

2003 Iron Butt Rally – One Riders Perspective

Leg 3 Lake City , FL to Buxton, ME

I woke at my usual time, it matters not what time zone I am in my body adjusts usually in less than 24 hours and wakes automatically at 2:30 am. I have until the checkpoint opens at 5 am to contemplate the next few days; so I repack, pull out my maps and start to worry.

I know this will be one of the hardest and easiest legs for me as I know the east coast well, but also am very familiar with the traffic and toll roads. I had spoken in length with Mitch at Florida Motosports the day before and he suggested I-75, though that had not been my original plan; I was truly considering this option. Of course I would not be able to make a final determination on the route until I saw the bonuses but I wanted to get an idea about my options as I ride best in the morning so when the checkpoint closed at 11 am and we were handed out packets I did not want to waste too much time figuring out the highways north to Buxton.

During my repacking I noticed everything I had washed the night before was still soaked, so I went in search of the hotels laundry. Though I needed to dry just a few items I knew it was a justifiable expense as putting on damp shorts would just add to my already sticky situation.

I let the clothes dry while I headed in for scoring. Checking in first with Michael he noted I was still all smiles, this would not change as it was one of my goals for the ride to keep a smile on my face no matter what happened, as it was no ones fault but my own if the scoring or ride went badly.

I was then seated in front of a man who had never scored before; this would be a really slow process. Luckily as I was going over things with the scorer another scorer jumped and said Rachel as in rides a Ducati, yep. Turns out it was Rick M one of the men who had volunteered to sign me in if I had made it to Annapolis on my 50cc attempt. How cool to finally meet him, and he informed me Don A would be up in Maine for me to meet too even better! I would get to thank both!

The scoring went smoothly as I did not have much to turn in, so off I went to check and make sure the little group of riders I was worried most about had all come in. Everyone develops a group of riders they recognize and seem to watch out for mine consisted of the “girls”, Stephan on a R6, Peter on a Triumph, Terry on a BMW, Allen on his FJR, and Mike on his Goldwing.

I started to get a little nervous when I couldn't find Stephan but Lisa L (one of the officials) told me he had not called, so as far as we knew he was ok. The girls all tracked each other down and it was then we realized we were one short, but Linda was with her husband or so we thought so we didn't worry too much.

Sure enough we all arrived safe and sound and after chatting a bit I went to load up my bike to get ready to go.

As I was walking away a man came up to me and re-introduced himself, turns out it was the Goldwing rider from back in LA. He had not recognized me at first, especially since now I was all cleaned up and didn't have my riding gear on. I could tell he was a little stunned by my size, which is hidden well behind layers of riding gear when I am on the bike.

Gearing up the bike again took some time, but provided me the opportunity to meet some fans. Several BMW riders had gathered around the M800 once they realized it was part of the rally and they had a ton of questions. At least four of the riders wanted my picture next to the bike to take home to their wives/girlfriends as proof I really was out here on a M800 by myself.

The riders asked about maintenance and modifications and were surprised I had no fuel cell or any other extras, especially after feeling my rock hard seat. But all were more than supportive which just boosted my lagging bad run leg spirits.

The riders met at 11 am to find out our fate. The packets were handed out and I took over one of the banquet tables to layout my maps and plan. It was fairly easy for me to plan this route as I grew up around here and could immediately rule out some of the bonuses as not for me. By 11:20 am I was on the bike and rolling.

As I came toward the on-ramp I noticed the film crew that Michael had told us about parked on the ramp with camera pointed right at me! Sure enough they followed me up onto I-75 and filmed me for a bit riding down the highway. Gosh I wish I could get that footage, and the footage I know they took of me at several other spots!

I cruised up I-75 toward Atlanta. I heard from Allen later he was one of the fools who went after the Key West bonus, a part of the US I swore I would never go back to after my 4- Corners ride. He was not happy after doing it – perhaps he should have talked to me first.

It is outside Atlanta that many of us hit a storm such as I have not witnessed since my 4-Corners ride. The rain came down so hard the traffic slowed to about 25 mph. Then the lightening and thunder started, vibrating up through the bike frame and into my bones I knew once again Mother Nature reins supreme. Many of the riders had pulled under over passes, but I was determined not to stop as down time for me could not be made up.

So I held my ground in the middle lane right behind a pickup truck. I did not care how slow he was going I was not giving up my position as the lanes to the right and left had filled with water. The most amazing thing about this was people here knew how to handle the road even with the storm, whereas in Seattle though it rains all the time no one understands the dynamic of driving on a wet road. I did not encounter one accident; everyone just slowed down and behaved appropriately.

Unfortunately, I was so focused on the road I failed to notice a rider off his/her bike, on an off-ramp, waving until it was too late for me to move over and see if I could offer assistance. So the panic set in as it is against IBR rules to pass a rider who needs assistance, you can actually be disqualified. The panic continued for 10 more miles until I could take the next exit ramp to a gas station with an over hang pull out my cell phone and call Lisa and Michael to ask what I should do.

I explained as best I could what had occurred and both agreed I should not attempt to go back since the rider was walking and the bike was upright, and no one had called them for assistance. They both agreed I was ok to proceed. I would still worry it is just my nature and would even ask one more time at the Maine checkpoint if any rider had called in, none had.

I continued on toward my first goal Tellico Plains, TN for a gas receipt bonus. With plans to make Marysville, TN for the 1 hour rest bonus. I learned a hard lesson outside Atlanta one I will not soon forget. Atlanta is not particularly safe.

I left my bike at a gas station pump long enough to go in and get a receipt as one had not printed, only to return to a situation I was not sure I was ready for. Though there were 8 pumps and only two were busy a man had placed himself between my bike and the pump to put gas in a canister. I am not a big person and in full gear cannot move fast so I was not sure what to do. I placed my keys defensively in my hand and walked toward the bike, scanning for others and making sure my detector was still on the bike as was my tank bag, the two easiest items to nab. Everything was still there, as he looked up and said nice bike.

He moved away just as I got close enough to realize I would have to make a decision about how further to react and laughingly told me not to worry. Excuse me not worry. Yes I left in a hurry and don't have plans to return any time soon.

Up I-75 to Rte 64. Without a gps I started to get nervous when I hadn't encountered 411 the road that would take me further north to the side road to Tellico. So at a stop light I called out to a really cute guy asking if I was going in the right direction. He yelled back yes and asked where I was headed. I responded Tellico Plains and he started to tell me I needed to try another road. I was desperately trying to explain that I couldn't I was riding the IBR but the light turned before I could finish.

I finally found 411 and started north toward the road to Tellico, and what a road it turned out to be. I had no idea that there were such great roads on the east coast having ridden very little here. The hills, tight turns and old farmhouses made for a marvelous ride! To boot when I arrived at the designated gas station there were a ton of other riders already there. It was just too funny when I received the gas receipt at the pump and it did not have the location on it, information that is required for all gas receipts. So I went inside to get this info and a phone number, also required, only to find the woman behind the

counter with her hand out stretched. Turns out so many riders had been in she knew exactly what she needed to provide and did so with a big smile on her face.

A quick look at the map and a little chat with some of the other riders made me doubt I would take on the Marysville bonus. I found out it was not a restaurant, which is what I had assumed from the title but someone's home. I am not comfortable going into someone's home especially if I do not know them and at night too! So I set out in that direction as I needed to go that way anyway and figured I would decide as I got closer if I would try to overcome my fear and go for it or if it was just too late and I needed to rest.

I arrived just outside Marysville and decided the hour I would be required to spend at this man's house was more than I could handle, perhaps next time, and instead settled in for a rest period at a very dive motel.

August 17th I hit the road toward Knoxville. By the time I realized I had passed by Knoxville it was too late I had missed a gas bonus oh well that will happen a few more times. I was determined to get to Hope, NJ for a bonus so I hoped on I-81 toward New England.

All highway riding here on the east coast would not do well for my state of mind. Traffic and fools everywhere I turned. There were only two times on this ride I thought I was not going to see the end; both occurred in NJ and both were in traffic.

The first was when a truck tried to cut in between the car behind me and me. I did not even realize anything was happening, who looks behind them in dead stopped traffic. Then I heard the horn and the squealing brakes. I looked behind to see the car driver had just about butted noses with the truck to prevent him from cutting between us and in the process had also come within inches of my tail! The second was similar situation but we were moving a little so I had my eye in the mirror when the traffic stopped quick and saw the fool behind me was not paying attention. One good thing about bikes is if you are aware you can squeeze yourself up alongside another car in his lane to avoid a rear-end accident this is exactly what I did.

Enough said. I made it up to the intersection of I-81 and I-80 when I called the Harley dealer as I could not find Hope on the map. As I was getting directions when a man came over to me and said he knew where the dealer was and couldn't understand why they were sending me the way they were, but he could not seem to come up with a quick alternative so off I went.

Back on I-81 for a short time I ran into Peter again, he took off in another direction however and I am glad I did not follow him, though I was tempted as he is from CT so would know the way better, as he was on his way to his house to fix some minor issues. I-80 turned out to be horrible, traffic and construction everywhere, I was not sure I could stand much more when I finally reached the turn off to 287 and then the dealer.

I rode the wrong way into town, a very cute town, where I asked about the dealer and was pointed back the way I came. Sure enough when I got there several other riders were there as well as the typical Sunday Harley rider groups. I proceeded to pull my camera and flag out then went inside to find the Harley Dragster. The man behind the counter said nope. What do you mean nope? It is locked in the trailer and the key is with the owner who was not coming in today. I stood dumbfounded and disappointed. He told me all the other riders had taken a picture of the model and I could too. I wasn't sure this would work so I asked another rider and they said yup, the rules say to do your best and if you can not for some reason get the exact photo get the next best thing.

I took my photo with flag and went to mount up. It was then I became part of a small trio of Harley guys on their way home who just thought what was going on too funny. We rode from the shop together back out on the freeway not parting until I started north and then south. What a pleasure to ride with true Harley riders it is like ballet. They are smooth on the throttle, move as one like a school of fish and just are so laid back. I still can't do the "no gear" concept but it was fun for a bit to be one with them.

I could tell a storm was coming in and I was not sure how far I would make it before it came in but I was told by one of the Harley guys I was but 4 hours from Boston. Oh my, would my parents freak if I made it home for my rest tonight. This did not happen. Between traffic in NJ and the storm coming in really fast I realized in Danbury, CT I should stop and rest for the night.

I also realized too late I was in need of gas really bad, so the closest hotel was a Hilton, don't ask how much that cost – hmmm about \$30 an hour – smile. But I was glad I stopped when the rain came pelting down as I parked the bike. Just walking from the parking lot to the entrance my gear was soaked. I was treated to major weather warnings while watching the weather channel in the room as I got ready for bed and power outages throughout the area; I knew I made the best decision. Though the woman who checked me in could not believe I would be here just long enough to rest, especially when I told her not to tell me about breakfast or the pool as someone else would have to use my allocation.

This stop would be a rest bonus for me as well so I made sure to get a special checkout on my way out the door early on August 18th.

I know this part of the US like the back of my hand so headed straight for Plymouth Rock my next bonus. I rode the turnpike like I had never left MA, down to 495 toward Plymouth. It was Plymouth I was not ready for. I had forgotten you had to travel off the main road really far through back roads to get there. Luckily I love New England and miss terribly the architecture and smells of the ocean, so I found it quite peaceful to do this ride. When I reached the rock it was daylight perfect. I went to get the date off the rock as required for the bonus, and to take a picture of my flag on the outside though not required I could not imagine not doing so as anyone could call Plymouth and ask what the date was.

As I turned to go two men jokingly said you definitely have proof you were here. Guess I was a little obvious, not to mention at this point I had found myself once to often talking aloud. Hey you would too after hours and days without true human contact!

Back on the road north toward Boston, it was high traffic time so I figured I would surprise mom and dad. They were to meet me in Buxton but I had enough time to say hi. So I swung in and buzzed the doorbell. My parents doorbell rings through their phone so when my mom answered I said hi, she said where are you, downstairs, no you aren't, yes I am, we'll be right down.

There mandatory hugs and kisses as I had not seen my family in almost two years! Then of course we had to get the gear off the bike as this is not a neighborhood to leave it out for even a few minutes. I got to take a shower and rest before heading out again toward Salem my next bonus.

Salem was less fun then Plymouth. As I mentioned Michael does not make this easy and downtown Salem with it's one ways and bad signage made this a bear to find, not to mention the bonus was behind a wax museum on a dead end street! But low and behold my "I will ask any one for directions" worked and I finally found it just as another rider was pulling out.

I wondered as I laid my flag on this marker for Bridget who was hanged what all the locals must think of this and if it might be considered rude. So I tried to be quick and quiet, just as I had at every stop. Two pictures in hand and my noted name, date of death and means of death on the score sheet I was off again toward Buxton.

Before I left town though I needed gas and a bathroom. So I pulled into a station and had a nice chat with the attendant about bikes and such, he even gave me great directions to get me out of town much faster then I came in.

Up I-95 north toward NH and ME, tolls tolls tolls, gosh I hate tolls I must have spent upwards of \$30 on tolls!

I made the turn off to Buxton, which took me through Saco, where I noticed a better hotel, then the one I had reserved for this checkpoint. I swung in checked with my parents and proceeded to change the reservation before heading off again to Reynolds Motorsports. I arrived just as the checkpoint opened with my parents in close pursuit. I had to ask them to wait, as the scoring process required I paid close attention to make sure all my paperwork was in order and I was ready. Sure enough I sat down to the smiling faces of Don A and Rick M! Yipee!

Well it was a good thing the scoring table wasn't too busy as we all got to talking. Soon enough though we had finished and were just chatting when my sister tapped me on my shoulder and the hugging and screaming and crying started! The men told us to take it outside so we did.

It was now that the minor repairs I needed to make on the bike had to get done. First I had to change out the headlight. I had called ahead to my sister's husband for him to pick up a Piaa bulb for me, though I always carry a spare I did not want to use it if I didn't have to. I also needed to figure out why my electrics weren't working as I had tried to figure it out in the dark in Plymouth to no avail. This turned out to be very minor the dealer had forgotten to hook up one connection to the battery the last time the bike was in the shop.

Within about 10 minutes I had the bike back together and we headed out to find some lunch. Ah real food! I was in heaven salad with grilled chicken and Dijon dressing what more could a starved rider want!

Our table conversation went from my trip to my following of fans! Turned out several lists had been monitoring me, others had been jamming my website to the point the server was shutting down, and still others were coming out just to meet me! My parents even ran into some Harley riders at a rest stop in NH who had heard all about the woman on a Ducati!

When we got back to Reynolds it was time to say goodbye to my sister. And Michael was asking the riders to rest, so my parents too headed off for a bit so I could rest in the warehouse behind the shop where the other riders were. I found on this ride I could sleep just about any where, something I had never been able to do before including now on a cold hard concrete floor with 30 other riders, some snoring, some talking.

After waking I had time to check in and make sure all the people I normally watched out for were in, and to get ready for the bonus packets. My parents arrived, as they too had taken a nap at the hotel and made reservations for their dinner a meal I would not get to enjoy as once the packets were out some would be off again, me I would be back at the hotel strategizing as I ride best in the morning hours.

The call goes out it is time to gather we do. The packets are distributed and I am off.