Endurance riding is not one of my favorite pastimes. I don’t particularly enjoy doing it. I find riding long distances mentally and physically demanding. Perhaps even taxing might be a better description. Every distance ride I have ever accomplished has been difficult for me. Having said that, I am glad I rode each and every one of them. I treasure every one of those memories.

I do not find an endurance ride itself particularly fun. The destination is frequently irrelevant and the sights seen are often fleeting and quickly forgotten. I often joke that I have seen the exits for some of the most famous landmarks in all of North America. And of course that does not even mention all the breathtaking sights I have passed in the dead of night. I have heard it said that writers hate writing, but love having written. In that same vein, I hate endurance rides, but I love having ridden them.

I love the competition, either against the clock or against other riders. Without that competition or challenge, I find a 400 mile day on a motorcycle to be about my limit. There are days when I complain to my girlfriend Nancy that I am too sore to walk after 200 miles on a bike. All that changes when I compete in a rally or some other ride. The miles seem to fly by without a care or notice. The mind soothes the body and pushes me further down the road, past all those exits to some obscure destination.

I had tried before to gain an entry into the Iron Butt Rally, the mother of all motorcycle endurance competitions with no success. I held out hope that my entry for the 2005 Rally would be successful, but I was not sure. The Rally is sanctioned by the Iron Butt Association, the governing authority for endurance riding around the world. The IBA describes the Iron Butt Rally thusly:

“"The Iron Butt Rally is held in the United States every two years. Although we have looked into moving the rally to other countries, only Australia offers the wide-open spaces without international borders for the running of this 11 day, 11,000 mile plus marathon."
“The Iron Butt is a fairly simple concept. The rally consists of five [three in 2005] checkpoints located around the perimeter of the United States. In order to be considered a finisher of the event, riders must be present at each of these checkpoints within a two hour window.”

“No consideration is given for bad weather (during the running of the Iron Butt, riders can expect to ride through rain, sleet, snow, severe thunderstorms, hurricanes and the occasional tornado). Temperature extremes routinely run 125 degrees or more in the desert Southwest in fact, in living up to the name, "World's Toughest Motorcycle Competition", event organizers intentionally route the rally through such places as Death Valley or the Mojave Desert during the hottest part of the day, to extreme cold at the top of mountains like Pike's Peak in Colorado where competitors may have to struggle up a muddy road to reach the peak's 14,110 foot summit.”

If I was looking for a challenge and competition, there was no doubt the Iron Butt Rally would provide both. The event attracts the best endurance riders in the world. It is a brutal test of both rider and machine. Of the thousands of riders clamoring for an entry for each Rally, only about 100 lucky ones are chosen. Many fewer than that will finish the rally as attrition gnaws at the field during the 11 day marathon.

Late in the spring of 2004, I received the news I had been waiting for. My entry for the 2005 Iron Butt Rally had been accepted and I was fortunate enough to receive one of the entries into the rally. In a way, this had become an end unto itself. I had put so much energy and effort into gaining an entry into the IBR over the last few years, that I had begun to lose focus on what this meant. I was now going to have to actually ride in the rally. It would shortly be time to see how I would fare in the “World's Toughest Motorcycle Competition.” Elation gave way to doubts, fears and apprehension. It would be a long journey to find the answers to questions that raced through my mind that spring afternoon.

Chapter 2

Preparations

I needed to make some rather elementary decisions by the end of 2004. The number one question was which bike to ride. As had been the case, when I had ridden from Key West, Florida to Prudhoe Bay, Alaska in 2003, I made the decision very early on that money was not going to be a consideration in my preparation and riding in the rally. Though I am certainly not wealthy by any measure, I am fortunate enough to have the resources to make the financial expenditures that I thought I would need to make to be competitive during the Rally.
I looked at new and used bikes. I also looked at bikes that had done well in past Iron Butt Rallies. Not only the manufacturer of the bikes that had done well, but what type of bike. I gave very serious consideration to the new Yamaha FJR1300. Nancy rides one and that gave me ample opportunity to ride the bike and try it out. The bike just never fit me very well. Short rides were a struggle. Eleven days on this bike was just not going to happen for me.

In the end, it was a very easy decision. I decided to stay with my BMW 1150GS Adventure. I knew the bike well. It was also very well equipped and would only need some “minor” additions to make it ready to ride in the rally. I was very comfortable on the bike. I could stretch out in almost every position imaginable while riding down the road. The bike was also sturdy enough to handle some of the most horrendous roads in North America that would surely be a part of the Rally. Unfortunately, I would severely test the durability (crashworthiness) of the GS during the 2004 Mason Dixon 20-20 Rally a few weeks later.

One of the advantages of being in the motorcycle “product” business is that in selling your product, you go to a lot of rallies. Over the last few years, Nancy and I have been to more motorcycle rallies and shows than we would ever care to mention. You see a lot of products at rallies, and when you are bored, you buy a lot of products at rallies. Not everything works as advertised and I have a garage full of products to attest to this. I mention this in way of an endorsement for the many products that are on my bike and do work. If they didn’t, they would be in the garage with all the other misfits.

I had already fitted the GS with the following accessories when my entry into the Iron Butt was accepted. Every one of the products worked as advertised with only a few exceptions. Though no one is paying me to endorse these products, I don’t think any rider can go wrong with any of them.

*Aeroflow windshield and half-fairing
*Jesse Oddyssey Side Bags
*Motolights, Caliper Mount 50w Lamps
*PIAA 910 Driving Lights
*Hyper Lights
*Run-N-Lights

*HID High Beam Conversion by Schoolhouse Accessories

*Valentine One Radar Detector

*Autocom Pro M1 Intercom system

*Bob’s Wrist Rest Friction Lock

*Throttle Rocker (One on each grip)

*Garmin Streepilot III GPS with 256 MB Memory Card

*HID High Beam Conversion by Schoolhouse Accessories

*BeadRider Seat (Of course!)

Over the next year and half, I added the following additional accessories:

*Tourtech Luggage Rack (Fuel Cell Platform)

*Custom Fuel Cell from Sampson Sport Touring

*Foot Rain Flaps from Wudo America

*GPS Tracking Device (7100) from Land/Air/Sea Communications

*BMW Multivario Tank Bag

*Custom Cover for the Fuel Cell by Linda Tanner

*Datel Voltmeter

*Smart Tire Monitor System

*XM Satellite Radio

*HID Low Beam Conversion by Schoolhouse Accessories
I also used the following items during the rally:

*BMW Rally 2 Riding Suit

*Schuberth S1 Helmet

*Custom Ear Monitors by EAR Inc.

*Gerbing Heated Jacket and Pants

*Oxtar Matrix Boots

With the exception of the Motolights on the bike, I purchased every one of the above products. The other thing they all have in common is that they work. I knew that many of the other riders would have many more accessories or “farkles” on their bikes, but for me, these are the ones I wanted for me to be as competitive as I thought I could be. And as I said, if these accessories did not work, they would not be on my bike and I would not have used them in the rally.

I do want to mention Motolight and the owners, Rob and Tina Hollaender. Rob and Tina are two of the best people you will ever meet. They are both very dear friends and have supported me through the years in my assorted long distance endeavors. Their lights would be on my bike, whether they sponsored me or not. There simply is not a better light out there that does what their light does. Additionally they have strongly supported the long distance community for many years. In the 2005 rally, Motolight sponsored several riders including John Ryan, Coni Fitch, Vickie Johnston, Bill Shaw and myself. They also sponsored the 2003 winner, Paul Taylor. Every year they donate a sizable check to the Mason Dixon 20-20 rally in Jim Young’s memory to help fund that rally. Like I said, they are good people.

My first rally after getting accepted for the 2005 IBR, was the 2004 Mason Dixon Rally. I love the rally. Rick Miller and company always put on a first class rally. Unfortunately after several good showings, this rally would be my first DNF (Did Not Finish). Shortly after midnight during the rally, the GS and I decided to part company. Unfortunately for me, this occurred at about 60 mph on a Pennsylvania Interstate. After I finished sliding and the bike finished tumbling, I was able to get the bike upright and re-attach some of the parts that had gone flying during the mishap.
Remarkably, the bike was still ride able. I continued on to the next bonus location until the pain in my foot forced me to reconsider. I decided to withdraw and rode home. Damage to the bike had been relatively minor. Scrape on the top case and on one of the Jesses. I replaced the crash bars and some other minor parts. The worst damage was taken by my then new BMW Savannah 2

Suit. The Suit had done its job, but it was trash. The BMW boots were also a total loss. I replaced the Savannah 2 with the BMW Rally 2 suit and bought a pair of Oxtar Matrix boots. A month or so later, the bike and I were as good as new, ready to ride once again.

Terry Smith from Sampson Sport Touring designed a custom fuel cell for the GS that brought fuel capacity up to just under the maximum 11.5 gallons. The gravity fed cell worked flawlessly. Mark Huffman from Schoolhouse Accessories finished the HID conversion on the bike for both the low beam and the high beam.

I installed a GPS Tracker from Land/Air/Sea Communications that would allow friends and family to track me on the Internet. It would also allow me to be located in the event of an emergency. Having a tracker on the bike had been a non-negotiable requirement from Nancy for me to compete in the Rally. I had spoke with the people from Star-Traxx early on, but decided against their system for two reasons. I did not care for the monthly fee that would continue every month, even if I was not currently using the Tracker. I was also not interested in allowing Star-Traxx to track me (and make that information public on their website) during the rally. Many riders did this and I am sure it worked fine for them. I had my own reasons for not doing this, but more on that later.

As 2005 rolled around, it was also becoming clear that my bike was in need of some serious electrical “cleaning”. I had wires running everywhere, so much so that I could not keep straight what accessory was connected where. I spoke with Paul Taylor about this and he recommended Roger Sinclair as the solution. Roger had done the wiring on Paul’s bike. Roger had also done Paul’s old bike which Paul had ridden to victory during the 2003 Iron Butt Rally. Sean Gallagher had bought Paul’s old bike and was planning on riding it in the 2005 Rally.

I had met Roger at the 2005 BMW Georgia Mountain Rally and had taken an instant liking to the displaced Irishman. Being an electrical engineer by trade, Roger knows more about electrical connections than I would ever
care to know. He is also a pretty good mechanic. He re-wired most of the accessories and installed a Centech fuse box on the GS. Though I know the bike pretty well, we went over dozens of problems that I could encounter during the Rally. We also established a list of spare parts to carry. If you are prepping a bike for a rally, Roger’s your man.

I had set the 2005 Mason Dixon Rally as the official trial run for the bike and to see if it was “rally ready” after all the changes and additions. By the time the Rally rolled around on Memorial Day weekend, I thought the bike was ready. I arrived at rally central on a sunny Friday afternoon and went inside to register. When I came out, the bike was dead. No power at all. I spent a frantic evening trying to diagnose the problem and find a new battery. Nothing worked. Once again, the Mason Dixon was a bust for the second year in a row. The bike had failed rather spectacularly on its trial run.

I had replaced the battery a month prior to the Mason Dixon as part of routine preventive maintenance on the bike. The new battery had been bad. The next day I exchanged the battery for another new one. That seemed to fix the problem, though my confidence in the bike was badly shaken by the experience. I gave serious consideration to buying a new bike, but in the end, stayed with the GS.

I became proficient at changing tires with a set of tire irons. I felt that if I had to, I would be able to not only patch a tire on the side of the road, but that I would be able to change tire as well.

I created a packing list and stuck to it religiously. As I packed the bike, the item was crossed off the bike. No matter what the object was, if it was not physically on the bike, I did not cross it off the list. Being a notorious haphazard packer, this system worked for me. Of the 200 plus items on my list, I left none of them at home. I also felt confident that I knew where every item was on the bike and that I could find it while stopped on the side of the road in the dark, in the rain. I know from personal experience that there is nothing worse than knowing something you need is on the bike, but you don’t know where to find it.

I spent the next couple of months riding when I could, especially if the weather was bad. If it rained, I rode. If it was hot, I rode. The worse the weather, the more I tried to get out and ride. The distances were never great, but by riding a couple hundred miles in “rally mode” in bad weather, I thought I was preparing myself as well as I could. With the end of summer quickly approaching, I felt as ready as possible. I would soon see if that was enough.
Chapter 3

Go West Young Man

August quickly rolled around and I felt ready to head out to Denver, where the Iron Butt Rally was to start. I finished packing the bike and went out with several friends the night before leaving. The next morning, Nancy came over to see me off. As she looked the bike over, she pointed to a puddle forming on the garage floor. “Should it be leaking there?” Fuel was dripping from some unknown area on the bike onto the floor.

Cursing, I began pulling the bike apart looking for the source of the leak. Eventually I found a loose clamp on a fuel line. I tightened the clamp and checked for leaks. The system seemed to be tight once again. I repacked the bike, placing a few extra clamps in my tool bag. Nancy took my picture next to a clean bike and I mounted up, ready to head out. Unfortunately I would do this three times before finally heading out after two more false starts. Once I had to adjust a connection with the Autocom and the other to adjust the volume on the radar detector.

Both times I had to unpack the bike to remove the seat to get to those connections. After fixing both of those items, I noticed a leak coming from the Camelback. Water was running all over the luggage on the passenger seat. Closer examination revealed this to be nothing more that a condensation problem. Still, it was all very frustrating. Finally, after nearly an hour of last minute fixes, I was ready to go. I turned to Nancy and said, “I don’t know how I am supposed to go around the world, when I can’t even get out of the garage.”

I left from Maryland, wanting to make the 1600 mile trip west over the next three days. I planned on riding 800 miles, 500 miles and 300 miles respectively over the next 3 days. I would then have 3 days of rest in Denver and hopefully be fit and ready for the start of the rally. As I rode west on I-70, I had no idea that I would be traveling this road a half dozen times over the next two weeks. For the time being, I was happy and stupid. I was about to find out what the Iron Butt Rally was all about.
I pulled into Denver on Thursday morning, the 18th of August. I had made arrangements with BMW of Denver to have a new rear tire put on that afternoon. I had replaced the front tire before leaving Maryland and planned on running the entire Rally on one set of tires. I used Metzler Tourance tires for the rally and based upon prior experience, I did not think there would be any problem riding the rally on one set of Tourances.

After replacing the rear tire, I headed south out of Denver. I wanted to take a ride up Pike’s Peak before the end of the day. I wanted to go up the mountain for a couple of reasons. It seemed that given the location of the Rally start and finish, Pike’s Peak might be a likely bonus location. And of course, the other reason to go up any mountain is because it’s there.

The ride up and down Pike’s Peak was fairly uneventful, if slightly unnerving due to the lack of any guardrails at some pretty extreme altitude. The dirt sections were in good shape, though I did note that the ride up would take on a completely different character in bad weather. I don’t know about other riders, but I would have to give some serious thought before I headed up the mountain in bad conditions. After Pike’s Peak, I settled into a hotel room in Colorado Springs, only about an hour or so away from rally central.

Friday morning, I rode up to Denver and checked into the Double Tree Inn, the host hotel for the Rally. It was also the location of the first checkpoint and the finish. The riders would be spending a lot of time at the hotel over the next couple of weeks. Only a couple dozen bikes were in the lot as I arrived, but as the day progressed, the lot began filling with bikes of all sizes and
shapes. To see some of the gadgetry and “farkles” on these machines was truly stunning. For me, some of the bikes were just too much. I would be overwhelmed just trying to keep track of everything. However, I am sure that every rider was completely at ease on their own mount. If they weren’t, they wouldn’t be here.

The weekend was filled with tasks that could best be described as necessary. The riders completed odometer checks, technical inspections, press seminars, videotaped liability waivers and other less thrilling jobs. Waiting in line became the theme for the weekend. I can’t speak for anyone else, but by the time I was done with all of it, I was more than ready to ride.
Rumors ran through the riders about possible routes and bonus locations. Rally T-Shirts were handed out. We all examined them for possible clues as to where we would be going. Nothing seemed obvious to me, but other Rally veterans seem to see important clues in the Rally logo. I did notice a lighthouse, but the last time I checked, there were a lot of lighthouses all over North America. Though it didn’t seem helpful to me, I did find myself staring at my shirt, trying to divine some hidden wisdom that would reveal the secret winning route.

Rally Secrets?
Chapter 4

Team Robo

Many of the riders formed teams or alliances to help better compete during the Rally. Information shared among the riders can be a valuable resource for any rider. As I would learn, information is a valuable commodity during the Rally.

Team Robo had been formed some time before the rally and was so named after Paul Taylor's nickname, Robobiker. Paul was the founder and head of the team. Though he was not riding in the Rally this year, even I was smart enough to take the advice of the reigning champ. Team Robo was comprised of some very serious riders. I was lucky and a little overwhelmed to be included in such a group. Paul had spent considerable time and effort trying to help team members do well in the Rally.

Shane Smith was perhaps the most experienced rider on the team. He had nearly won the Iron Butt in 2001, finishing second. In the months leading up to Rally, Paul had told me that Shane would be one of the toughest competitors. To say that I was impressed with Shane's accomplishments would be a tremendous understatement. Though he probably needed less help than any of us, any advice Shane could share with the team would be worth heeding.

John Ryan had never ridden in a rally before, so that might put him at a disadvantage. However he was also the only person on the planet that had
completed a Bun Burner Gold 4500 (Back to Back to Back 1500 mile days). That put John in a unique class of 1. Paul thought John had a legitimate chance to win the rally. I concurred. John also had one of the best quotes of the rally. Before the start, we were talking about the considerable costs incurred in competing in the Iron Butt Rally. All finishers are awarded a license plate placard that proclaims them a competitor in the Iron Butt Rally with the words “11,000 miles in 11 Days.” John stated that if he could finish the rally, he was going to change his placard to read “$11,000 in 11 Days”. Though it didn’t cost that quite that much to compete, it certainly was not a cheap endeavor.

Bill Shaw was an avid rider who was writing an article for Motorcycle Consumer News about the Rally and his experience with it. Bill had started the 2003 Iron Butt Rally with the same job. Unfortunately a mishap early in the Rally prevented him from being a finisher two years prior. I really wished the best for him this time. Riding in the Rally was going to be tough enough without the additional pressure having a work related task to accomplish. I was pretty nervous, but looking at the pressure facing Bill even made me feel a little better. Bill was welcome rider for Team Robo.

Ed Phelps was a veteran of the Iron Butt Rally and a formidable rider. He also happened to have just won the 2005 Mason Dixon 20-20 Rally a couple of months earlier. This was the same rally, I could not even start, let alone finish. In 2001, Ed had started the Iron Butt Rally and was riding high in 4th place after two legs. Unfortunately, bad luck struck on the 3rd leg forcing him to DNF.
Sean Gallagher had started and finished the Iron Butt Rally in 2001 and 2003, putting him in rarified air having completed multiple Iron Butt Rallies. This year, Sean was riding the Rally on Paul Taylor’s winning bike from 2003. Though no rider had ever won the Rally twice, Sean was attempting to at least see if the bike could repeat as champion.

And then there was me. I had not ridden in the Iron Butt Rally before. But there might be something I could contribute to Team Robo. The concept was simple. We were competitors against each other, but we could also share information and help each other. Paul could also give strong ground support to everyone. As we met in one of the hotel rooms over the weekend, Paul went over everything he could think of that might help us. We discussed
possible routes, ferry schedules, time zones, border crossings and a dozen other things.

And we discussed the competition, formidable as it was. The rider list read like a who’s who of endurance riding. Former champions Rick Morrison and George Barnes. Peter Hoogeveen with 6 top 10 finishes. Eric Jewell, Eddie James, Morris Kruemcke, Jack Savage, Jeff Earls... all with tons of experience and top 10 finishes to go along with that experience. And then there was the “Wrecking Crew” from Minnesota, Mark Kiecker and Marty Leir, who finished 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 3\textsuperscript{rd} in 2003. Throw in a George Zelenz, Jim Owen, Vickie Johnston and Rob Nye and about 80 other hard core riders and things get down right intimidating. Oh, and if your route happens to take you down a dirt road, you can count on competing against one of the best dirt riders in the world in Dick Fish. After a while, I really didn’t want to know who the competition was. It was just too intimidating.

About the only good thing you could say about the competition that made things easier, was that Paul had retired and at least we wouldn’t have to compete against him. And Paul had some simple advice for us when we all first got together. He didn’t care who won the rally, as long as it was a person in the room.

I don’t know about the other riders in the Rally, but I know it would have been very difficult for me to ride in the rally without a lot of support from friends and family members during the Rally. In addition to the help from Paul Taylor and other members of Team Robo, I also was able to reach out to Leonard Roy for advice. Leonard is a seasoned IBR veteran and always in the hunt. In 2003, Leonard held the lead going into the final leg and finished a terrific rally. Between him and Paul, I felt confident I could get the best advice possible on just about any question. Leonard had planned on riding in the 2005 Rally, but personal circumstances had forced him to withdraw.

Roger Sinclair was on call 24/7 with any mechanical issues. He was even willing to fly anywhere on a moments notice to get the bike running again. Support like that is hard to get.

Nancy fielded questions from other friends and family and kept everyone posted with frequent updates on where I was and how I was doing. She and a few select others were able to track me real time over the Internet. After the first few days, other people in her office got involved and followed my progress. Aileen, a friend and coworker with Nancy, kept tabs on me and became quite involved. Aileen became an unofficial member of the ground
support team, helping Nancy whenever she could. We were both grateful for her help.

Nancy grew attached to her laptop, carrying it with her everywhere. She never knew when I was going to call her and ask her to tell me how long it takes to get from Lackawanna, NY to Lovelock, NV. Her cell phone constantly rang with calls from everyone. Even near the end of the rally when things got very hectic, she handled everything in a calm and efficient manner. Even when I wasn’t so calm.

In addition to keeping our website updated, fielding phone calls and monitoring the LD Rider List, Nancy also watched the Star-Traxx website to see what other riders were doing. She was shipping central with any number of items ready to be over-nighted anywhere, including a set of tires that was boxed and ready to go. She booked ferries, checked schedules, followed Hurricane Katrina, looked for road closures and even brought me supplies during one fuel stop close to home. Most importantly, she kept me sane when I wanted to quit. Any success I had during the Rally was directly related to her efforts. I hope every rider had a “Nancy” at home to help them. I know I would have been lost without mine.

Chapter 5

Sounds Like a Plan

My plan was pretty simple. Win the Rally. Everything I did was geared toward that goal. I was also realistic in that this was my first Rally and that probably was not going to happen. I am very competitive by nature. If I had set my goal for a bronze medal, I would shortly change it to a Silver Medal, then to Gold Medal, then to a top 10 and then to a top 5. I simply saved time and set the goal to win right off the bat.

Paul had asked me several months before the Rally, what my goal was. I told him I planned to ride to win. I wanted him to know I was not riding to finish the rally. I was willing to risk a DNF to win the Rally and I needed his advice on how to win, not finish the Rally. And I got the advice and heeded it. Harold Brooks had told Paul many years ago his four golden rules to a top 10 finish. After that, circumstances would need to fall right to win it.

*Put the “Big Rocks” in First (Get the Big Bonuses)
Stay on the big roads

Get 4 hours of sleep every night

Ride all night the last night

I changed these rules, just slightly. I planned on riding 1200-1300 miles a day, with 4 hours of sleep in a hotel every night. I would only eat on the bike or during a timed rest bonus. All other eating would be done in gas station parking lots. Take the red pill (hard route) if offered. Sleep on the bike, when needed. Ride all night the last night. Risk the DNF for a chance to win. As any military person will tell you, no battle plan survives first contact. My plan would be no exception.

The Rally broke down into three legs. The start was from Denver Monday Morning with the 1st checkpoint back in Denver Friday evening. The 2nd leg would be again leaving from Denver Friday evening and arriving at the Maine checkpoint Monday morning. The 3rd and final leg would leave Maine and finish at the Denver checkpoint on Friday morning. Eleven 24 hour periods. In a departure from previous Rally’s, riders that were late for one checkpoint were an automatic DNF. You might as well go home. Your Rally would be over. This fact was not lost on anyone.

All the riders gathered for the Sunday night banquet. After dinner, riders were called up one by one by the Rally Mistress, Lisa Landry to receive their official Rally flag and rider number. I sat with Paul and other Team Robo members during the banquet. As the riders went up to receive their packet, Paul shared what information he knew about them. I personally knew only a handful of riders and others by reputation only. As the numbers were called out, Lisa would sometimes state the accomplishments of each rider. One thing became clear. A lot of them had done this before. That did not fill me with confidence.
Lucky number 69 was called. I managed to get up to the front and get my flag without tripping or otherwise embarrassing myself. As I sat back down, Paul whispered in my ear, “69, now that is a good number.” I don’t know if I believed him, but at that moment, I believed that he believed it. Just thinking that made me more confident, if only slightly.

Paul &I Hard At Work
Then the time came for everyone to open their bonus sheets. After a rustling of papers, everyone in the room was frantically going through the bonuses. Mike Kneebone, the president of the IBA went over some of the bonus locations and other housekeeping and scoring issues. We were then on our own until the start the next morning. Class dismissed.

As I continued looking through the bonus locations, the room was a flurry of activity. Every bonus was the right one, every bonus was a sucker one. You could hear a dozen opinions with every step you took. I found it a little overwhelming. I spoke with Vickie Johnston. Vickie was the top female finisher in the 2003 Rally. We agreed to look over the sheets and meet in about an hour to see what we had come up with. Team Robo was to meet in a room shortly to bounce route choices off each other.

I gathered all my sheets up and went to my room. There seemed to be three obvious routes:

*West to pick up a lot of smaller bonuses.
*Northeast to the north coast of New Brunswick for a LARGE Bonus

*Southeast to Fontana, NC and Key West for Large Bonuses

There were some other large bonuses to the far Northwest in Canada, but I thought they seemed impossibly far and not worth the points. Other than that, I came to no obvious conclusion. I picked up my laptop and headed to the Team Robo HQ.

I found the team with laptops a-buzzing and maps spread everywhere. We began bouncing ideas. We thought a route of 4500-4800 miles would leave us in good shape for the second leg. The first checkpoint was back in Denver on Friday morning. We strongly anticipated more points being available on the 2nd leg and then even more on the 3rd and final leg. No one wanted to burn themselves out on the first leg and then be too tired to go for the big points later in the Rally.

The group eventually decided that Key West was the right route. Everyone seemed to have variable of some type, but they all involved Fontana, NC and Key West, FL. I headed back to my room to upload the maps and waypoints into the GPS. I planned on going to NC, then Key West, Chicago and finally a bonus location in Nebraska. I felt the route was easily doable and should get me back in Denver in time to get plenty of sleep before the next leg.

I called Vickie and she came down to my room. She was planning on riding the first leg with Bob Wooldridge. I told her I was planning on going to Key West. She said they were leaning toward some of the large bonuses in the Yukon Territory in Canada, but that she had some reservations about the route. She was especially concerned with having to ride long periods at night in an area with abundant wildlife. I agreed that it would be very risky. I just did not think there were enough points to justify the risk right at the start of the rally. We agreed to check with each other in the morning.

I finished my route plan and retired for the night. Ironically after days of not being able to sleep at all, I slept like a rock. There was nothing left to worry about. I only had to ride. Let the games begin.
The parking lot was bustling with activity in the morning. Riders, onlookers, family, friends. Everywhere you looked there was activity and everyone had a camera. I tried to concentrate on the bike and getting ready, but it was hard. I had decided to go very light on the first leg. I would be returning in four days so I stored a lot of gear, including my laptop, at the hotel. Other than the clothes I was wearing, tools and parts, I took very little with me.

I saw Paul in the parking lot. We were both in pretty high spirits. He asked me if I was going to go to Chicago after Key West. I replied, “Absolutely, I didn’t come here to watch someone else win this thing”. I found that John Ryan, Shane Smith and I had picked nearly identical routes. Paul ran into Jeff Earls in the parking lot. Jeff said he had a route going west that was over 30,000 points. I think Paul and I were a little stunned by this. After Jeff walked off I asked Paul whether Jeff was a rider to be worried about. Paul assured me the Jeff was one heckuva rider, but he was skeptical about the point total. The Key West route would only bring around 27,000 points.

Paul’s next question to me should have been a huge red flag. “Did you look at any of the routes out west?” I said that I had, but I did not think there were enough points to overcome the huge Key West/Fontana bonuses. He agreed. We also thought that any rider going west would burn themselves out by going for so many smaller bonuses. I continued packing the bike and did not think anymore of it.
A short time later, Bob Higdon, the official scribe for the Rally, wandered over to our area. Bob has been covering the rally for years. His articles on the Iron Butt Association’s website provide a window for the world to watch the Rally and to feel a part of the activities. All of my friends and family members would hang on every word Bob wrote. After the Rally was over, I would find out what happened during the Rally by reading what Bob wrote. He is one of the most talented members of the IBA family. Bob claims to be retiring from his official reporting duties after this Rally. I can only say that I
hope he will reconsider. I am sure there are others that can take over his duties, but there is no one that can truly replace him.

We talked about riders going north to the bonus in New Brunswick. They would pick up about 700 points more than the Key West riders, but we all agreed the extra miles were not worth 700 points. Bob’s prophetic comment was “When was the last time the Iron Butt was won on the first leg? Oh, that’s right…NEVER!” We all laughed and commented on the insanity of going to New Brunswick and riding all those extra miles. Fools!

All the riders made their way to their bikes as the magic starting hour approached. I wished all the riders I knew good luck and hoped they arrived back in Denver safely. Everyone knew that not all of the riders would arrive
back in Denver. It was a numbers game. Some riders were going to DNF on the first leg. We all just hoped it would not be us or one of our friends.

Vickie and Bob had decided against the Yukon Territory and were also going to Key West. I told Vickie to give some serious consideration to Chicago after Key West. I needn’t had bothered. She already had it plotted.
I phoned Nancy one final time and told her I would call her once I was on the road. Dale Wilson was appointed official starter and began waving us out of the parking lot. The local police Department had blocked traffic for us all the way to I-70. Riding into a sea of cameras was downright fun. And then, everyone was gone. I turned onto I-70 east and began the ride across the country for the second time.

Chapter 7

A Horse in Mid-Stream

I passed riders, riders passed me. I think we were all happy to be riding. The “Wrecking Crew” from Minnesota passed me by. Paul had believed they would be some of the strongest riders in the Rally. I fell in with them and trundled east. The group would pick up other riders and drop riders
from time to time. Riding east through the foothills of Colorado, they didn’t seem to be so threatening. After a while, I dropped out of the group. I had my route to ride and own schedule to keep. I always thought that riding with someone else during a rally was a hindrance that put both riders at a disadvantage.

Shane Smith passed me. It would be a familiar scene over the next 11 days. John Ryan and I passed each other several times over the next few hundred miles. We even refueled at the same first couple of stops together by pure coincidence. Both of us were getting very poor fuel mileage and neither one of us could figure out why. We never did.

I talked to Paul on the phone a couple of times. He was trying to get an accurate picture of which riders went where. I told him the Wrecking Crew was heading to Key West with us. He said that Jim Owen and Rick Morrison had headed west. George Barnes was going to New Brunswick. Only about 10 riders were going to New Brunswick. Everyone else seemed to split between going west and going to Key West.

More ominous signs. Paul stated that he had been running some routes and found that a good rider running an aggressive route out west could probably put up more points than my Key West route. But, it would be a very technically demanding route and probably leave the rider exhausted at the end of the leg. And the margin of points gained would be minimal. The goal was not to be in first after one leg, but be in first after 3 legs. Still though….in the back of my mind, I began to second guess the Key West route.

As night approached, rain began falling on and off. With night and rain both falling, my speed also fell. I had been following John Ryan for about a hundred miles or so. I began to drop back a little as my night vision is not the best. We were still about 150 miles west of St. Louis and I had planned on riding all night, sleeping on the bike at the bonus location in North Carolina. The bonus would not be available until 9:00 AM Tuesday morning, providing ample time to get a good nap.

Paul called. He had been running some numbers again with St. Louis as a starting point. The route to New Brunswick was fewer miles (about 50) and more points (about 700) than the Key West route. I was somewhat stunned by this. Paul suggested I head for the New Brunswick bonus, a lighthouse on Miscou Island on the northeast tip of New Brunswick. He stated that he had spoken with Shane and that Shane had already turned for Canada.
I did not want to change horses in mid-stream. Not only did I already have my route plotted, but I had not brought my laptop with me to load a different map set into the GPS. I asked Paul to call me back in an hour. I wanted to think about it and I would not have to decide for another hour or so. I called Nancy to see what she thought. I think she said something like, “Less miles, more points? Seems like a no-brainer to me.”

When Paul called back I told him I was heading north. He suggested a route through Cleveland and Buffalo. I told him I would try to make Cleveland by morning. I then called Nancy back and told her the bonus was a lighthouse on the north coast of New Brunswick. I told her the lighthouse was on an island named Tippensquaw. I did not want to stop to pull out the bonus sheet to recheck the name of the island. I asked her to find a large town near the lighthouse that would be in the base map of the GPS, since I could not load any other maps. I would check with her the next morning. Of course, the bonus location was on Miscou Island, not on the non-existent Tippensquaw Island. Nancy would spend considerable time and energy trying to track down information on the mythical Tippensquaw Island!

As I rode on through the night, I wondered how I could have been so blind. By heading straight to New Brunswick, I could have saved 150 miles. I had now ridden 150 miles out of my way and spotted the other New Brunswick riders a huge lead. I tried to catch up with John Ryan to get him to go north, but he was gone and had no phone on his bike.

I felt a strong sense of urgency to make up for lost time. As dawn approached, I thought about my plan of 4 hours of sleep every night. The plan didn’t survive Day 1 of the rally. The New Brunswick bonus was a “Daylight Only” bonus, meaning I had to get there in the daytime. My on-the-fly route had me there Wednesday around noon or so. From there I wanted to go on to Chicago and Nebraska, also both daylight bonuses.

After passing through Cleveland early Tuesday morning, I checked the GPS. In the first 24 hours, I had already ridden just under 1600 miles. I pulled into a rest stop for a half hour nap on the bike. Feeling refreshed, I pulled out and headed north toward Buffalo, then into Canada.

The weather was perfect as I crossed the Thousand Islands Bridge that leads into Canada. I pulled out my passport as I waited in line at Canadian Customs. As my turn came I handed my passport to the inspector and waited to be waved through. I told him I was on vacation on my way to New Brunswick. “Sir you will need to pull over and see the Immigration
Inspector.” I knew this was not a good sign. Going through a secondary inspection is a tedious experience that can eat up valuable time, sometimes hours.

I pulled off to the side and went into the building to be further examined. I waited in one line and then another. I answered questions and then some more questions and then some follow-up questions to those questions. All the while, I smiled and my brain went “tick…tick…tick”. An hour later I was cleared to enter the great white north and headed on toward Quebec.

Ah…Quebec, or as I like to call it, “The-Land-Where-All-Our-Signs-Are-In-French-And-We-Don’t-Care.” Nothing against Quebec, but it is really disconcerting even trying to find a gas station when nothing is in English. Even more disconcerting is the overhead flashing yellow sign that is surely trying to tell you something very important and you have no idea what it is.

I struggled through evening rush hour in Montreal and onto Quebec. Darkness fell and I began to fade fast. Rain started coming down. Now this may sound strange, but I have always found Canada to be a very dark place at night. Living in the Northeast, I am used to everything being lit up at night. It is clear that Canadians do not share the American love affair with the streetlight.

It was time to find a hotel and take my 6 hour rest bonus. East of Quebec, I began searching for a hotel. I soon found a perfect one. It had a credit card machine for a time stamp, restaurant attached and parking in front of the room. I had been riding for over 30 hours and had covered well over 2000 miles. I got some food from restaurant and took it back to the room. I set the Screaming Meanie alarm and was fast asleep two minutes after I was done eating. This would be the only food I would eat on the first leg.

I woke the next morning, sometime before dawn. I called Nancy and gave her an update. Using the Star-Traxx website, she had been checking the progress of the other riders heading to New Brunswick. I had my own schedule but because of my slight detour south, I wanted to find out how my progress compared with other riders. After checking, Nancy found that I was about 150 miles ahead of a couple of riders that were also headed toward New Brunswick. I knew from Paul that Shane had spent the night at a hotel about 150 miles ahead of me. Being behind Shane was something that was going to become a familiar theme.
As the morning progressed, it became clear that I would not reach the bonus until early in the afternoon sometime. I stopped for gas at a small station in St. Quentin, New Brunswick. After gassing up, I checked the GPS and found it routed me up to the coast through Campbellton and then along the coast to Caraquet. The map showed Route 180 on a more direct route, through the middle of New Brunswick. The owner of the station stated that 180 would be a little rougher road, but would save about an hour driving time.

I headed up 180, dodging potholes as I went. I ran into 2 modest construction zones along the 100 mile stretch. As I rode north, I passed Shane coming south. He had already been to lighthouse and was heading out. I continued north and passed one other rider coming out from the lighthouse only a few miles from the bonus location.

I arrived at the lighthouse and quickly snapped the requisite photo. Nearly all the bonuses during the rally required the rider to take a picture of the bonus location that also contained your Rally flag. While waiting for the photo to develop, I re-read the bonus instructions to make sure I did what was required to earn the points. I had learned through harsh experience that this was good practice. As I filled out my paperwork, two other riders rode up. I spoke briefly with them and then headed back south.

Again, I opted for Route 180 to save a little time. Unfortunately, it started raining about halfway down the road. The previous construction zones
were now muddy messes. The GS slogged through fine, but I really hate riding through mud. I never get comfortable.

I got lost briefly in Montreal, trying to find the correct road west. I planned on riding the northern route and dropping back down into the US near Detroit. After midnight, I began looking for a hotel for a few hours sleep. Unfortunately, my timing was going to be very expensive. Once again I was in the Thousand Islands area. The first two hotels I checked were full. The third one had a room. I ended up with a beautiful hotel room that cost me about $35.00 an hour. The hotel clerk was quite shocked when I left a few hours after checking in.

Chapter 8

**Back To Where it All Began**

I continued west Thursday morning, through the Toronto rush hour and south into Michigan, just north of Detroit. Unfortunately my Autocom system was acting up at this point. I was getting horrible feedback and static through the system. This could have been from moisture in the cables or some other problem. It didn’t matter. What it meant was that I had no telephone or radar detector. All my audio inputs were fed into my headset through the Autocom system. I missed the telephone most of all. Not only could I stay in contact with other riders and friends, it kept me from becoming too bored. There was nothing I could do until I stopped at the end of the leg.

Heading into Chicago is always an adventure. Illinois is full of toll plazas and my EZ Pass does not work there. There were two bonus locations in Chicago, only a few blocks apart, but they were in the heart of the city. And things did not start well as I headed into the city.

I approached a toll plaza and ended up in an exact change lane, with no change. It was too late to back out so I edged to the side of the lane to let other traffic pass me. As I pondered the stupidity of being stuck here, I watched the arm on the toll barrier go up and down as cars went through. It certainly seemed that the only thing to do was to piggy back on one of the cars going through and deal with the ticket later.
Well, as I can now attest, the arms on those toll barriers are a lot quicker and sturdier than they look. As I tried to slide through following the car in front of me, the arm came down on me striking the windshield and then in rapid succession, my head and arm. I felt like I had been struck with a 2x4, which, of course, I had been. The bike nearly went down, which would have been even worse. As it was, I pulled off to the side of the booth waiting for the authorities to come over. My arm ached and I had a crack in the windshield. I sat and waited, but no one came. I decided to slowly pull off to see if that would stir any activity, but nothing. There is probably a law somewhere in Illinois that if you get whacked in the head by a toll gate, then you are exempt from the 25 cent toll. I pulled off bruised but otherwise unmolested.

I picked up the first bonus downtown with no problems. The instructions for the second indicated that you may have to park in a garage and walk. That seemed somewhat extreme. As I got to the intersection, I steered the bike for the sidewalk and popped up on it with little fanfare. I would like to think I partied the sea of pedestrians like Moses parting the Dead Sea, but the reality was somewhat less thrilling. No one even batted an eye at me as I parked the bike on the sidewalk. One exceptionally helpful lady even pointed to the marker I sought. I snapped the photo, re-read the bonus directions and was off again.

After sitting in afternoon rush hour in Chicago, I headed west toward Nebraska. It was now Thursday evening. I needed to ride most of the night to be able to reach Scottsbluff, Nebraska Friday morning. The bonus there was another lighthouse that had to be photographed during the day.

The week before, I had seen a special on the weather channel on so-called “Super Cell Thunderstorms”. The special showed the devastation that one storm had caused in Nebraska one summer evening. As I crossed west through the night in Omaha, things began looking very bad. The entire sky became a horrendous lightening show. It was clear to me that this was a real life example of a super cell thunderstorm. All around me were sky to ground lightening strikes. I became worried about riding blindly into a tornado. Heavy rain limited visibility. When I could see, it was because lightening turned night into day.

As I approached a ridge, it felt like I was riding closer and closer to the storm. I was just trying to get through it, but the storm seemed to go on forever. I passed a tractor trailer that had gone off the road. This made me feel a little better, because state troopers on the scene were standing out in the storm. If they weren’t worried about lightening, then I should be okay. At
least that is what I kept telling myself. I later found out that several horses, not of the iron variety, had been killed during the storm that night.

I continued west, eventually breaking out of the storm. I pulled into a rest stop and got an hour of sleep. Later that morning I reached the bonus and ran into Ed Phelps. He had gone to North Carolina and Key West. We talked briefly and then parted. After obtaining the bonus, I headed for Denver. I was tired and looking forward to some solid sleep at the hotel.

As I rode to Denver, I felt good about my ride for the first leg. I did not think that I would be in first place, but I thought I would be in good position and well rested for the second leg. I caught up with Ed outside of Denver and we rode through some terrible traffic to the checkpoint.

We were met there by Paul and his wife Tricia. I filled out my paperwork and had Paul double check everything. I knew there would be many riders that would lose points for not filling out their fuel logs or bonus sheets properly. I did not want this to happen to me. One of my mini-goals was to not lose one point at the scorer’s table.

After waiting for a short time to be scored, I sat down at the scorers table. As my scorer began going over my paperwork, I began watching Jeff Earls, who was being scored next to me. The thought was running through my mind, “Boy he certainly got a lot of bonuses.” I did not see his final score at that time, but it certainly seemed to me that he had run a good leg. A very good leg. That nagging feeling in the back of my mind continued growing.
I grabbed some of the food provided for the riders and went upstairs for some much needed rest. I set the Screaming Meanie timer for 4 hours and went right to sleep. I awoke about a half an hour before the new bonus sheets were to be handed out and wandered downstairs. I ran into Paul Taylor outside the rider lounge. He gave me quizzical look and asked if I had slept okay. I told him that I had slept great and just wanted to check a couple of things on the bike. I repacked the bike, which included the laptop computer this time.

I went to the parking lot and tried in vain to get the Autocom working. Nothing seemed to work. Nancy had shipped a variety of new cables to the checkpoint, but none of them seemed to fix the problem. I resigned myself to running the rest of the rally without a phone or radar detector.

As I worked on the bike, Paul came up behind me. He asked again how I felt, saying that he thought I should try to get some more sleep. I looked at my watch and saw it was only a few minutes before 9:00 PM when the new bonuses would be handed out. At about the same time, I realized that my watch was still on Eastern Time! I had gotten up 2 hours early. I had wasted an opportunity to be really, really rested at the start of the 2nd leg. All of the sudden, I felt very tired. I wasn’t feeling very smart either.

I retreated to my room and tried to get some more sleep with no success. I tossed and turned before finally giving up and heading back downstairs. Twelve hours later, I would really be missing those two hours of lost sleep.

I found Paul again and we talked about the first leg. Paul told me that Shane had gone from New Brunswick to North Carolina. This allowed him to pick up several hundred more points than I had. Paul told me not to worry about it. He thought I was in good position. I told Paul that I did not think I could beat Shane. He was too good of a rider and would just grind me down over the next week.

Once the scores were posted, I found there were another 10 riders that I also could not beat. As I looked at the scores, I was stunned. I had scored just over 28,000 points, but the top five riders were all over 30,000 and all had gone west. Every one of them had ridden significantly fewer miles (and therefore much more efficient routes) than I had.

As I looked at the scores, Jim Owen sat in first with nearly 10,000 points more than me. Jeff Earls did have a very good leg. He was third with
over 33,000 points. Things were looking very difficult. Poor planning had dug
the riders of Team Robo a very deep hole. Shane sat in 7th, I was 10th and
John Ryan was 13th. The only thing we could hope for was a slew of larger
bonuses on the next leg to try to make up some ground.

Chapter 9

Onto the Maine Event

Shortly after 9:00 PM, Mike Kneebone announced the top 5 scores
and the new bonus sheets were handed out. As I looked over the bonus
sheets, I became even more anxious. The leg seemed to be very “point
challenged”. Not only were there no huge bonuses that could overcome the
mistakes of leg 1, but it seemed that even a very good run would only net
around 10,000 points.

I commented to Paul that Jim Owen could take a leisurely ride to
Maine, pick up no bonuses and I could probably still not catch him. And
though I did not know for sure, I suspected that Jim and the other riders in the
top 10 had no intention of taking a leisurely ride to Maine. I told Paul that it
was time to get aggressive. Very aggressive. And it wouldn’t hurt to get lucky
as well.

Team Robo adjourned to a room to look at possible routes. Shane
and Rick Morrison had quickly decided to take an aggressive route north. I
looked at the route, but did not like the timing of some of the bonuses. I also
thought that the bonuses up north tended to thin out drastically near the end
of the leg.

John Ryan was impatient and ready to ride. He had arrived very early
in Denver and had gotten a lot of sleep. He looked at the bonus in
Galveston, Texas and had decided to go for it. We ran the mileage for
Galveston and saw that this would require a ride of over 3,000 miles in about
55 hours. Paul and I did not think the points in Galveston warranted such a
big ride. We tried to talk John out of the route, but he was ready to ride. If
there was one of us that could do the ride without a DNF in Maine, I knew
John could do it. We all wished him luck and he was off.
I eventually picked a route through St. Louis and onto to other bonuses east, though I wasn’t sure which ones yet. I loaded up the bike and headed out of Denver around 11:00 PM. Ed, Sean and Bill had all also decided on a route through St. Louis. We would pass each other several times over the next 900 miles as we rode through the night and into the dawn.

As the sun rose in the east, I became increasingly tired. Riding into the sun seemed to drain all my energy. Several times I had to pull into rest areas for short naps. I had wanted to be in St. Louis around noon, but it soon became apparent I was going to be several hours behind that goal. At one point, Sean and I had pulled into the same rest stop. I was hot, tired and generally just beat. I looked at Sean and just said, “Brutal”. He nodded and pulled on ahead.

The bonus in St. Louis required a walk of about a half a mile to the middle of a bridge on old Route 66 to get a picture of a sign. If there is one thing worse than riding in riding gear in hot weather, it is walking in riding gear in hot weather. I pulled into the parking lot and looked at the bridge. For a brief second, I contemplated riding to the center of the bridge to get the bonus, but the bonus instructions had specifically said that you had to walk the bridge. I got off the bike, got my flag, camera, duct tape and bonus sheets and started walking.

I found the sign proclaiming Route 66 and took the picture. Again I re-read the bonus instructions and found that this was not the correct sign. The correct sign was 100 yards farther up the bridge. After getting a picture of the correct sign I walked back to my bike. Several other bikes were pulling into the parking lot. We exchanged greetings as they headed off for the bridge. I pulled out my laptop to run some possible routes.

I decided to forego the other bonuses just east of St. Louis and to head straight to Phillippi, West Virginia. With the bike re-packed, I started to head out, when one of the riders came back from the bridge, followed by another rider. I thought to myself that was pretty quick. They must have jogged all the way there and back. It turned out that one rider had forgotten his flag and the other one was out of film. They had gotten halfway up the bridge before having to turn around. I groaned at the very thought of walking up the bridge twice.
I rode on to West Virginia. I wanted to get as close as possible to Phillipi to be at the bonus around dawn Sunday morning. The bonus was a covered bridge that had to be photographed in the daytime. In Kentucky I ran across Jim and Donna Phillips at a gas station. They were riding the Rally on a Goldwing 2-up. As I sat in the gas station lot eating a candy bar, I marveled at any couple that could ride the Iron Butt Rally 2-up. Nancy and I have a hard time riding to lunch 2-up, let alone all over North America. Jim and Donna would eventually finish the Rally in 11th place, which is truly amazing. My hat is off to them.

During the day I had gotten Roger on the phone and he had been able to solve my Autocom problem, if only temporarily. I again had a working cell phone connection and radar detector. I told Nancy and Paul that I had decided on a route from Phillipi that would take me to Alexandria, VA-Baltimore-Harrisburg-Philadelphia-New York-Maine.

Around midnight, I found a hotel in a small town outside of Charleston, West Virginia. I grabbed some food at the Taco Bell, which was the only thing open and went right to sleep for a 5 hour sleep bonus. The next morning, I headed out just before dawn in heavy fog. My progress through the mountains of West Virginia was slowed considerably in limited visibility.

I arrived in Phillipi and found 2 other riders in the lot next to the bonus location. I took my picture as I waved to them. I was off again in just a few minutes. This was going to be a long day and I needed to keep moving. I continued on through the fog eventually coming out onto I-68, a road I know very well. I rode east on I-68 heading right into my own backyard.

Chapter 10

There’s No Place Like Home

Just after I crossed into Maryland, I passed another rider on a GS which was also going east. The bike was pulling into a rest area. I didn’t know it at the time, but I would be catching up with Jeff Earls several more times during this leg.
I called Nancy as I approached the Washington, DC area. We made arrangements to meet at a gas station just off the interstate near her house. I would need fuel by then and she could bring me some supplies that I needed. Another friend, Gordy Williams would also meet us there to lend some moral support.

About an hour from that stop, I got a call from Paul. He suggested I consider changing my route to include Lewes, Delaware and Cape May, New Jersey. I would also dump Harrisburg, PA from the route. To catch the new bonuses I would need to make a ferry from Lewes to Cape May. I called Nancy and had her start checking ferry schedules.
I needed to be at a large bonus north of Philadelphia before night fall. She called me back with possible ferry schedules as I began to run routes in my head to see if the route would work. I knew all the roads very well, including the expressway from Atlantic City to Philadelphia. I began to think the route was doable. Nancy made reservations for me on several of the ferries from Lewes, Delaware to Cape May, New Jersey. I wanted to make the 3:30 PM ferry to have the most time to make the Philadelphia bonus.
After meeting her, I ran down to Alexandria, VA and then up to Baltimore for two quick bonuses. I scooted across the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and into Delaware. I had called another friend, Bill Sage for help in Delaware. He was able to talk me into the bonus location. I took the picture and made it to the ferry just after 3:00 PM. I felt really good and was finally able to relax. By making the ferry, I thought I would be able to make up some valuable points on some of the bikes in front of me.
That feeling lasted about 3 minutes until Jeff Earls pulled onto the ferry behind me. I was happy to be able to talk with another rider, I just wish it had been a rider 30 places behind me instead of one 7 places in front of me. After speaking with Jeff, it was clear that I was not going to be making up much ground, if any on him. He had again ridden a very smart and efficient route. We exchanged what we knew about the other riders, which was not very much. We both believed that Jim Owen and Shane Smith had taken a northern route, but we did not know much more than that.

As the ferry continued on to Cape May, I plotted the 5 bridge bonuses in New York City into the GPS. In total all 5 bridges were worth over 1,000 points, however I still hadn’t decided to go for them or not. Jeff and I talked about he bridges. I told him I had not decided about them yet. Neither one of us mentioned the large bonus in Washington Crossing, PA, north of Philadelphia. The natural route would take us right past this bonus. If Jeff was too tired, or just not paying enough attention, he might just miss this bonus. Though he didn’t say it, I'm sure he was thinking the same thing about me.

After leaving the ferry, we both rode over to the lighthouse in Cape May and took the requisite photo. I headed out and lost sight of Jeff. Riding west, I kept one eye on my rear view mirror, but did not see Jeff. Perhaps he had headed directly to New York, I thought wishfully.

As I arrived at the bonus location in Washington Crossing, I ran into Bill Shaw, Sean Gallagher and several other riders. After a couple of minutes, the inevitable happened. Jeff arrived at the bonus, as I knew he would. To think that a rider of his quality would make such a huge mistake was pure folly on my part. It just wasn’t going to happen. This was clearly a popular bonus as nearly a dozen riders had arrived by the time I finally departed.

I headed north on I-95, contemplating the bridges of New York. At best I was non-committal about doing any of them. I have been to New York dozens of times. I have driven in the worst traffic New York can throw at you and I hate it. Plus, I wanted to get plenty of rest before the third leg. I was not sure any of the bridges were worth the aggravation and time it was going to take to get to them. There was the additional problem that the bridges only had a toll one way, making navigation trickier. The bonuses all required you to get a receipt for the toll for the bridge.

I somehow came up with the plan that I would head toward the bridges to see how traffic was. Somehow I thought if traffic turned out to be bad, I
could just turn around and head toward Maine. Not exactly the clearest thinking I had done during the rally. I set the GPS for the Outer Bridges on Staten Island to see what I could see.

What I saw was traffic, traffic and more traffic. The back-up for the first bridge stretched several miles. Of course the thinking at this point became, “Well I’m here, and I might as well as get this toll.” I crept along with traffic and finally made it to the toll booth. The EZ Pass paid the toll and I asked the attendant for a receipt. Things got very ugly, very quickly. Did I mention that I hate driving in New York?

Mr. Attendant told me he could not give me a receipt and that I would have to get one from EZ Pass. Now having gotten receipts for tolls paid by EZ Pass numerous times, I was a little taken aback. I explained that I was on a scavenger hunt and only needed a receipt for the toll. He adamantly maintained he could not give me a receipt. Frustrated, I pushed the bike to the side and dismounted.

I walked back to the booth and tried to reason with Mr. Attendant. I told him I would pay cash. He could not take cash from me because the EZ Pass had already paid. So I did the next logical thing. I told him I would pay for the person behind me.

“Do you know him?”

“No, I told you, I just need a receipt for this toll?”

“Well I don’t know what you’re trying to pull, but that is illegal and they don’t pay me enough to deal with this [expletive deleted]”

He bent over at that point and appeared to reach for something. I couldn’t quite see what he was doing, but it soon became apparent when someone tapped me on the shoulder a minute or so later. At that point I was trying to hand cash to the driver behind me to pay his toll and get a receipt. My quest was abruptly interrupted when I turned to see a uniformed Port Authority Police Officer motioning me to follow him. This was not a good sign.

I followed the officer and soon noticed another officer following me. Between the traffic and my earplugs, I could only understand about half of what they were saying, but I felt confident they were not there to give me a receipt. After more questions and answers, a manager or supervisor of some
type came out to speak with me. He seemed to greatly enjoy wagging his finger at me. This time, I was only half listening, just wanting to get on my way to Maine at this point. He lectured me about blocking traffic, creating disturbances and a whole litany of things that did not interest me. Then he said one thing that did interest me.

As I recall, he said, “Blah, blah, blah….blah, blah, blah….blah, blah, blah, blah….I’m going to give you a receipt and I hope you have learned a lesson.”

“Oh, yes sirree, I certainly did learn my lesson. Whatever you say. Can I have my receipt now?”

And after all that drama, I got my receipt. A crummy non-conforming receipt that would cause problems later at scoring, but a receipt none the less. I promptly buried the EZ Pass inside the Jesse side bag and rode off. And I still hate driving in New York.

I went on to get the other four bridges, obtaining regular conforming receipts all four times. I even got to pay for the Cross Bay Bridge 3 times while only crossing it once. But I got even with them by crossing the Verrazano Narrows Bridge 3 times and only paying once. A much better value as far as bridge crossings go.

At some point I am going to look at the GPS track I took during the 4 hours I was in New York just to see where the heck I actually went. It certainly was not a very efficient route. I had already given up on the George Washington Bridge and was just trying to get out of New York when I accidentally stumbled upon it. I got my last bridge receipt and headed north.

I was way behind schedule at this point. I had hoped for six hours of sleep, but as they say, that horse had left the barn quite some time ago. By the time I finally pulled into a Motel 6 south of the checkpoint, I would only manage 2 hours of sleep. I woke groggy and irritable. I certainly would not be heeding the advice of the Rally Mistress to arrive at the Maine checkpoint rested and ready to go.

As dawn broke Monday morning, the weather was pasty and dreary. Off and on falling drizzle was more of a nuisance than a concern. I pulled into the parking lot of Reynolds Motorsports with about an hour left before the penalty window started. The Rally was now two thirds over. I was tired, but happy to be at the checkpoint and see how the other riders had done.
I saw John Ryan. He had just gotten in from Galveston with little or no sleep. He had not been able to get any other bonuses. His score was going to take a serious hit.

Vickie Johnston looked good, but not happy with her score. She had unfortunately ridden past the large bonus at Washington Crossing which would drop her a little in the standings. Bill Shaw jumped up 10 spots with a good second leg. As I thought, all the scores were considerably less than the first leg. There were just not enough points available. Many of the riders had a difficult leg missing bonuses or having other problems. Another 7 riders dropped out of the rally for a variety of reasons bring the total of riders out of the Rally to 12.
I picked a spot and began working on my paperwork. I checked, rechecked and rechecked again. Once again, I accomplished my mini-goal of not losing any points at the scorers table. My "crummy" receipt from the first bridge in New York was eventually accepted after a favorable ruling from the bench.

After being scored, Bob Higdon, the official Iron Butt scribe cornered me for an impromptu interrogation.

"Are you tired?"

"No, I feel good"….good and tired would be more like it.

"Are you lying to me?"

"No", I lied.

"Would you tell me if you were lying to me?"
“Of course I would” as I walked away hoping to not be struck by lightning.

Bob has a way of bringing the rally to life. I love his writing. Despite the fact that he may not be wrapped any tighter than the rest of us, I would read the telephone book if he wrote it. He’s that good.

Food was set out for the riders and I quickly wolfed down four of the Egg McSomething sandwiches, along with a couple of bananas. I pulled out my laptop and got ready to plan the final leg.

Mike Kneebone gathered the riders to announce the scores and hand out the final leg bonus sheets. The good news was that I had climbed into 4th place with the best leg of all the riders. The bad news was that I was still way behind the leaders. Jeff Earls, now in 2nd place, had me by over 4,500 points and I was over 8,000 points behind the leader, Jim Owen. I had chipped away at them, and if my plan held true, I would catch them around the 40th day of this 11 day rally.
Chapter 11

It's Déjà vu All Over Again

Still though, I was elated to be in 4th place. As soon as the bonus packages were handed out, I tried to look for something obvious. Unfortunately there were no “ride to the end of the earth and back for a zillion points” bonuses. Some of the riders were heading to the west coast for a large bonus in Washington. That didn’t seem right to me. There were two other groups of bonuses, one group in New Brunswick (again) and the other on the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

Bill Shaw knew the Outer Banks very well and was already on his way there. I had been there before and knew traffic would be tight. The trip there would also require another ferry ride. New Brunswick did not look so inviting having just been there. There were a lot of points there, but not only had I just been there, it was in the opposite direction of Denver. There was also a good combo bonus between New York City and Las Vegas that tempted me.

I called Paul on the phone and we went over the bonus listings. We both agreed that going to Washington did not look tempting, but possibly New Brunswick combined with some large bonuses on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan might be a winner.

I then started running numbers for New Brunswick and North Carolina. The number of points between both locations was huge and I might be able to pick up some additional points along the way. I put a rough route in the computer and came up with a route around 3300 miles. I thought this sounded very reasonable. Unfortunately, I did not take the time to put in the exact route and run the numbers. If I had, I would have found that this route was well over 4,000 miles. Still though, I decided this was the route for me. I thought it had a real chance at winning.

I packed up the bike and headed out. By the time I had pulled out of the lot, there were not many bikes remaining. I did not know how far I could go on just two hours of sleep, but I wanted to try and make the first bonus in New Brunswick by nightfall, as the big bonuses there were available in the daylight hours only.

The bonuses in New Brunswick were laid out so you could travel the coast in a clockwise or a counter-clockwise direction. Neither way seemed to
make much of a difference. I ended up choosing clockwise as I set the GPS for Campbellton, New Brunswick.

As I rode north on I-95 through Maine, I encountered the occasional rider also heading north. South of the Canadian Border, Shane Smith passed me, again. This made me feel pretty good about the route. Shane had run a good second leg and was sitting in 6th place. Another rider also past me, as it started to rain. I began looking for a gas station to refuel and to don some heavier rain gear.

South of Houlton, Maine I pulled off I-95 into a gas station. There I found Shane and the other rider that had passed me, Rebecca Vaughn. We all exchanged greetings as we all hastily put on our rain gear. Rebecca asked me which bonus I was going to first. I told her that I hoped to make Campbellton before nightfall. All three of us headed out together, with Shane leading the way.

As we approached the border, the rain got heavier and steadier. Still though, it was not really affecting any of the riding. Shane and Rebecca cleared the border ahead of me. I was praying that I would not again be delayed at the border. Fortunately, I was waved through with no incident, after explaining to the inspector what a scavenger hunt is.
I had lost sight of Shane and Rebecca. They were gone. I assumed they were heading toward Campbellton, but could not be sure. What I could be sure of, was the further north I went, the heavier the rain got. My progress slowed considerably. At times visibility was down to only a 100 feet of so. My speed dropped to below 30 mph. As the day wore on, the rain became heavier and harder. Rain flew up inside my helmet from below. My rain pants became water logged and my boots filled with water, the gore-tex lining trapping all the water inside.

As I headed north, I saw a rider coming south. I could not make out who it was, but I figured either Shane or Rebecca had given up on Campbellton and were heading to better weather. I really wanted to turn around and cursed myself for continuing on. It was just plain stupid and stubborn.

None of that mattered, except for what it was doing to my progress. As I watched the GPS, it became increasingly clear there was a chance I would not make Campbellton until after sunset. All doubt of this was removed when I hit a horrible construction zone. The pounding rain had turned it into a muddy quagmire. I stopped and looked at the zone. I thought about turning around and giving up on Campbellton. I could not tell how long the muddy road would last. With no other cars around, I did not relish trying to pick the bike up in this mess by myself.

I began shivering from the cold and rain as I left the pavement. The road was bad, but thankfully the pavement picked up again in a couple of miles. But it was painfully clear, I would not make the Campbellton bonus today. My next plan was to just get to Campbellton, get a hotel room and get the bonus at dawn on Tuesday.

With about 40 miles to go to Campbellton, that plan was abandoned. I was cold, drenched and exhausted. I could not ride any further. Darkness had fallen and the rain made it impossible to see. I stopped at the next hotel.

I walked into the lobby, water rolling off me, leaving puddles as I walked. I checked in and got a timed receipt for my first rest bonus of the last leg. The clerk told me the rain was supposed to continue all through tomorrow. She commented how they had been in a drought and it almost never rains like this. I thought this to be an outright lie, since I had now been to New Brunswick twice in my life and it had rained both times.
I pulled my gear off the bike and sat on the bed in the room. I had no dry clothes at all, other than underwear. Nothing. No pants, no socks, no shirts. Everything was soaked through including all my riding gear.

I was ready to quit. Here I was sitting in 4th place and I wanted to quit. I was done. I was not going anywhere but to Denver if I could figure out a way to get back down to civilization. I was so tired I didn’t know what to do. I called Nancy. I had been out of contact with her since about 100 miles before entering Canada.

I told her where I was and that I was done. I didn’t care anything about any other bonuses in New Brunswick. And there was also no way in hell I was going to go to Prince Edward Island for any other stinking lighthouses. If by some miracle I got on the bike the next day, then it would be headed straight for Denver and no place else. And if I didn’t get on the bike, I would just sit here until the weather broke.

Nancy listened patiently and didn’t say a whole lot. She waited for me to blow myself out with my babbling. When I was done, I think she said something like it sure would be shame to be all the way up there and not go on to Prince Edward Island. And then, “Well you know best. You know….. Prince Edward Island is worth 10,000 points, and, while I’m no expert, that sounds like a lot of points to me.”

I sat there dumfounded. Yeah, that was a lot of points. I had ridden a lot further for a lot less already. It was time to quit whining about the weather and every other problem facing me. Every other rider in the Rally faced had their own demons. Mine were no different. It was time to get some rest and get ready to ride the last three days of the Rally. That was all that mattered at this point.

After hanging up, I bundled up all my wet clothes and went to the desk. The lady at the desk was nice enough to let me use the hotel’s dryer. I ordered some food from the restaurant next door and took it back to the room. After eating, I retrieved my warm dry clothes, crawled into bed and slept for next 7 hours. This is an eternity during an Iron Butt Rally, but there was nothing I could do until dawn the next morning.

Shortly before dawn, I woke and packed the bike. The weatherman did not disappoint. It was still raining, though not nearly as hard. After getting another receipt to end my rest bonus, I headed off. The rain continued, but it certainly seemed to be getting much lighter. By the time I hit Campbellton, it
had nearly stopped. I photographed the lighthouse and was off once again, heading toward the island of Miscou. It seemed a long time ago, but it was only a few days earlier that I had been there. I know someone in Denver had to be getting a good chuckle at that.

This time I was looking for a lighthouse on the north coast of Shippegan Island, just south of Miscou Island. I stopped in the town of Shippagan to ask for directions. I always found those buildings with the giant “?” on them to be very helpful. The young man inside knew exactly where the lighthouse was and pointed it out on the map. Following his directions, I headed toward the lighthouse. However, his directions did not match the directions listed on the bonus sheet.

I spent the next half hour searching for the lighthouse with no luck. I finally disregarded the bonus directions and followed those from the local. I found the lighthouse several minutes later. I turned into the parking lot and was surprised to see another rider there. I was also happy to see the other was Rebecca and that she had made it safely through the storms the night before.

It became obvious that she had had as bad a time the night before as me. To say that we both had struggled would be a huge understatement. We talked about the bad directions, the bad weather, the bad road, the bad everything. She had made it all the way to Campbellton the night before, which was impressive given the conditions.

I asked her where she was going and she said she was heading straight back to Denver. I told her that had been my plan last night, but now my navigation team (Nancy) wanted me to go to Prince Edward Island (PEI). We were only about 300 miles or so from there. Nancy had also told me that I would have to ride right past Prince Edward Island going south, but I thought there was a distinct possibility that this was a lie just to get me to go there.

I don’t usually ride with other riders during rallies. It can make things very difficult unless all the conditions are just right. But at this point in the rally, I thought both of us could use some company. If things got nasty again, you knew there was at least one person who was just as miserable as you. I asked Rebecca if she wanted to ride to ride together to PEI. After a minute or so, we agreed to ride there together.

The weather vastly improved as we headed south. Even better, we began passing riders that were going north. It made me feel better to think
that we were already past a bonus other riders had not reached. I know it made no difference, but I still smiled every time we passed one. We crossed the Confederation Bridge and onto PEI. The bonus location was on the extreme southern point of the island, another lighthouse.

Neither one of us knew exactly where the lighthouse was, but I had put White Sands in the GPS. That got us in the neighborhood of the lighthouse. A few miles from where I thought the bonus was, I saw one of those helpful “?” signs again and pulled in to the visitor center. The clerk inside gave directions right to lighthouse.

We got off our bikes and took each other’s picture at the lighthouse. The attendant came out and asked if we were heading back to Denver. Obviously, other riders had been here already. At that point, I wasn’t sure where I was headed. I knew I was way behind my fictional route to North Carolina. I called Nancy to get some information.

She had been speaking with both Paul Taylor and Leonard Roy about the route after PEI. They were divided on what I should do. They both agreed that going on to North Carolina was going to be very extreme. Paul thought it was too extreme and that I would be time-barred. He favored going for some large bonuses in Michigan. Leonard agreed that North Carolina was a risk, but he thought it was doable.
I didn’t know what to do, but then again, I didn’t need to do anything just yet. I told Nancy to get in touch with Paul and tell him I would call him once I got off PEI. I gave Nancy some other routes to run while I was riding.

Rebecca had decided to head directly back to Denver. I told her that I hadn’t decided where I was going yet. Either way, we both needed to get back to the US and there was only one way to go from where we were. We rode back toward the Confederation Bridge, this time paying the toll and getting a receipt for the bridge bonus. I stopped after the toll to call Paul. He asked me if I could make Ocracoke Island, NC, some 1200 miles away, before sunset the next day, Wednesday. I told him that I thought I could make it, hitting it between 3:00 and 5:00 PM.

He had changed his mind, and now thought bonuses in North Carolina were doable, though still extreme. But, I had to get the bonuses during daylight on Wednesday. I could then catch a two hour ferry from the Outer Banks back to mainland North Carolina. From there, I would have around 30 hours to cover the 1800 miles back to Denver. But I had to get the bonuses in North Carolina before sunset Wednesday.

Though I was relatively fresh, having only ridden around 400 miles or so since I had started in the morning, I would need to ride the next 1200 miles straight through to make North Carolina by Wednesday. I thought realistically North Carolina gave me the best chance at winning, but I also thought it gave me just as good of a chance at a DNF. I hung up with Paul undecided. I tried to call Nancy to get her opinion, but was not able to get through. I knew I already had enough points for a Gold Medal Finish if I rode straight back to Denver. If I picked up just a few easy bonuses along the way, I would probably finish in the top 10.

Before I had even decided, I turned to Rebecca and told her I was heading for North Carolina. I told her I was probably trading a gold medal finish for a DNF, but I was going to take a shot. We agreed to ride together back to toward Bangor, Maine, where we would probably split up.

We headed south, through Moncton, toward the border crossing in Houlton, Maine. There was very little traffic and we made good time. As we crossed the border back into the US, Rebecca took the lead into the night. With my poor night vision, I was happy to have another rider lead the way.

We arrived in Bangor, Maine and refueled. We had both been riding since dawn with no break and the midnight hour was fast approaching.
Rebecca decided to get a hotel room and to take her rest bonus. I needed to continue south toward North Carolina. We wished each other good luck and agreed to meet again in Denver. And with that, I set out alone, hoping I was doing the right thing.

Chapter 12

Carolina On My Mind

My main concern was much closer than North Carolina. I had to get south of New York City before the morning rush hour started. If I got stuck north of New York, I would spend hours trying to get past the city and would never make the North Carolina bonuses before sunset.

As I headed south, I began having problems with the GPS. It would turn off for no reason and freeze up while calculating the route. It also was continually routing me onto side streets. I was tired and becoming very frustrated with it. I ended up in a suburb of Boston, which I knew was nowhere near the correct route. I had almost resorted back to paper maps, when the problems fixed themselves. The GPS seemed to now be working, but I probably lost about over an hour with the problem.

I approached New York with traffic getting increasingly heavier. Shortly after 4:00 AM I had to stop at a rest stop for a 10 minute nap. I started out again, not feeling much better, but I crept toward my goal. I took the road in 10 mile segments. Just before 6:00 AM, I crossed over the George Washington Bridge into New Jersey. Once southbound on the Jersey Turnpike, I pulled into the first rest stop. I put the bike on the center stand, set the Screaming Meanie alarm for one hour and shoved it inside my helmet.

I leaned back on the bike and was quickly fast asleep. Many of my friends have told me that they could never sleep while sitting on a motorcycle. My response to them is always, “Well then you aren’t really that tired.” I had no problem sleeping.

I awoke an hour later with a fresh layer of moisture coating me and the bike. Dawn had broken on an overcast day. I figured the clouds were the distant signs of Katrina, but I wasn’t sure. I felt a lot better. Unfortunately, I
had again lost the Autocom, meaning no radar detector, but more importantly, no cell phone. The only way to make a call would be to stop the bike and use the phone. That meant I would be out of communication for most of the rest of the rally.

As I went south, I got some good news. Katrina had stayed to the west, going up the Ohio Valley and was nearly out of the US. I had thought I would run right into the storm on the way to North Carolina. In fairly uneventful order, I crossed into Delaware, Maryland and into Virginia. When I went to refuel in Virginia, I found that I had lost a credit card at the last stop. I had the support crew (Nancy) call and cancel the card and continued south.

There were three bonuses in the Outer Banks, all lighthouses. The Currituck Beach Lighthouse located toward the northern end was worth 3513 points. On the tip of Hatteras was a lighthouse worth 1201 points and the big one on Ocracoke Island worth 19,222 points. To reach Ocracoke Island you needed to take a ferry that ran every half hour from Hatteras to Ocracoke Island.

Once on Ocracoke Island, there were two ways to get to Denver. One would be to take the ferry back to Hatteras and to retrace the long and tortuous beach highway north to back to Norfolk. This was a 1900 mile journey with little opportunity to sleep.

The second path was a two hour ferry from Ocracoke Island to Cedar Island on the North Carolina mainland. I would be able to sleep on the ferry and have 1800 miles to Denver. The last ferry ran at 8:00 PM, but I did not think this ferry would leave me enough time to make Denver and avoid a DNF. I wanted to catch the 6:00 PM Ferry from Ocracoke Island to Cedar Island to make sure I did not DNF in Denver.

As I headed onto the Outer Banks from Norfolk, VA, I got stuck waiting for a drawbridge. I took the opportunity to call Nancy and firm up the ferry schedules. She reminded me about the Currituck Beach Lighthouse and the Hatteras Lighthouse. I was non-committal about either one of these and would decide when I got to the bonuses. I had decided that I needed to catch the 4:30 PM ferry from Hatteras to Ocracoke Island to ensure making the 6:00 PM to Cedar Island. Backtracking up the Outer Banks was not an option. I was just too worn out to do that.

I reached the intersection for the turn off for the Currituck Beach Lighthouse. An hour or so to the north was the lighthouse. To the south lay
Hatteras and the ferry to Ocracoke Island. The GPS showed me arriving in Hatteras just after 4:00 PM, without the detour north to Corolla for the Currituck Lighthouse. I turned the bike south, foregoing the Currituck Beach Lighthouse bonus.

Traffic on the road to Hatteras was a horribly slow procession of beach combers, fishermen and vacationers. Still though, I reached the Hatteras lighthouse around 4:00 PM and arrived in Hatteras proper in time to catch the 4:30 PM Ferry to Ocracoke Island.

As I settled down for the 40 minute ride, I called Paul to try and get an update on the other riders. He told me that Bill Shaw had gotten the North Carolina bonuses and was already heading west. John Ryan was having a good leg. Then Paul asked me if I had gotten all three bonuses in NC. I told him I had skipped the northern lighthouse to make the ferry. He told me that Shane was in North Carolina and that he had gotten all three.

This shook me somewhat, because I knew that this put Shane ahead of me by around 1500 points or so. I was a little down after this news. I remember thinking that Shane was somewhere ahead of me down the road in North Carolina with the lead. I did not think there were enough points to make up the deficit and overtake him. I also remember thinking it didn’t matter anyway. No one was going to catch Jim Owen, so if I finished 2nd or 7th, what did it matter. I was not going to win.

What I did not know at the time was that Jim Owen, after one of the more remarkable and amazing runs in the history of the Iron Butt Rally, had broken down in Nevada. His quest to lead the rally wire to wire was over. He would DNF. I also did not know that Shane had skipped the Campbellton Lighthouse in New Brunswick, leaving me slightly ahead of him. As I sat on the ferry to Ocracoke Island quite dejected, I was in fact leading the Rally.

But at that time, I knew none of that. I picked up the bonus on Ocracoke Island and then caught the 6:00 PM Ferry to Cedar Island, North Carolina. I was able to sleep about an hour on the ferry which helped my mood considerably. After that I was able to ride another 4 hours or so before running out of steam.

Outside of Raleigh I pulled into perhaps the worst hotel I have ever frequented. As the clerk slid me my receipt under the bullet proof glass, he asked me if I would like to put a deposit down to get a remote control. I declined. I was somewhat surprised there would be such a large market for
stolen remote controls in North Carolina. And I should add, remote controls for fifteen year old 12” televisions at that.

I called Nancy before setting the Screaming Meanie for my last night in a hotel for the rally. I was tired and wanted to ride straight to Denver, skipping any additional bonuses. I wasn’t even sure I could make Denver at that point without a DNF. I still had over 1600 miles to go and not much over 24 hours to make it. Paul told Nancy that Shane was going to be at the Mabry Mill, VA bonus at 6:00 AM Thursday morning and I was supposed to meet him there. At that point, I didn’t care. I wasn’t quite sure where I was going to be at 6:00 AM, but I was pretty sure I was not going to be at the Mabry Mill bonus. My only response was that I would try to do the best I could.

I awoke before dawn and was off again. I had gotten around 4 or 5 hours sleep and felt much better once again. I touched base with Nancy before I took off. My support team was headed for the airport to catch her flight to Denver for the finish. She would temporarily turn all her support duties over to her our friend and coworker, Aileen while en-route to Denver. I also did not know at the time, but my GPS tracker had been turned off because of the lost credit card in Virginia the day before. Aileen tried in vain to get the company to turn it back on, but they would not without talking to me and getting a new card from me. Once again, I knew nothing about this at the time.

Nancy reminded me about meeting Shane, but I was doubtful that I could make it in time. I was still probably 3 hours or so from the bonus. I did not think I could catch Shane in points anyway, but I would try. I got to the Mabry Mill bonus and then on to the bonus at the New River Gorge, WV. As I headed west, I knew Shane was somewhere ahead of me, but I was not sure how far and I didn’t want to take the time to call Paul and find out.

I set my sights on the bonuses in Missouri. There were two ferries there, but they were both “daylight only” bonuses. I wasn’t sure I could make them before sunset. I crossed through West Virginia and Kentucky, knowing Shane was ahead of me….somewhere. I did not know how far and I did not know if he was going for the Missouri bonuses or not. More importantly, I also did not know that I held a slim 986 point lead.
Chapter 13

The Circle Closes

For the final time during the rally, I was riding across I-70. I had become quite sick of the road at this point. I was tired but the end was in sight. By the time I hit Indiana, it was becoming clearer that I might not reach the bonuses in Missouri by nightfall. I missed the bonuses by about an hour. There was nothing else to do but to head to Denver. Only 900 miles to go.

I passed through St. Louis and on through Kansas City. As I headed toward Topeka, flashes of lightening appeared to the west in front of me. Apparently, there was still a little excitement left in the ride. I stopped at a toll booth and asked the attendant if they knew anything about the coming storm. “Fast moving from the west…hail.”

I really didn’t want to hear any of that. I put my rain gear on for what would be the last time. As I rode, I stared at the GPS trying to match up the road with the lightening strikes in front of me. There was not a lot I could do about the storm. I did not have enough of a time cushion to stop and wait. There was nothing to do but ride and hope to get lucky and skirt the storm. Somehow I-70 shaved the side of the storm, getting nothing worse than a few large drops of rain. The lightening was close enough to get my attention, but it too stayed a couple miles off the highway.

One thing I learned during the Rally was that there is nothing between Kansas City and Denver on I-70. Flat, boring and at times, windy. Other than that, I can do without that stretch of highway for the rest of my riding career. I would cross it one final time on my way home a few days hence.

I crossed into Colorado, struggling to maintain my speed. I pulled over and took short nap. I had about a two hour time cushion at this point, but I was quickly using it up, 15 minutes at a time. After pulling out of a rest stop I saw a bike coming up behind me. John Ryan waved as he went by. He would arrive in Denver well ahead of me, as I puttered on toward the finish. My nighttime speeds are at best at or below the speed limit. The closer I got to the finish, the more I worried about a deer mishap, flat tire or other calamity that could lead to a DNF.
My support team had arrived in Denver the night before and was anxiously awaiting my arrival. Because of the lost credit card, the GPS tracker was no longer functioning. The last position Nancy could find was on the east coast. No one was quite sure where I was at this point.

About an hour out of Denver, I stopped for the last time and called Nancy. I told her I was fine and simply working my way to the finish at a snail’s pace to increase the drama. I reminded her that the tortoise was the one that won the contest. And I was doing my best tortoise impression indeed.
At around 7:15 AM on Friday, September 2, 2005, I arrived at the finish. I had finished with 45 minutes left before the penalty window started. As I stopped the bike, I felt nothing but relief to be done. I got the hug and kiss from the support crew. Vonni and Paul Glaves were there to greet me, as they were with every rider.
Things got blurry after that. Paul was there, along with Shane, Bill Shaw, John Ryan and all the members of Team Robo. We had all made it through the Rally safely. No one could have asked for anything better. In fact as I soon found out, all riders would soon be accounted for with no serious injuries.

Nancy was snapping pictures while I was trying to find out what was going on in the Rally. It was then that I found out that Jim Owen was out of the Rally and that Shane had skipped the Campbellton bonus. No one knew what Jeff Earls (2nd after two legs) had done. Eric Jewell (3rd after two legs) was still out as were a couple other notable riders.

I gathered my paperwork and found a quiet place to do some serious ciphering. I did not want to lose any points at this stage. I checked the numbers, rechecked the numbers and then had Paul check the numbers. Everything seemed fine and in order. I gathered up all my paperwork and went to be scored.

I was probably more nervous getting scored for this leg than at any point in the Rally. With Jim out of the Rally, I thought it would come down to Jeff Earls, Eric Jewell, Eddie James, Shane or myself. It would be very difficult, though not impossible, for anyone else to jump over all of us with a monster leg. Mark Kiecker of the Minnesota Wrecking Crew would ride such a leg jumping up from 11th to 4th. I don’t know Mark but he is certainly to be congratulated for riding one of the best legs of the Rally.

I finished up with no scoring mistakes. I had accomplished my mini-goal of not losing any points at the scoring table. I was now officially finished. There was nothing else to do at this point. I walked around a little and spoke with some of the other riders. I saw Rebecca and found out she had gotten back to Denver safely.
Vickie Johnston had ridden another superb rally and would finish as the top female rider for the second Rally in a row. I know Vicki takes no consolation in this and will not be happy until she is the top rider period and she may very well be that one day. Other riders also finished the rally successfully. Sean Gallagher, Ed Phelps and Verne Hauck would all be finishers.
For other riders, the Rally finished as a bitter pill. The final leg had claimed another six riders with DNF’s. Other riders made it to Denver, but did not accumulate enough points to be considered a finisher of the rally. Out of the 90 riders that had started this journey 11 days earlier, 69 successfully finished the rally. One oft quoted factoids about the toughness of the rally is this one; More people have climbed Mt. Everest than have successfully finished an Iron Butt Rally. It is truly a battle of endurance and attrition.

After catching up with everyone I could, I made some phone calls and got some sleep. A few hours later, I woke up feeling much better, but still very groggy. Surprisingly, I did not awake with that sense of urgency to be anywhere or the panic that I had missed a checkpoint. I woke up fairly normally. The nightmares would begin days later and last for months, though they have become less frequent.

Nancy and I went downstairs and met with other members of Team Robo. We all gathered at two of the tables near the front of the banquet hall. Mike Kneebone, Bob Higdon and others said a few words while we all waited for the main event. Finishers would receive their plaques and perhaps more importantly, the license plate marquee that identifies them as a finisher of the Iron Butt Rally.
Perhaps the happiest person in the room was Bill Shaw. After failing to complete the Rally in 2003, he had ridden this Rally to a Gold Medal Finish. When called up to get his plaque, Kneebone, Landry and best of all, Higdon all received the biggest hugs Bill could muster. Bill’s smile stretched from ear to ear. I think everyone who knew what he had been through was smiling for him as well.

Lisa then called the top 10 riders up to the front. She proceeded to call the riders names in order from 10th to 1st. Peter Hoogeveen had earned another top 10, finishing 10th. Eddie James had battled back from injury to take 9th. Eric Jewell finished 8th. John Ryan had ridden a monster 3rd leg to jump up from 23rd to 7th place, an amazing comeback.

Marty Leir and Jack Savage finished 6th and 5th respectively. Mark Kiecker took 4th place after a great 3rd leg. That left Jeff Earls, Shane Smith and myself to decide the top 3 positions. Lisa announced that Jeff had taken third place. I know Jeff was disappointed he did not win the rally, but his ride had been a great one. He rode the most efficient route in the rally and came tantalizingly close to winning the Rally. Jeff is a smart, tough competitor who will probably win the Rally at some point.
And then there were two. I whispered something to Shane and waited for the announcement. Lisa announced that I had taken second place. I thought there was a lot of applause, but my guess is that there was not so much applause for my second place, but for Shane winning. I gave Shane a hug and accepted an impossibly heavy trophy from Mike Kneebone. I could not have been happier, even if I had won.

Shane received a well earned Champion’s applause and was ever gracious in his words to those in attendance. During the rally his home had been severely damaged by Hurricane Katrina, as he lives just north of New Orleans. While riders like myself, worried about such things as ferry schedules and checkpoints, Shane had other more serious concerns. At one point he wanted to quit and return to his home and family, but his wife would not let him. This was his last Iron Butt Rally after three top 10 finishes, including taking second place in 2001. In a fitting gesture, he left his flag at his last bonus in Hannibal, Missouri, one of the bonuses that pushed him past me to victory. Shane had beaten me by 1314 points.
Chapter 14

**Oh, What Could Have Been**

I have spent many hours since the rally ended, Monday morning quarterbacking many of my decisions and what I could have possibly done differently. The most obvious answer would be to go to the Lighthouse in Corolla, North Carolina that I had skipped. Those 3513 points would have secured the win for me. But it is not that easy. The two hour roundtrip to get those points would have caused me to take the last ferry off Ocracoke Island pushing me back at least two hours.

If I could have still made the ride to Denver after riding the two additional hours, I would have undoubtedly been in penalty time at 20 points per minute when I arrived in Denver. Things would have been very tricky. I think there is a strong chance that I would have been time barred if I had gone to Corolla. I will never know, but I do know I was at the limits of my riding when I got to Denver. Two more hours of riding without more sleep was not possible.

The bigger mistake was in the route I picked for the first leg. I rode a horrible route and deserved to be so far behind the leaders. It is ironic the leg with the most time to plan, resulted in the worst route and hence 10th place after the first leg. In looking at the second and third leg, I finished 1st and 3rd in points for those legs respectively with no time to plan the route. In reality the rally was “lost” on the first leg if that is possible.

Of course, Shane managed to overcome the same mistake and win. I could not. In my heart I do not feel I lost the rally by virtue of something I did or did not do. I was beaten by a better rider. As with all the riders competing, we did not lose the rally, Shane won it. It is a distinction with a difference.

The bike has recovered and came through in fine order. Though the BMW reputation has taken a hit in recent Iron Butt Rallies, my bike was just fine. I’m sure Jim Owen might have a different opinion after his BMW broke down and cost him a chance to win. The body is slower to bounce back but I have time to recover. One interesting note of my ride was that I only picked up one bonus west of the Mississippi, the lighthouse in Nebraska. In fact, Denver was the farthest west I rode the entire rally. I don’t know what that means other than I find it odd.
The good news is that 2007 is just around the corner. I have already talked with Paul about a new Team Robo. He is already doing the planning. Of course my support crew is not too crazy about another rally, but I think after some time off she will come around. Shane is officially retired, and I wish him a happy retirement. I also want him on my speed dial when I am sitting in Red Lodge, Montana and trying to decide to go to Tucson, Arizona or Grand Rapids, Michigan in 2007. I hope to avoid some of the other minor mistakes I made and do what every rider strides for, to ride the perfect rally. No one ever has ever ridden one, but we will all keep trying.