in to stop the clock, I checked in to a room to get organized. After going over my receipts, it was obvious that my first fuel receipt was going to be a problem. The extreme heat in the left Jesse Bag had bleached out the receipt. I suspected the judges would not be kind in their ruling about the validity of the receipt. The receipt for parking at the St. Louis Arch was similarly damaged, but still readable. I had moved the other receipts to the other Jesse Bag early in the leg so no other receipts were affected. All the other bonuses seemed to be in good order.

After getting organized I went down to be scored. There was a considerable wait. While I waited, I left my helmet with Paul Taylor and John Ryan. John's attempt at 11 consecutive 1500 mile days came to an end when he shredded a tire early on and suffered a blow out. Though he was not injured, it had brought his attempt to an end for now. Paul and John had the new J&M headset from Roger and were going to try and sort out the problems. They also replaced the gas cap on the auxiliary tank. The RID problem persisted but there was nothing that could easily be done to fix it.

I met with the Ira Agins, prior to being scored. Ira was the head scorer for the Rally and would be the arbiter of any scoring disputes. I presented my two damaged receipts and got the rulings I expected. The fuel receipt was out, but the Arch receipt was accepted. Being one of the last riders scored, I finally finished being scored near midnight and made my way back to the room.

In all, I collected 33 bonuses on the first leg over 4874 miles. This was more bonuses than I had collected during the entire rally in 2005. I figured we would get more of the same for the second leg, with a choice of a southwest or a northwest route. I thought I would be well positioned to make a run during the second and final leg. I went back to the room and got some much needed rest. The next bonus listings would be handed out at 4:00 AM Saturday morning.
Chapter 7

Act II

I awoke fairly refreshed shortly before 4:00 AM. At 4:00 AM sharp the Rider meeting started with the announcement of the top 10 riders. I was comfortably sitting in 7th place, the lost fuel receipt costing me a couple of places. More importantly the scoring differential between the leader, David Derrick and me was only 3%. In 2005, I had dug myself a 24% scoring differential hole. The top seven riders this year were separated by just a little over 3,000 points. Barring some major catastrophes, I was fairly confident, the winner would be one of the top seven.

The group contained some of the best riders in the field including Jim Owen, Alex Schmitt, Marty Leir, Mike Evans, Greg Burger and of course the leader David Derrick. Lurking just a little further back was another group of strong riders including Jeff Earls and Eric Jewell, who I was sure were aiming to move up.

The bonus listing for the second leg was, as expected, extremely large and complex. It contained well over a 100 bonuses covered in 38 pages of descriptions. After a quick examination, the breakdown fell into a general southwest direction and some more pronounced northwest directions. It was clear I would not be going anywhere anytime soon. This was going to take some time. I retired to my room and began the tedious task of inputting the bonuses into the laptop. I moved even slower than the bonuses in the first leg, trying to make sure I did not make any mistakes.

As before, people drifted in and out of the room, but with less fan fare. I finally finished with the bonus locations and began working on routes. The largest and most extreme bonuses were in the far northwest and included Homer, Alaska, HyderAlaska and Prudhoe Bay. Though I was doubtful these bonuses would be part of a winning route, I ran them anyway. They were quickly discarded. What did seem appealing was a route built along the southwest that included the Grand Canyon and then into California and into the Northwest.

I ran a few routes and was beginning to feel pretty good about the choices when I promptly deleted every bonus from the computer. What had taken me hours to do, was now gone. “I've just lost the Iron Butt Rally”, I said to whoever was in the room at the time. I was physically nauseous. I could not believe what I had just done. Every bonus, every route. They were all gone. Vicki Johnston was in the room running her own routes and tried to come to my rescue. We tried everything to get them back, but it was useless.

The morning had been flying past and in my mind I could hear every bike starting and the riders heading out. I had nothing. My hands were shaking I was so upset. I tried to clear my head and come up with a plan of action. Before deleting all the bonuses, I had a pretty good idea of where to go. I started putting in bonuses again. I ignored anything in Canada or Alaska. I also ignored the Texas bonuses and those in the extreme northwest of the US. Though there were still a lot of bonuses to input, it was faster the second time around.

The urge to get on the bike and ride was overwhelming. But with no place to go, there was no point. After I put everything back in, the route materialized again. The large bonuses were day bonuses and included the Grand Canyon and two groups in central California. I grouped them by day, planning on riding between the groups at night. I was not sure it was a perfect route, but I thought given the complexity of the bonuses, it could be a winning route, especially if some of the riders in front of me went for the Alaska bonuses.

Bob Woolridge had joined the room along with Paul and Vicki. One of the traits of the Iron Butt Rally, is the tendency for the Rally to repeat bonus locations. Many of the bonuses on the second leg had been bonuses on prior rallies, including Shiprock, New Mexico, the Ancient Bristlecone Forest, Mono Hot Springs, Death Valley, Dinosaur National Park and Gerlach, Nevada. We discussed the difficulties of
the bonuses, but nothing sounded all that bad. The roads to Mono Hot Springs and the Bristlecone Forest were not great, but how bad could they really be? The route focused on arriving at a large bonus at the Lick Observatory in California early Tuesday morning. If I made the bonus on time, I thought I would be in great shape.

With a plan in place, I headed down to the bike. I ran into Bob Higdon and Tom Austin in the parking lot. They asked me what I thought about the bonuses in Los Angeles. I told them I was not a big fan of Los Angeles. What about San Francisco then? I thought San Francisco was a great city and would be well worth visiting in the near future, concealing just the slightest smile. And with that, I was off, heading to Ship Rock, New Mexico, planning on making it there early Sunday morning.

I took the most direct route to Ship Rock, with the only detours being for bonuses that were directly along my route. If I could swing a dead cat and hit the bonus, I would stop. Otherwise, it was "Go West Young Man". My oscillating defunct feline would strike a small bonus in Tulsa and then one in Oklahoma City. The latter was the Survivor Tree at the site of the Oklahoma City bombing. I had always wanted to visit the memorial, but had never had the opportunity. When I arrived there was some type of ceremony going on at the site of the tree. Though such sites are common bonuses for endurance rallies, I often find myself uncomfortable with such locations. It is difficult to show the appropriate reverence for the victims of these horrific events and still get in and get out quickly. I really wish I could have spent more time here.
After Oklahoma City it was on to New Mexico. I rode on through the night, hoping to get to Ship Rock at dawn. Along the way there was a good size bonus in Mancos, Colorado that I wanted to grab. Once again, my progress would slow at night. One of the vagaries of using a GPS is that it frequently will take you along a quite unexpected route. I spent much of the night on two lane roads with no towns in site, when I had anticipated interstate much of the way. No matter, as there was ne’er a car in sight. I stopped for an hour and took a nap on a picnic table outside a small hospital.

Refreshed, I was off again before dawn. Dawn broke before I arrived in Mancos. I had seen deer everywhere throughout the night, but they had respectfully granted me the right of way and stayed off the road. Riding toward Mancos, yet another deer crossed in front of me. I slowed, anticipating his buddy
would be right behind. It didn’t matter. The deer ran out of the woods and slammed into the left side of
the bike, striking my left leg and the left Jesse bag in the process. I swerved briefly, but kept the bike
upright and braked to a stop to assess the damage to myself and to the bike.

Both appeared to be relatively unharmed. I had a large bruise on my left shin and a lot of blood
on the Jesse. Other than being shaken up, no real damage had been done. The deer was dead in the
road, the Jesse bag apparently breaking her neck. I climbed back on the bike and road off, more awake
than ever before. I called Nancy to fill her in and let her know where I was. I did not know if the tracker
was working well in the Colorado Mountains.

A few miles after striking the deer, two rally riders zipped past me. I guess I was still a little
shaken and had been putting along at a pitiful pace. The two bikes in front were dual FJR’s, but I wasn’t
really sure who it was. I was a little surprised to see any riders this far out. I figured this far into the Rally
nearly all the riders would have stopped for more rest. Apparently, as I so often am, I was wrong.

I fell in behind the riders as we arrived in Mancos for the giant arrows. I would follow them all the
way to Ship Rock, sometimes falling back, sometimes keeping up. It passed the miles away.

The three of us arrived in Ship Rock a while later. The Rock is visible from miles away. I
pulled into a gas station and confirmed that the large Rock in the middle of the desert was in fact Ship
Rock. The other two riders continued on ahead. The directions for the bonus routed the rider toward the
Rock along a dirt road off the highway. Along the highway, I found a marker that identified the landmark
as Ship Rock. I called Paul Taylor who told me that a picture with the sign and the landmark had been
acceptable in previous Rallies. He did not think I needed to go all the way to the Rock. Not wanting to
lose the bonus, I also called Lisa Landry for a final clarification. She assured me that a photo of the Rock
and the sign would be sufficient. I snapped the photo and quickly headed toward the Grand Canyon.
Riding across the Navajo Indian Reservation into Arizona, signs of poverty were everywhere. It was a depressing sight. The oppressive heat made everything seem worse. It seemed to be an impossible environment in which to live, yet I am sure the residents would probably say the same about living in Maryland. Trailers dotted the landscape every few miles or so. I could not help but be amazed and bothered by these sites. Though I am sure there are many tribes that are very prosperous, I have often found traveling through reservations to be a sobering and somber experience.

Chapter 8

A Hole in the Plan

I called almost everyone I knew. After spending the first leg as a mute, unable to speak with anyone, I found the ability to talk on the phone to be exhilarating. I am sure many of my friends got tired of hearing me babble on and on about nothing in particular. I called Nancy on the way to Grand Canyon. For years she had been after me to go and see this monument of nature. And for just as long, I had been putting it off for one reason or another. I told her that I was headed for the Grand Canyon. I believe her exact words were, “Don’t you dare look in that stinkin’ hole without me.” So now, I only had to take a picture of the “stinkin’ hole” without actually looking at it. This would actually be a lot easier than it sounded.

I entered the park at the North Rim and made my way to the Cape Royal overlook to get the picture. About 10 miles from the overlook the road was closed for maintenance or some reason. With the road being closed, I took a picture of the closure to claim the bonus. It was on to Sin City thereafter.
The bonus in Las Vegas was pretty simple. Take a photograph of the Statue of Liberty in front of New York, New York. Riding into the city, I rode through a small but violent line of storms that dumped rain and hail on me. I narrowly avoided a multi-car pile up that happened right in front of me just outside the city. The rain cooled everything off and actually felt pretty good once I was through the storms.

I pulled onto the median on the Strip in Las Vegas across from New York, New York. It is rare that I would ever actually park for any bonus unless I absolutely had to. This would be no exception. But the traffic on the Strip made my normal practice a bit touchy. There is a reason why pedestrians routinely get whacked along this road. I quickly snapped the photo, grabbed a gas receipt and headed north toward Beatty, Nevada.
I stopped in Beatty, Nevada and got a room for the night. I called Paul. Paul had been to my next bonus, the AncientBristlecone Forest on numerous occasions, most famously with Dennis Kessler during the 2003 Iron Butt Rally when Dennis' bike had spontaneously burst into flames and burnt down nearly to ashes. I picked Paul's brain for any details that could be helpful about the road in and out. The bonus, the Patriach Tree was located at the dead end of a 12 mile dirt road at 11,000 feet in the White Mountains, east of the Sierra Nevada. The trees are the believed to be the oldest living things on earth at an estimated age of 4,000 years old.

Paul suggested I lower the air pressure in my tires to increase traction once I reached the dirt road. This would be advice I wish I had taken and would come to regret ignoring. I then called Vicki Johnston. Though I had not talked with her since shortly after leaving St. Louis, I thought she might somewhere in the area. I wanted to be at the bonus at sunrise, which meant riding up the mountain in the dark. I thought it would be prudent to be with another rider, should anything unexpected happen.

Normally, I believe it is a huge mistake to ride a Rally with another rider. Two people are rarely, if ever, as efficient as one. I have known Vicki and her husband for a number of years, but had never ridden with her before. During the 2005 Rally, Vicki had passed me a number of times, but we did not ride together.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that Vicki had also planned to ride to the Patriarch tree at dawn the next day. We agreed to meet in the parking lot of the hotel at 3:00 AM to give us plenty of time to get up the mountain. As it turned out, we would need every minute of it. My original thought was to just ride together for this one bonus, but as things turned out, we would end up riding most of the remaining Rally together.

A few hours later, I pulled my gear together and met Vicki out in the parking lot. There were a couple other bikes parked in the lot, but none appeared to be stirring just yet. There was not a lot to say and I had a long day ahead. We got on the bikes and got moving with me in the lead. Riding through the desert at night, the moon illuminated the road ahead pretty well.

Animals did not seem to be a concern until we got closer to the bonus. As the road began twisting and turning in the foothills approaching the mountains. We began to see rabbits all over the
there were dozens of them at every turn. Unlike deer which seem to run directly at you at times, the "wascally wabbits" seem to be pretty adept at avoiding us. One particularly athletic one was able to scoot between my wheels without getting hit. Alas, one poor critter fell victim to Vicki's bike, but other than that, all the rest made it unscathed.

As we rode along California Highway 168, the GPS showed a turn to the right to reach the bonus. I stopped and confirmed with Vicki that her GPS was showing the same thing. The only problem was that there wasn't much of a road there. In fact, there was barely a trail there. We both surmised that this was the beginning of the stretch of bad road. Neither one of us was very happy looking at a sandy path barely 4 feet wide that seemed to go straight up the mountain. With nothing else to do, we headed up the "road". I nearly went down a half dozen times in the first 100 yards. This was terribly difficult. Not to mention, it was still pitch dark and the road seemed to be disappearing, or at least becoming harder to make out. Other trails seemed to criss-cross in and out making navigation even harder.

About one mile in, I began to think there was no way I could go on like this for another 11 miles. I stopped and zoomed the GPS out to show the "big" picture. At that point it became clear what had happened to us. The GPS had routed us up this goat path in an effort to shave a mile or two from the route. Had we just gone another mile down CA 168, we would have come to the paved road that would lead us up the mountain. Cursing myself for being incredibly stupid, I waved Vicki up to tell her of our mistake. It was at that point I noticed she was not behind me. My guess was that she had gone down somewhere in the past mile.

I turned my bike around and started down the mountain, again nearly dropping it a half dozen times. I came across Vicki a few minutes later. She had not gone down, but had the good sense to turn around and head back. After nearly an hour of hard work we made it back to pavement having traveled barely a mile or two. I told Vicki about our mistake. We rode down the highway and came to the correct entrance.

We entered the park and headed up the mountain. The road was narrow and twisty, but nothing really unusual. It was still dark when we came across another dirt trail. Once again, both GPS's were directing us down the path, indicating the bonus was located only .2 miles down the road. Vicki confirmed her GPS was showing the same. She asked if I felt like walking .2 miles to get the bonus. How hard could it be? We rode down the path.

We searched everywhere but could find nothing that looked like Patriarch Tree or plaque. We rode from one tree to another with no luck. Finally, when all else fails, read the directions. I pulled out the bonus listing. With good directions we headed back to the paved road and continue up the mountain. Following the GPS had now cost us close to 2 hours aimlessly riding through the woods in the dark. Just plain stupidity.

As dawn was breaking we came to the Visitor center and the end of the paved road. Signs clearly showed the way to the Patriarch Tree, 12 miles ahead. The pavement abruptly ended but we pushed on. The road was rocky and narrow, but nothing too extreme. We hit some soft sand about three miles in that certainly got our attention. Vicki slowed as I nearly went down. I stopped on the switchback above sand, more to take a quick break. We both agreed we had no business being on this road, but there was no turning back at this point.

I looked back at the section we had just traveled and saw another rider heading up. As he hit the heavy sand, the bike abruptly went down. It was hard to see the rider from our vantage point, but we could see the bike on its' side in the pre dawn light. As we slowly began turning our bikes around to head down to help the rider, the downed rider had lifted the bike and was once again heading up the mountain. We continued up the mountain and came to Patriarch Tree just after dawn.
We snapped our photos and headed back down. Despite our best efforts to get lost, we were still more or less on time. Going out, we made much better time. I began to get a low tire pressure warning from my Smart Tire monitor. It was showing slightly low pressure in my rear tire. I began cursing the monitor. I have complained for years that the system was not accurate and not worth the money it cost. It was just another false warning.

As we rode on, the monitor continued to show a slow and steady loss of air pressure. I stopped and asked Vicki to look at my rear tire. She could not see anything wrong, so we continued on. The monitor now showed I had lost nearly half the air in the tire. Something was definitely wrong. I stopped and rolled the bike forward as Vicki examined the tire. The problem became obvious. A large bolt had penetrated the rear tire and was still embedded in the tire. It was perfectly placed in the tread of the tire.
I nursed the bike back to pavement and assessed the situation. Vicki offered whatever assistance she could, but there was nothing she could do. She left me her can of Fix-O-Flat and continued down the mountain. If I could not repair the tire, getting a tow truck up the mountain could be problematic. I pulled the bolt out of the tire. It left a quarter inch hole in the tire. I pulled out my Stop-N-Go Tire Plugger and went to work. Several riders stopped and offered their assistance as I worked on the bike. Amazingly, I plugged the tire and pumped it back up within 15 minutes.

I hopped on the bike and headed down the mountain, silently composing the letter of endorsement I would be sending to the Stop-N-Go people after the Rally. I soon caught up with Vicki at a gas station outside of Yosemite National Park. There were several large bonuses in the park and we began once again riding together. I quickly forgot about my tire problems as I looked forward to seeing the park for the first time. That was a mistake. Twenty miles later, the tire monitor again began showing a slow leak. I stared at the digital readout, trying to will air back into the tire. Despite my psychic abilities, the pressure was steadily falling through the 30's and then into the 20's.

Shortly after entering Yosemite, I had to pull over to try and address the problem. After speaking with Vicki, we knew there was nothing for her to do. She continued on, as I tried to re-seal the tire. No matter what I tried, I could not find a way to completely seal the hole. I had now decided to change the Stop-N-Go tire plugging kit name, to Stop-N-Go-About-100-Miles. In all fairness, the tire had a large hole in, nearly a quarter inch wide that any plug would struggle to fill.

I called Roger. He suggested removing the valve stem core and filling the tire with the Fix-O-Flat foam. This was more involved than I wanted to get. Plus if I was unable to get the core back in the stem, I would definitely be stranded. I also spoke with Nancy and Paul. All three of them began working to find me another tire somewhere near me or where I planned to be later in the day. I pumped the tire back up and headed out again. Predictably, within 20 minutes or so, the tire would start losing pressure. So began the tedious process I would follow for the rest of the day. When I stopped to get a bonus, I would attach the pump to re-inflate the tire, while I got the bonus. Once inflated, I would ride to the next bonus and repeat the process all over again.

I grabbed the Hotel bonus in Yosemite and headed for the El Capitan bonus at Glacier Point. The sheer size of the wall was breathtaking. Getting both bonuses allowed the rider to see the
wall from below and above. It was yet another bonus where I wish I could have spent more time taking in the sights.

The road up to Glacier Point is long and curvy. The vista at the top provides a view of El Capitan from the other side of a small valley. Careful observers can follow the progress of climbers as they make their way up the famous wall. I arrived at the top to find Vicki just returning from taking her photo. I half jogged and walked to the bonus point while Vicki waited for me to return. I found a volunteer to hold my flag while I took the picture. For one brief, terrifying second, my helper dropped the flag, allowing it to briefly flutter in the breeze. He quickly snatched it back and held it up with a more determined grip.
I made my way back to the bikes. The Rally seemed to be set up for the riders to follow a natural line of large bonuses all the way to the Lick Observatory the next day. In that line was the bonus at the Mono Hot Springs. Vicki asked me what I knew about the road going into the bonus, which was nothing other than it was worth a lot of points. Another rider had told her the road was horrendous and he would not be going there because of that. As we road out of Yosemite, I tried getting in touch with Roger and Paul, but spotty cell service proved to be problematic. Finally after leaving the park, I was able to reach Paul. He had made arrangements with Santa Cruz BMW for a new tire, if I could get the bike there. The service manager and mechanic would come in at 5:00 AM Tuesday morning to take care of the bike.

I asked Paul about the road into Mono Hot Springs. Like other bonuses, this was a bonus that had been used in previous Rallies. Carefully straddling the truth, Paul replied that road was “nothing special” and is paved all the way to the bonus. A short while later, Paul called as he watched us approaching the bonus via my GPS tracker and gave me one last word of caution. The road would deteriorate the closer we got to the bonus. This would be an understatement. This road was just plain horrible.

I found this description of the road to Mono Hot Springs on the internet:

“State 168 out of Fresno is your ticket to Kaiser Pass. For last minute supplies and gasoline, stop in the small town of Prather, 16 miles before Shaver Lake. (Prather is also the site of the forest service’s High Sierra Ranger Station.) The highway winds uphill past Shaver Lake to the eastern shore of Huntington Lake and the turnoff for Kaiser Pass. From this point you must go easy on the gas pedal—Kaiser Pass Road is a narrow, circuitous byway that locals call a mountain pig path.”

Having now been down this road, I find this description to be an insult to all self respecting mountain pig paths. I didn’t think this road was nearly as well maintained as most mountain pig paths. I cannot imagine any scenario where someone would voluntarily ride down this road. I certainly didn’t.

Once we passed beautiful Shaver Lake, I lost all cell service. It would take us nearly three hours round trip to the bonus and backtracking our way out. The road gradually narrowed to something about the size of a golf cart path. And though it remained paved, much of the pavement was nothing more than
rock than had been carved out of the side of the mountain. About 15 miles before the bonus, rain started to fall, making the rocks slippery. The switchbacks were tight and numerous. Being in the lead, I held my breath every time I came around a corner looking for oncoming traffic. To my astonishment, occasional cars would pass us the other way. Most seem to be some type commercial traffic for a mining operation but some seem to be civilians out for a drive.

The road would narrow down to 8-10 feet wide at parts. The rock surface was hard on my rear tire which was again desperately low on air. I tried to not lean the bike at all for fear of pulling the tire off the wheel. When we finally pulled into Mono Hot Springs, I let a full sigh of relief out and began my routine of pumping the tire back up. The depressing thought was that we would have to do it all over again on the way out.

With the tire again re-inflated we started working our way out. Coming around yet another blind turn, I came face to face with a large SUV coming the other way. There was nowhere for me to go. I braked to a stop, a scant three feet from edge of the road staring down into nothing but empty air. The SUV kept coming. I put my head down and just braced for the impact that was sure to come and push me off the mountain. The other driver finally turned back to the right and slid by me on the left. I said a silent prayer of thanks and continued down the mountain.

Back in civilization, we stopped to get gas. We still had one more bonus before nightfall. With no room for error, we could still make the General Sherman Tree in the Sequoia National Park, but we would need every bit of the daylight left to make it in time. Wasting little time, we made our way back toward Fresno. I put the bonus location into the GPS, but for some reason the GPS was routing me on a route that traveled through Nevada and would get us to the bonus some 10 hours later. This obviously wasn’t going to work.

I called Nancy and had her pull up the longitude and latitude for the General Sherman Tree. Using these coordinates, I was finally able to get a good route to the bonus. Because we would be pushing the daylight limit, I also asked her to start searching for a location where we could obtain a timed receipt in case we were not able to obtain a good daylight picture. She called me back and confirmed that the gift shop would still be open where we could get a receipt. This turned out to be completely
unnecessary, as the receipt for the entrance to the park would turn out to be sufficient proof that we were there before sunset.

We arrived at the park and made our way to the General Sherman Tree. This is believed to be the largest living thing on the planet. As I suspected, given the denseness of the forest and the time of day, it was impossible to obtain a picture showing daylight. We would use our entrance receipts as proof of our time at the bonus.

Vicki led as we backtracked our way out of the park toward Fresno. I called Nancy. She made hotel reservations for us at a hotel next to the BMW dealership in Santa Cruz. I had hoped to make it there before midnight so we could start our 5 hour rest bonus and pick up an extra hour or two. Unfortunately, we were both pretty tired after over 20 hours of hard riding. When we arrived in Santa Cruz I left the bike in the parking lot of the dealership and walked over to the hotel for some well deserved sleep.

Chapter 9
California Dreaming

The next morning I walked back to the dealership to get the bike well before sunrise. I expected to have to wait while the tire was replaced, but amazingly, the tire had been replaced and the bike was ready to go. I can’t say enough about this type of service. Once again, and not for the last time, a BMW dealership, or more precisely, the employees at the dealership had gone above and beyond to get me back on the road. We were off, heading down to Big Sur for a good bonus.
Arriving at the Bixby Bridge in Big Sur, we ran into Rebecca Vaughn. Rebecca had just set an IBR record by spending over $400 for a hotel room on the Monterey Peninsula the night before. The price is even worse than that when you figure that most riders will be in a hotel room for just a few hours. We wished Rebecca well and worked our way north back to Santa Cruz for the boardwalk bonus.

Vicki in Big Sur, California

We began to sharpen our lane splitting skills in earnest as the morning rush progressed. Though it always seemed to be controlled chaos as we weaved our way through traffic, it certainly made rush hour traffic a non-factor. Being fairly well rested, we made good time and arrived at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk ahead of schedule. It also felt good to be able to lean over again and to not have to constantly stare at the tire monitor.
From Santa Cruz, it was just a short hop over to the large bonus at the Lick Observatory. As we rode I spoke with Nancy and Paul. By gathering information from a variety of sources, they were able to put together routes that were being run by other riders. I also relayed information that I had received from other riders, some of which was probably more rumor than fact.

In looking at what some of the other riders were doing, it appeared that no one in the top 10 had gone for the far north bonuses. The other riders seemed to fall into two groups, a clockwise route which would include Marty Leir, David Derrick, Greg Berger, Mike Evans and myself and a counterclockwise group that would include Alex Schmitt, Jeff Earls and Jim Owen. Everyone seemed to have built a route around the Lick Observatory bonus. Though some information seemed to be solid, I was never 100% sure where anyone else was unless I actually saw them myself. The Rally was far from over at this point.

We started up the road to the Observatory and found a tight, twisty road with sharp switchbacks all the way to the top. Though paved all the way to the top, we barely managed 10-20 mph all the way up. At the top there were numerous riders milling around. I saw Jeff Earls and spoke with him briefly. He had made an all night run from Washington to arrive here.
We nearly made two fatal mistakes at the bonus. Our first pictures did not include the requisite picture of the Observatory Dome and Vicki nearly forgot to have her bonus book stamped. Disaster averted, we grabbed some cold water and took five minutes to rest. Dean Tanji was there and got me for another short interview. Much like the Arch Bonus, it was clear that the Rally Masters wanted riders to be at this bonus to give Dean a chance to capture more of the Rally on tape.

Again, we spent the next hour backtracking our way off the mountain and over to Livermore, California for the longest continually burning light bulb in the world. Excepting for power outages, this light bulb, located in a fire station has been burning since 1901.

We arrived at the station only to find everyone was out on a call. Per the instructions with the bonus, there was nothing to do but wait for someone to return. Fortunately, someone returned within a few minutes and let us in. More importantly than getting the picture was for the rider to sign a log book, documenting the visit. I took a long look at the names that were already in the book. I was surprised to see none of the names of riders that I believed had already been there.
Heading north toward the five bonuses in San Francisco, I had an extensive conversation with Paul about my route choice. Up until now, things were working pretty well, but he thought I was making a mistake in trying for the Northwest bonuses. There was no doubt I would be able to pick up a large amount of them. The problem was that this would force me about 2,000 miles from the finish in St. Louis with a little over 24 hours to go. I didn’t remember this when running the route, but I did remember I would need to put in big ride the last 30 hours. Even with a two hour grace period for the late window, I would be hard pressed to not be time barred at the finish.

As much as it pained me to cut those bonuses, in reality I had no choice. I kept going over it in my head how I could have made such a mistake. Perhaps I had not taken into account the loss of time riding back east or more likely, I just was too hurried to get out of St. Louis without rechecking the route. I had really been counting on those bonuses to push out to a lead in the last 48 hours. There was nothing else to do but work the middle of the country collecting bonuses in Nevada, Utah and Colorado as I made my way back.

When Vicki and I stopped at the first bonus in San Francisco, I explained to her my mistake. She seemed to take it all in stride, which, in retrospect, was the thing to do. We methodically worked our way around San Francisco with a minimum of difficulties.
Cupid’s Arrow with the Bay Bridge in the Background

Crooked Lombard St, with a Rider Coming Down
Perhaps the only problem we had in San Francisco was that we were both running low on film. I had brought enough film for 80 pictures, but with duplicates on some bonuses, I was down to my last pack, as was Vicki. I stopped at a drug store and bought 4 more packs.

After the Rally, I would find out there was a mini-controversy over these bonuses. Some riders had been led to the bonuses by non-Rally riders. I was completely underwhelmed by the situation. While
riders in the Rally are prohibited from riding with riders that are not in the Rally, some people seemed outraged by this, thinking those riders got some type of extreme assistance.

Given that neither Vicki, nor I knew San Francisco at all, I would still doubt that any of the riders made it through the city much quicker than us. The bonuses were just not that hard to find. Any assistance using riders with local knowledge would have been of negligible usefulness in the overall Rally. I also doubt there was any intent to circumvent the rules. Quite appropriately, the punishment imposed also did not impact on the final standings.

We easily beat rush hour out of San Francisco and headed east toward Sacramento. With just a bit of wandering, we found the large coke cup and continued on.

We still had two more bonuses to grab before daylight ended. They were both located in the Grass Valley area of California. We easily found the covered bridge for which we were searching. Then the odyssey began to find the Kneebone Cemetery. We searched for the better part of an hour with absolutely no luck. We stopped several times to reread the directions. Finally, Mike Langford road up and asked us if we were looking for the bonuses. We told him that we had been to the bridge, but couldn't find the cemetery. To our amazement, he told us the cemetery was right next to the bridge. I was dumbfounded and more than a little angry. More wasted time due to sheer stupidity. Near the end of the Rally, these mistakes would prove costlier.

We quickly backtracked toward the bridge and found the cemetery. We snapped our pictures and headed toward Nevada. I wanted to try to make Utah before the end of the night.
Leaving the bonuses, we stopped for gas. As I filled my main tank, I tried to calculate how much this delay had hurt. As I filled the tank, the cap on the main tank just snapped off and clanked against the ground. The metal hinges had broken. I stared at the cap on the ground simply dumbfounded. I had never even heard of such a thing. I picked up the cap and tried to get it to seal on the main tank, but it wouldn't seal. Now, instead of a 3 gallon auxiliary tank without a cap, I had an 8 gallon main tank with no seal. Once again, I tried not to think about the consequences of dropping the bike. There was nothing to do but set the cap in the neck of the tank and ride off. What else could go wrong?
We crossed over the Sierra Nevada Mountains after sunset and were greeted by the pulsing neon of Reno, Nevada. The night had grown cold but was not intolerable. In fact, after the heat of California, the coolness was welcome. There was a 24 hour bonus in Wendover, UT to pick up during the night but as the night wore on, it was clear we were not going to make it that far without some rest. We stopped in Winnemucca, Nevada and got a few hours sleep in a hotel.

Before dawn Wednesday morning, we packed up and headed out. The leader for the first leg, David Derrick has also gotten some rest in the same hotel. Unfortunately, David had run into some mechanical problems during the second leg which would knock him out of contention. He was just trying to make it back to St. Louis with enough points to be a finisher.

Over the next couple hundred miles, we would leapfrog back and forth with David until we parted ways after the Wendover Will bonus. Later that day, David would be involved in a serious accident, ending his rally completely.

We stopped at a gas station in Wendover to fill up. At the pump across from me was another rider. He asked me what time did the Rally finish Friday? I told him I thought it was around 7:00 AM Friday, but he should check the bonus sheets to be sure. Once again, I was trying to do two things and not concentrating on refueling. I filled the auxiliary tank and moved the nozzle to the main tank, but it would not fit. After trying for a few seconds to force the nozzle in the main tank, I realized what I had done. I had been pumping diesel fuel into the bike. Idiot!

I had also left the valve between the auxiliary tank and main tank open. Some diesel fuel had undoubtedly drained into the main tank. I closed the valve and pushed the bike to the edge of the station lot. I disconnected the auxiliary tank and began draining the diesel fuel. Vicki had finished refueling and rode over to me. Once again a stupid mistake was costing time. I finished draining the tank and refilled the bike with gasoline. After speaking with Roger, I was fairly confident no real damage had been done. The bike started right up and we were off for Salt Lake City.

The rules of the rally required the rider to turn in receipts for all fuel purchased during the rally. I started chuckling to myself about how to record the purchase of 3 gallons of diesel fuel in the log. I
decided to call Lisa with a scoring question. “If you fill your bike with diesel fuel, are you required to get a receipt?” I actually found this question to be hilarious. Ah…long distance humor. There is nothing like it on Day 9 of the Iron Butt Rally.

I got a call from Paul as we rode across the salt flats on the outskirts of Salt Lake City. He had somehow sweet talked the service manager of Salt Lake City BMW to meet us at the bonus location in Salt Lake City with a new gas cap for the bike. The manager would need to remove the entire fuel cap assembly and re-key the cap. I was amazed that someone would take the time to help me out like this.

We arrived at the Council Hall Building a short time later. With barely an introduction, the manager went to work on the bike while Vicki and I took pictures of the large, colorful bison in front of the building. By the time we returned, the manager was just about finished. I paid him and thanked him profusely. More importantly, I did not have to worry about every bump spilling fuel all over my crotch.

We quickly moved across Utah toward a large bonus at the Dinosaur National Monument. Construction traffic slowed our progress, but not too horribly. We took a quick nap on in the parking lot of a gas station, but were soon off again. We passed a couple riders outside the Park and rode to the visitor center. Though I am sure there are probably a lot of things to do in the park, it seemed to be just one large desert. I guess I expected giant dinosaur statues like something out Disney World.
We wasted no time in heading for Independence Pass, the next bonus. As we rode through Aspen, Colorado, I started feeling just the slightest vibration in the clutch lever. It was so slight that I first thought I had imagined it. But it was there. I called Roger and told him the problem. He had me run the bike through a series of diagnostics as we rode through town. Nothing else seemed amiss. Being cognizant of possible final drive failures, I asked Vicki to look at the drive at a stop light to see if there was any leakage. Everything seemed tight. The bike continued to run fine and the vibration disappeared a few miles later.

We began the climb out of Aspen up toward Independence Pass. The temperature dropped dramatically as we rose. The wind was also whipping across the mountain tops. This was perhaps the quickest bonus of the rally. It was very cold at the top. I am not sure we said one word as we took the pictures and headed back down to warmer climate.
Chapter 10

Grinding to a Halt

We still had plenty of daylight as we dropped back toward Leadville, CO. The last bonus of the day was to be Tennessee Pass, just 10 miles outside of Leadville. As we rode through the town, I began hearing a horrible, metal on metal grinding coming from the bike. Even though we were both wearing ear plugs, there was no missing the screeching coming from my bike. I pulled into a gas station to try and assess the situation.

I called Roger and gave him the symptoms. He immediately suspected final drive failure, but I wasn't so sure. He wanted me to drain the oil from the bike and do some other things. What became clear was that the bike was not going anywhere. Night was falling, as was the temperature. I coasted the bike down to a motel parking lot, with the bike screaming and protesting every second it moved. Vicki decided to get a few hours sleep at the hotel and get the bonus at Tennessee Pass at dawn.

I settled into the room and started making some phone calls. I called Lisa Landry and explained the situation. She referred me to Ray Zimmerman, the executive director of the BMW Owners Association. In fairly rapid order, I spoke with Ray, Roger, Paul, Nancy, Bob Woolridge (owner of BMW Atlanta) and some assorted other folks. No one was exactly sure what the problem was, but a final drive failure was the leading suspect. In any event, there was nothing to do but try and get the bike to the nearest BMW shop first thing in the morning. And it needed to be a shop that could work on the bike immediately.

I felt pretty confident that if I could just get the bike to St. Louis, I had enough points for a top 10 finish, even without picking up one more point along the way. To do this, I would need to get the bike repaired and back on the road no later than 2:00-3:00 PM the next day. This would allow me just enough time to return to Leadville (as required by the rules) and make a run to St. Louis.
Paul pulled yet another miracle out of his bag of tricks and found a final drive that someone was willing to bring to me. Roger felt confident he could talk me through the repair. I cannot express how much I appreciated their efforts. The problem was that I still had no definitive diagnosis. I finally decided the best course was to get a tow truck to take the bike to Foothills BMW in Colorado Springs early the next morning. This was not the closest dealership, but I was assured they would do their best to repair the bike immediately.

I slept fitfully for the next few hours. Even though I badly need sleep, it would not come. After 9½ days of hard riding and overcoming a slew of problems, many self inflicted, my Rally was over. I needed a miracle.

I started calling for a tow truck at 5:00 AM Thursday morning. Unfortunately, it would take several hours for the truck to get there. I helped the driver load the bike onto the truck for the drive to Colorado Springs. Unbelievably enough, after never having been on a tow truck, the bike was now taking its second excursion since leaving home.

The bright blue skies and stunning Colorado skylines did little to brighten my mood. It would have been a glorious day to ride. As it was, I napped as the trucked rattled its’ way through the mountain passes. A couple hours and $600 later we arrived at Foothills BMW. Though Foothills was a little further, I had the good fortune (if you can call it that) to have the bike looked at by Matt Parkhouse, one of the best BMW mechanics in the country. Unfortunately, there was no one that was going to fix this problem.

In short order, the final drive was given a clean bill of health and eliminated from the pool of suspects. Matt then opened the gear box and put a magnetic probe inside. When he removed it, thousands of small, metal shards stuck to the probe, like some giant, oily Q-Tip. The transmission had torn itself apart. The look on Matt’s face told the entire story. The bike was finished and not going anywhere on its’ own.

The great folks at the dealership helped me arrange a truck rental and load the bike into the back. After tying the bike down, I headed off for St. Louis. If I drove all night, I would be able to make St. Louis sometime the next morning. Unfortunately, the truck I had would develop a terrible vibration at any
speed over 55 MPH. As I slugged along 20 miles below the speed limit, once again, every vehicle on the road passed me. I would drive all the way back to Maryland like this. I figured this was my penance for every speed limit I ever exceeded in my life.

To say the drive to St. Louis was depressing would be too kind. But it was nothing compared to the pain of seeing other riders that had finished the Rally. Only two years prior, I had experienced that wonderful high. But now, I felt nothing but despair and heartache. So many people had helped me over the last year to get to this point and I had let every one of them down. Many people think the Rally is about the riders. It never is. It’s about the family and friends that support the riders and anguish with them over those eleven days. It is about the sacrifices they make that allows the riders to compete.

Nancy had flown to St. Louis in anticipation of meeting me at the finish. Neither one of us thought it would be like this. I pulled into the parking lot beaten and dejected. She was there taking pictures and talking with friends.

I spoke with some of the riders, most prominently Jim Owen. Jim had a gear box failure near the end of the 2005 Rally that probably cost him the victory. I also learned of David Derrick’s terrible accident. Sometimes it takes something like that to make you realize that you really have no problems. Though I would not finish, it was the bike that was broke and not me. Things could have been a lot worse.

We attended the finisher’s banquet later that night. Though I had very little interest in attending, Nancy and I went and cheered every finisher with new found admiration. They had all done something I had failed to do.

The top 10 was full of familiar names. Jeff Earls and Eric Jewell had once again stellar rides. There was one name I really wanted to see in the top 10. I wanted Vicki to become one of the few female riders to ever finish in the top 10. Unfortunately, she would miss out by fewer than 8,000 points. However, she would once again be the top female rider finishing with a personal best 14th place.

Unlike 2005, this would not be photo finish, but it would come down to two riders. Jim Owen had ridden the counterclockwise route going west, while Marty Leir had taken a nearly identical route to mine.
on the second leg. Marty had been able to get a large bonus in Minnesota, while Jim had struggled with a punctured tire that had slowed his progress. Marty would end up winning by nearly 11,000 points.

And for me there was nothing but a barrel full of what ifs to ponder. Had the bike held up and I had been able to pick up the bonuses on the final day of the Rally, I would have had a good chance at another second place finish. If I could have gotten the bike back to St. Louis with no points on the last day, I would have finished 10th. None of that matters, because none of it happened.

The rally had been tough on a lot of riders. Nearly three dozen riders would fail to finish, an attrition rate well over 30%. Only 64 riders would claim their finisher’s plaque. I was happy for each and every one of them. I just wished I could have joined them.

Chapter 11

After Further Review

The air is crisp and cool as fall fades to winter. The sky is a crystal blue as I make my way north on I-95. The bike is again running perfectly and heading home nearly 3 months after the beginning of this long trip. On my way back from St. Louis, I had left the bike with Roger for repairs. BMW had to ship a new transmission from Germany for the bike. Roger also had replaced the clutch, final drive and any number of items. The RID was repaired and again functioning. One of the engine guards had also cracked somewhere during the Rally, as well as the center stand.

People often ask about the cost of the Rally. It is almost impossible to give an accurate answer. You can plan for entry fees, gas costs, and to a certain extent, hotel costs. But there are way too many intangibles to be accurate. In 2005, my expenses were somewhere just north of $10,000. John Ryan's prediction of “11 Days, $11,000” was somewhat accurate.

After this year's Rally, I now miss those now more fiscally conservative days. I failed to budget for tow jobs, lost money, transmissions, tires, clutches, truck rental, fuel caps, GPS trackers and a dozen other things. I spoke with Nancy about replacing the bike with a new one. She replied, “I thought that was what you were doing. Just one part at a time.”

I pulled the bike into the garage where it has sat for the last month. I still need to do some other repairs. The J&M headset is still not working properly and the Motolights need to be rebuilt. Perhaps then I will be able to enjoy my new 5 year old bike.

After the Rally, the long distance riding community once again feasted upon itself in what is becoming a biannual cannibalistic ritual. The internet buzzed with allegations of cheating and illegal or improper tactics by riders in the Rally. Though outside assistance is permitted in the rules, there is disagreement among the community about what is acceptable. What is perfectly acceptable to some, seems to offensive to others.

In many ways this is unfair to any rider. It is difficult enough to compete in any endurance event. It is impossible to compete if riders are expected to conform to a standard that is not outlined in the rules. As I did in 2005, I not only read the rules, I carried them with me during the Rally. When I needed a clarification, I asked for one and got it. I would expect nothing more or less than that from every rider. One of the things IBA President Mike Kneebone told me years ago was that a rider should not do anything the rider would not share with his (or her) fellow competitors. There is a lot of common sense and wisdom in that statement.
There has been considerable debate about what constitutes a level playing field for endurance rallies. Given the nature of the sport, the playing field can only be leveled so much. I chose to ride a bike that would eventually fail. Other, wiser riders chose bikes that would finish the Rally. I also chose to work heavily on routing skills for months leading up to the Rally. Others chose not to. Different is not automatically unfair.

Every rider and every bike in the Rally was different. The riders made different choices. Some choices were good, some were not so good. Once again, they were made within the context of the rules of the Rally. Every rider starts with the rules of the Rally and goes on from there. These choices cover everything from bike choice, to gear, to routes, to maintenance and to everything in between. To expect a rider to adhere to something other than the rules when making those choices, puts the rider in a no win situation.

This is a small sport in very small pool of motorcycle sports. The overwhelming majority of endurance riders will complete a total of one ride during their lifetime. Most will never ride in any Rally. I would guess there are fewer than 1,000 active endurance rally riders in the world. Yet, we sometimes seem to take great joy in trying to tear the sport apart.

The IBA, and more specifically the IBR staff seems to be grappling with the advances of technology. Many riders lament the demise of the earlier rallies, where riders used paper maps and plotted everything by hand. GPS’s, laptops and cell phones are seen as the enemy. They yearn for the good old days of man and machine against the world. And while this certainly has a certain romantic appeal, the design of the modern IBR has grown as technology has allowed riders to do more. As recent rallies have shown, it just isn’t that difficult for the top riders to ride 11,000 miles in 11 days. By adding more technical routes, more timed bonuses, the IBR has given the rider more challenges. Riders have responded to meet these challenges.

In many ways, the IBR organizers got a very predictable result in this Rally. Having plotted every leg of every Rally, there is no doubt in my mind the two legs in 2007 Rally were the most technical the Rally has ever seen. If you doubt it, simply sit down and try to come up with a finishing route. And if you want to have some real fun, do it with only a paper map. Some people seemed to be genuinely surprised that many riders received outside assistance, when if you look at the design of the Rally, that result would seem to be a logical byproduct of the Rally design.

More legs with fewer, more definitive route choices would seem to negate the effect of outside routing assistance. But none of this matters much to me. It certainly seems to qualify as a large tempest in a very small teapot at best. I spoke briefly with Mike Kneebone after the banquet. I told him I believed that should the IBR change its’ rules to not allow outside assistance, there is no doubt in my mind that every rider would abide by this rule. The issue is not going to subside any time soon, and it certainly will take someone smarter than me to find a solution.

And in the line of outside assistance, I never would have been able to achieve such a spectacular level of failure with the terrific assistance of quite a few people. In no particular order, I am truly in debt to Vicki Johnston, John Ryan, Bob Woolridge, Lisa Landry, Mike Kneebone, Ray Zimmerman Foothills BMW, Santa Cruz BMW, Salt Lake City BMW and Pittsburgh BMW. Many thanks also go to Roger Sinclair for all the work done on the bike before, during and after the Rally. Paul Taylor came to my rescue time and time again. I could not ask for anything more from a friend.

And of course, as always, I am in debt to Nancy, who never, ever likes any of these things. Not only does she help during the Rally, but in the year leading up to it she tolerates quite a bit. She is probably the only person that can motivate me to ride on, when the only thing I want to do is quit.

With all that being said, I have nothing but the most heartfelt congratulations for every rider that was able to finish the 2007 Rally. None of these debates does anything to diminish what they accomplished. I wish I could have joined the club, but for now, I will stand back and applaud your
accomplishments. So, I say to Marty, Vicki, Jeff, Jim, Brett, Alex, Eric, Rick, Rebecca, and every other finisher, well done.