

My 2005 Iron Butt Rally

by Rick Mayer

Acceptance and preparations

My [Iron Butt Rally](#) adventure started with the congratulatory e-mail late summer of 2004 advising me of my applications acceptance. I was surprised to have been picked because I had not yet joined the Iron Butt Association even though I had completed many 1000+ miles riding days in my 30 years on a motorcycle.

Preparations began immediately as I readied my bike, body, mind, and family for the ordeal to come the following August. The bike, a 2003, BMW R1150RT had 75,000 miles and had proven to be a very dependable rig. An extra gas tank was fitted in lieu of a passenger seat and additional driving lights were added. The communications system was already extensive and included XM satellite radio, CB, FRS (family radio for nearby two-way communication), radar, GPS, and cell phone all wired to my earplug speakers for on-the-fly use.

As the start date approached, the butterflies flew often. The self doubts were many. My family was convinced they would not see me alive again after the start. My best efforts to convince them otherwise fell on deaf ears. I knew I would not take this competition to the bitter end however and the goal was to finish somewhere in the middle of the pack.

The week before the rally start, the bike received a new final drive, belt, fluids, and a stem to stern check. To the best of our combined knowledge, all was as ready as it would be.

Start Weekend

The Friday before the start in Denver my son and I attended a concert 150 miles from my home and 100 miles closer to Denver. After the concert, I checked into a local motel and said farewell in the motel's parking lot to my son and daughter. The goodbyes to my wife had come and gone earlier that day.

At 4:00 am the wake up call started the push to Denver; 1341 miles and a leisurely 17 hours later I rolled into the Hotel in Denver that was the headquarters for the Iron Butt Rally for the next 14 days.

After a good nights sleep I awoke at 0630 and spent most of the morning on technical inspections and paperwork. It was discovered that my homemade auxiliary gas tank held more than the allowed maximum so two 16 oz. Snapple bottles filled with gas and wrapped in foam and sealed with the original cap displaced the 27 oz. needed to bring the total down to the required maximum

The afternoon was a mix of anxiety, chit chat with other riders (many of whom were my seat customers), and last minute fiddling on the bike. The riders assembled for dinner at 1700, and at 1900 our packets were handed out detailing the bonus locations for the first leg of the 2005 Iron Butt Rally. We then scattered to our rooms and other quiet locations to plan our strategy- some gathered in small groups but most were alone with their maps and laptops. The

mood was generally very serious. The laughter was in part needed to break some of the tension.

The Start

The bikes were impounded in the parking lot on Monday at 0800 and could not be moved. There was much milling about but none of us wandered far from the bikes. The official start was at 1000 hours and we were flagged off in pairs to a Denver police escort and streets closed for our departure. Ninety-one very special bikes and riders in a soon-to-be-thinning group. I chose to ride to a very high point bonus on an island off the coast of New Brunswick in far northeast-



ern Canada, 2653 miles east of Denver. There were 10 or so riders that chose this initial destination, knowing that we would have to return to Denver by 1700 hours Friday. 5300 miles in just over 4 days. Torrential thunderstorms met us within 100 miles east of Denver and by 1200 hours I had separated from the small group riding East. I would be virtually alone for the next 4 days, not seeing another competitor on the road.

I had forgotten to pack my Birth Certificate and had called my wife to have it overnighted to a shop I had found in the phone book outside of Chicago, IL. I had predicted this would be a likely stopping point for the first day.

I moteled it in Niles, Illinois, a small town between Chicago and Detroit and met the shop owners of Surry Motorworks the next morning after about 5 hours sleep. The shop owners, Cory and Jack were very interested in my participation in the Iron Butt Rally and were in fact following the ride and rider's progress on the Internet. Fed Ex arrived within 15 minutes of my arrival and within 30 minutes I was back on the road, Canada-bound, armed with my birth certificate and proof of Canadian insurance coverage.

I crossed into Canada at Sarnia, Ontario just north of Detroit and was quickly on the 401, the closest thing to an autobahn North America has to offer. Although the posted limit was 120km (about 65 mph) the flow of traffic was much faster and I passed Toronto and was into Montreal by nightfall. I continued north and east on into the night and found myself in deep fog in an area of New Brunswick that I discovered was not on my GPS maps.



Dead reckoning kicked in and I crossed New Brunswick that night and the next morning and was at Miscou Island by 1100 Wednesday

The bonus location was a lighthouse built in the early 1800's and to earn the 17,400 points I needed to take a photo with my Polaroid. No digital photography is allowed on the Iron Butt for official photos. As I was prepared to leave, I realized I had not included my rider's flag in the photo and took another. No points would be awarded to a rider whose flag was not pictured in the photo. It would have been a long ride for nothing!

I took another route across New Brunswick hoping to avoid the 8 hr/350 mile two lane that skirts the Province along the north coast. Provincial Hwy 107 runs

from the south east corner to the North West corner of the province. This 135 mile isolated road with one two-pump, card-only gas station halfway across and no other sign of (two legged) life was so bumpy that twice I had to re-attach my rear-view mirrors that had been bumped off. With two fully loaded log trunks setting the pace at my tail, I drove much faster than was comfortable for that narrow, unlined, forested path with pavement (mostly).

I back tracked my route back through Montreal, arriving around midnight to an exceptionally comfortable motel and an all night diner featuring excellent lobster club sandwiches.

The following day, Thursday, I re-entered the US and with the help of my XM satellite radio, successfully negotiated the Chicago metro traffic and bagged two daylight bonuses downtown. Since I was in the neighborhood, I dined outdoor at Al's sausage dogs and waited for the rush-hour traffic leaving the city to subside.

I drove all night towards Denver, 1100 miles or so and took a 5 hour detour to bag a significant bonus in Nebraska; a lighthouse! I rolled into Denver about 1 hour before the checkpoint opened and relaxed in my room, hoping to catch a quick nap before our rally packs for leg two were handed out at 1900 hours.

Summary for leg 1 - 4 days 7 hours, 5800 miles [56mph average], 29500 points, no penalties, and 10th place overall. Not bad for a rookie, I thought!

The Second Leg

Friday, 1900 hours and the bonuses were distributed. 100% of the locations were located on the east coast with several in the St. Louis area. The obvious strategy was to take off across the prairie, ride all night, bag the St. Louis bonuses in the morning and attack the east coast. Unfortunately I had been awake for more than 40 hrs and the thought of getting back on the back for a hot, boring ride across Nebraska sounded like suicide to me so off to bed for a short nap- at least, that was the plan.

When the Denver sun hit my eyes, I knew I had slept way past my intended wake up. A glance to the clock revealed 0845 hours. I couldn't believe it! I had not slept that late in 20 yrs!



These guys on these customs knew EVERYTHING about the IBR!

here). This bend identified the hazardous western edge of the river with its rocky reef and directed river traffic to the deeper East side.

On to Gays, Illinois for a quick photo of the only two story outhouse in the country then a quick lunch to review my strategy for the following 30 hours or so. The 0900 Monday checkpoint in Buxton Maine was beginning to look distant.

At lunch my GPS indicated that between Gays, Illinois and Buxton Maine was a distance of 1222 miles and would require 18 driving hours. The time now was 1600. Since I would lose an hour entering EST, I had 19 hrs to make it to the checkpoint, so much for bonus strategies. I had 1 hour to spare for three gas stops and comfort breaks! Needless to say I was off again in short order. Fortunately the weather was clear and cool, and the traffic was light so I made good time through Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

A quick shower, a roll from the café on the way out and to the parking lot where my bike sat alone, patiently waiting for my return. I was off across the prairie (again) and rolled the next 1000 miles or so feeling like I was chopping wood.

I rolled into the only 24 hour-available bonus around midnight, a tiny little town near Eureka Springs by the name of Beaver with an important, historic bridge the locals call the “Golden Gate of the Prairie” and got a motel shortly thereafter. The next morning I am off at 0600 up to St Louis to get a photo of the Chain of Rocks Bridge across the mighty Mississippi. This bridge was used between 1935 and 1965 as the Route 66 river crossing. It was also featured in the movie “Escape from New York”. An interesting feature of this bridge is the 22 degree bend halfway across (seen



Breakdown!

Somewhere in Western Pennsylvania, outside of Scranton, my concentration is broken by a sudden glaring red light from my dash display. I knew this alert well as I had seen it twice before. My alternator belt had snapped. I knew from experience that on this bike, a fully charged battery in absence of an alternator re-supplying current is good for about 15 miles. Fortunately, part of my bike preparations had anticipated this well-talked-about failing of this bike and I was prepared for a roadside fix. I picked the most well lit area on the side of the road I could find after about 8 miles of searching for a rest stop and pulled as far to the side as I could while still on pavement. It was just before a bridge and several streetlights had been placed to mark the bridge's legs. I found my tool kit and my friend's trouble light (thank you Ron!) and after a few minutes of searching, my extra alternator belt.

Part of my planning had been to cut the cover of my alternator belt cover in half horizontally, about half way up. This allowed for the complete removal of the cover without removing anything else. Prior to this emergency I had discovered that an hour or so was involved in the removal of the cover as it necessitated the removal of the bike's fairing and fairing bracket-keeping track of the 15 or so tiny screws was just not going to happen on the side of the expressway at night. Five minutes later the cover was off and 10 minutes after that a new belt was bumped on using the handle of a screwdriver and the bike's starter button. 2 minutes more the covers (2 halves) were reinstalled and I was back on the road. Total time- 28 minutes! Feeling immensely smug I found a great deal of energy for the next hour or so.

Once into New York, the pace slowed considerably as the toll booths became a repeated annoyance. Each booth required the removal of a glove, and careful extraction of my wallet-knowing that had I dropped either the traffic behind my would have no patience while I dismounted, set the bike on the center stand, retrieved the dropped item and remounted the bike. Fortunately I managed to find a clip that nicely held several dollar bills on the bike's shelf over the gauges for easy retrieval.

It is exceedingly boring at night on this stretch of road with few large towns and no scenery to keep you occupied so I was forced to take several short naps at comfort areas.



This was a stretch of new blacktop somewhere in NY where for 20 miles just the shoulder was open. I had the frequent blast of my radar detector to keep me awake. 45 in the construction zone you know and double the fine! I did some quick math and figuring one barrel every 100' or so times 5 lanes times 20 miles = 5280 rented barrels! Somebody had a sweet deal!

In New York these rest stops, or comfort stations as they are called are like mini malls with several fast food places, a gas station, restrooms, and several even had all-night gift stores. Somehow I resisted the NYFD coffee cups and hats.

I finally reached Maine at 0730 hours and ran up the 95 in quick order to the Buxton turn off. Construction now slowed my pace and the clock was ticking. 0900 came and went, then 1000 and finally, after covering the final 20 miles in a agonizing 55 minutes I pulled into the parking lot of Powersports at 1045. A quick run into the office to stop the clock and assess the penalty; 106 minutes past 0900, 10 points per minute, 1060 point penalty-OUCH. Coupled with a meager 3 bonuses bagged for the entire 3 days put me at 40th place with 34100 points



Mike and Lisa explain why the Louisiana bonuses might not be such a great plan on day 6! “What Hurricane?”



Above, the shop list of service appointments at Powersports.

Baby Needs New Shoes!

I had expected my original tires to be shot by now and they were. My decision to start with the 880s was a good one. Nearly 9,000 miles! I had shipped a set to this dealer and pulled my bike to the service area for the mounting of the tires. The third leg bonuses were handed out and I found a quiet area to review the last 4 days of riding strategy. The bonuses were once again sprinkled across the entire U.S. with large bonuses along the east and west coasts. Again I found my self craving sleep and surrounded by an overwhelming force of riders prepared to head out again across the U.S. to bag the really big bonuses on the West coast. I couldn't face the thought of another hour without sleep, much less do so on a motorcycle in East Coast traffic. I had heard of THE WALL many times in my 30 years of riding but I don't believe I had ever come close to glimpsing it until now. I wouldn't describe it as a wall however, more like a very large curb. I could still see above it, but doubted I had the strength to hop over.

Fortunately there were several nearby bonuses that gave me a little time to regroup. I went after those after the bike was ready and even found time at a little gift store to select a few presents to have the store ship home for me.



The Beaches in Maine!

I still craved sleep as afternoon became evening and I knew another motel was in order. I had made reservations prior to the trip at the local Motel 6 in Portland, Maine and checked in. Across the street and down the road a mile or so was a very good local diner that served Lobster for \$12.99! Knowing a good night's sleep could be counted on and with dinner well settled, I pulled out the maps with renewed interest in actually finishing.

I needed 26,000 points and had 2,300 miles to ride in 3 full days. With several large Freebie bonuses built into the last leg amounting to over 10,000 points, and more than 9,000 points in two fairly tight groupings, for the first time in days I felt sure I could actually be a finisher. So it was settled, and off to the motel and bed.

The Final Push to Finish

Tuesday morning was bright and clear; I awoke without alarm around 0630 hours and quickly checked out of the motel. This morning felt much like the first morning 8 days prior with much the same energy and enthusiasm. The first bonuses were relatively close. The GPS led the charge and to the back roads of New Hampshire I motored. I had never traveled this country and it was spectacular. Several covered bridges to photograph then off through Pennsylvania.



I motored it in Western Pa and awoke again at 0600 hours- it was Wednesday. The remnants of Hurricane Katrina had finally reached the Northeast and the weather would shift repeatedly from cloudy, to torrential rain accompanied by 40 mile per hour winds. There were many times when the road would just disappear and I would be forced to use the truck ahead and to my right as my guide. I felt like I was the wing man in some aerial acrobat show depending on the direction of another to guide my path. This weather pattern was short lived and by Western Illinois the skies had brightened to this beautifully clear and cool fall sky.

I reached Hannibal, Missouri at dusk and captured the light house along the Mississippi, boyhood home to Samuel Clemons, AKA Mark Twain. I found a small roadside motel in Troy, IL and dined at a very local sports bar. By this time I ignored the glares I always received from locals when I would enter in my riding suit, no doubt looking like a movie extra from Star Wars! I think the White Sox won that night.

Dawn on Thursday morning and I was off for a ride in the country along the Mississippi through some of the greenest farms I have ever seen.



We don't see much green in Northern California this time of year and I was very jealous.

Two small ferry crossings later....



.... and I was off to St. Louis (deja vu) and the long 597 miles to Sioux Falls, South Dakota for the nearly 4000 point bonus there.



I literally had nothing else to do now but ride and the road was flat and featureless. Along this stretch of I-70 is a great western store I have stopped in several times before. Since I didn't have any real clothes, I stopped in and quickly selected a nice set of Luchesse boots, nice wranglers, a bib type shirt and matching belt. I instructed the clerk to overnight these and provided my Fed Ex number. I was off again in less than an hour. The boredom of this road was significant but I resisted the urge to grab a nap, I needed to get to the final bonus location by dusk and it was already 1130. I wicked up the speed to 80 (5 over, the limit here being 75) and ticked off the miles.

I rolled into Sioux Falls about 1900 and followed my GPS's cues to the Falls Park Bonus Location. As I pulled into the parking lot, another Iron Butt rider, Mike Smeyers, rolled in on his cherry red Honda Gold Wing. I was happy to see another rider and with no other bonuses to catch, hoped Mike wouldn't mind company for the push to Denver that night. We snapped each other's bonus photos and decided with (only) 719 miles to go and 10 hrs to get there we both felt a good sit down Chinese dinner was in order.

After a great meal we headed out across the prairie (again) for the final push home. Normally, 700 miles after dinner would be unthinkable. Somehow in this polarized-focused world of extreme distance riding I had placed myself in, distances became compressed and instead of "700 miles," it became "2 gas stops."

Riding with a partner after so many days and miles solo was both a blessing and a curse. While security was initially found in the company of another, I became increasingly distracted by his presence. When in front I found myself spending too much time in the rear view and hit the rumbles several times, while in back, a form of hypnosis from his taillights was taking its toll. We spread out to within a ½ mile of each other and I once again found that 'groove'. I felt energized and began the slow downward spiral to relax, rewarding myself far too early for a job well done.

By the time the first gas stop arrived, about 390 miles from Sioux Falls, I was seriously tired. I took the lead to

remove the distraction of the second bike and once again focus on my riding and nothing else, but sleep was pulling at me from every reflector. After several long blinks (2 seconds, 10? Hard to say for sure) I knew I had to stop- and soon! With 150 miles to go I started to see the wall come into focus. We stopped at a gas station and I had my first cup of coffee of the trip.. I had weaned myself off the stuff at the suggestion of several pros but now seemed like the appropriate time to fall off the 'no stimulant' wagon.

A quick top-off of the tank and with the renewed chemical vigor we are once again off. 150 miles? "Piece of cake," I remember thinking. Not 40 miles later I was forced to stop again. Mike was in about the same shape. He had bagged an incredible 50000+ points these last few days to make up for his terrible start, points-wise. We did 5 minutes of calisthenics and once again felt we could press on.

The last 100 miles we would find ourselves stopping another 3 times-expending every ounce of energy we had left to make it to Denver. On one occasion I remember glancing at my GPS and seeing 28 miles to go. That small distance seemed almost insurmountable. After what seemed like 20 minutes, I glanced again and it now read 26 miles! I shut the damn thing off, confident I could find my way to Denver using light pollution and dead reckoning alone.

I was relieved to see several other bikes obviously part of the rally (easy to spot by the erratic lines in corners!), all headed for the barn! I switched off my brain and followed these three riders directly into the hotel's parking lot. Had they not been part of the rally, I might have followed them anywhere!

At 0448 hours Friday, September 2, I rolled into the parking lot of the Doubletree Hotel to a cacophony of hugs and smiles. It was O-V-E-R! 11 days, 11015 miles [an average of 41.3mph], and now to have my bonuses checked to determine if I was indeed a finisher. In a matter of seconds I was ripped from my pitiful, sleepless, dog-tired and trodden state to one of somewhat celebrity status. Dozens of faces appeared and faded-many I recognized, did they me?

Handshakes, photo ops, finally Vonnie (Glaves or "Mom" as many referred to her, seen here) grabbed me and suggested I go inside and have my bonuses checked and officially recorded. I grabbed my binder and headed in. My organization of my bonus sheets and photos in a three ring binder with clear folder type pages was a blessing. Had I stuck a gas receipt or photo somewhere in the tank bag or my pocket instead of in the neat and tidy binder, it would not have been found at this moment.



At this point, I honestly didn't care about bonuses anymore though, just sleep! Fortunately my paperwork, receipts, and photos were in order and I had several thousand points to spare to be an official finisher! What place? I didn't even wonder.

I checked back into the hotel and hit the room. After an hour or so of staring at the ceiling and replaying the last 11 days I arose and decided it was a good time to replace that bulb in my PIAA that had failed several days ago, a victim of Katrina. I finally made it back up to the room for a nap around 1100.

Dinner that evening was 1700 hours and I woke at 1400, checked the front desk hoping my clothes package had arrived, but no. A call to the store revealed they had not shipped it and I canceled the order- Walmart beckoned and my wardrobe was secure! I saved \$400 dollars!

Dinner was a treat- all smiles in the house. I went to bed immediately after and slept a hard 12 hours!

The next day I was on the road by 1000 hours after a quick stop at the UPS store to ship home 50 pounds of unneeded gear. 1340 miles and one more motel room and I was home.



**At the Final Check In at the end of the Iron Butt Rally
11 days and nearly 11,000 miles, and still smiling!**

In Conclusion

It will be months before I can fully reflect on this time in my life. The full range of emotions was akin to a death experience. The burden of my absence weighed heavy on my wife and son. The loss of business in the tens-of-thousands of dollars, the cost of the ride well into the thousands: 291 gallons of gas, 9 motel rooms, two sets of tires, \$1000 in miscellaneous travel expenses, not to mention the personal risk 91 people took in their nearly 1,000,000 motorcycle miles in less than 2 weeks.

It is important to note here that no one ended up in the hospital (although several went down with minor to moderate injuries, none required a stay of more than a few hours). It can be said with confidence that this group of riders is the most talented, safest, and goal-oriented people I have had the pleasure to be involved with.

To answer the obvious question of, "Would I do it again?" The answer today is clearly, "Not a chance!" In a few days, weeks, or months, if you asked me again, the answer may turn to, "Maybe." I learned a lot and realized several key mistakes, and I would obviously like the chance to do slightly better. All and all I am very proud to be one of only 362 riders to ever successfully complete an Iron Butt Rally!

Epilogue

A year and a half has passed at the time of this entry and I am talking to riders weekly making their final plans for the 07 Iron Butt Rally. I am glad to not be in their shoes! I can say that none of the anxious, excited anticipation would be there had I entered this time, only dread. I believe the knowledge of the sacrifice would be in the way of needed concentration. Life is very different today. Business has literally exploded and takes more and more focus. The needs of my wife with her recent back surgery make trips away from home a very difficult proposition. My son is 16 now and has less and less use for me, yet I am not ready to be fired from the job of Dad! I enjoy sharing my experience though and reflection has colored the memories. I have to focus hard to remember the pain; joy has taken over the bulk of the memory of those 18 days in 05. I have been asked to 'sum up' the experience many times these past months. I have come up with a quick, somewhat glib phrase that covers a lot of the ride;

For me at least, and for many, I have learned, the most difficult part of the Iron Butt Rally was not riding all those miles and spending all those hours in the saddle, but rather getting off the bike to rest! The overpowering urge is to keep going. Resting is the key and learning how to nap is crucial. "Stop to keep going" to quote my good friend Don. Bottom line and never let your ego outweigh your judgment! I know in retrospect how important some of those very ordinary experiences were such as a sit-down lunch, an hour browsing cowboy boots or forcing yourself to think of others when shopping for them. Whatever your endeavor, always, always, always include something very routine and normal for you. It will serve as a reality check.

Would I do it again?

I am thinking about '09! -Hard

-Rick