

Iron What? Iron Butt!

Somewhere in between the legislation, the politics, the fund raisers, the rallies, and the companions you meet along the way there's riding. There's riding and what drew you to it in the first place. Let's face it; I'm not sure there's one person out there that would say legislation drove them to ride. Riding, for me, meant freedom and I'm guessing it was the same way for a lot of you. However, at some point this compelling feeling hit TILT and I simply couldn't ride enough. What made this even worse was that I found an organization of about 30,000 other riders that have the same affliction. This group is appropriately named the Iron Butt Association (IBA). On top of endurance riding the IBA has also devised a game that requires the ability to ride long distances for days on end in what could be considered a continental wide scavenger hunt. "The World's Toughest Motorcycle Competition", as the IBA describes it, is more widely known as the Iron Butt Rally which spans 11 days and most of the competitors cover more than 11,000 miles during the course of the rally. A common misconception is that it is a race which is completely false. Coming across the line first has nothing to do with your finishing position.

I decided at an early age that the IBR was something I wanted to do. The question of "why" never really entered my head. I pretty much went straight for "where do I sign up"? I had just sold my first dirt bike and saw a small news clip about the rally. At the time I don't think I realized the magnitude of what I had mentally signed up for but I knew I wanted to have the chance to compete. The years went by and I kept it in the back of my head but didn't know where or how to get started. Well the internet grew up and of course the IBA had a website (www.ironbutt.com) that explained everything. It outlined the rides that you could document on your own, and have certified, to get started. The entry ride is 1000 miles in 24 hours and they get progressively harder from there. In 2002 I started doing some of these rides and started entering short duration rallies, 24 hours or less, to build up my endurance. Rallies are a combination of long distance riding and collecting bonuses which are worth points. The person with the most bonuses within the set amount of time is the winner. By the time 2006 rolled around I had 14 different rides/rallies under my belt. I decided to submit my application for the Iron Butt Rally thinking with the thousands of people that apply I would probably not get in on my first submission. I was wrong and upon returning from a 100CCC (coast-to-coast-to-coast in less than 100 hours) I received an email congratulating me on my entrance into the 2007 Iron Butt Rally starting in St. Louis on August 20th, 2007. I couldn't have been happier but I had a lot to do over the 15 months that followed.

Preparing for the rally pretty much consumes your life. As a rookie everything you do centers around getting ready. You have to prepare physically, mentally, and financially. Managing your mental and physical fatigue over the 11 days has to be a given. Knowing your limits is extremely important. Like any sport, you need to train yourself and know when to stop. The financial commitment is steep and I came up with a plan to raise funds by taking donations through my website from anyone that wanted to donate. Marlene, Char, and Nancy pitched in and held a kissing booth to raise funds for me which came as a complete, but pleasant, surprise to me. Members from www.st-owners.com were also major contributors. All those donations added up and by the time the rally came I wasn't worried about being completely in debt after the rally. I had a lot of unexpected expenses and the extra money helped cover those costs with some left over for gas and hotels. Physically I committed myself to going to the gym at least 2 or 3 times a week. I lost about 20 pounds over the year and managed to get into pretty good shape. Being in good shape helps your body cope with the heat and fatigue which would come in handy as the rally is held the last two weeks of August. The mental preparation was the tough part for me and the only way I could combat that was to try and be prepared. I entered a couple small rallies and practiced mapping over the winter. After the rallies were done I decided to do a big mileage ride as the last part of my preparation. I decided to do a BBG Trifecta which is three 1500 mile days back to back and is one of the more extreme certified rides that the IBA has to offer. Gary and Shawn Klinker played hosts for four days as I used their place as home base for the ride. After completing that ride I decided I better get packed for St. Louis.

I went to St. Louis a few days before the rally to get prepared. There are many things a rider needs to do before they can start the rally. There is the odometer check, tech inspection, and a few rider meetings. I had prepped the bike with an extra gas tank so I could carry around 11 gallons of gas. The bike passed inspection and after the opening banquet the rider numbers were handed out along with the first leg bonus packet. The first leg would be 4.5 days long. The checkpoint would be in St. Louis and the second leg would be 6.5 days long with the rally finishing back in St. Louis. This would be the first time in the rally's history that there would be only one checkpoint during the rally. This would be an extra challenge as mapping a route that was 4 to 6 days long would take a lot of planning. Gary Klinker met me in St. Louis and was there to help me keep my head about me before the rally started. He also helped me prepare a map with all the bonus locations on it. There were over 100+ bonuses located all over the eastern US and Canada in the packet. An example of a bonus location would be something like take a picture of the southern most point in the US located in Key West for 2,000 points. The point of the rally is to plot an efficient route that nets you the most points and puts you back at the checkpoint, or finish, before time is up. It was clear the big points were at Perce Rock in Canada but I decided to take a southerly route and stay in the US where at least the weather turned out to be better after the first day.



Morning came and we left in a downpour. It rained the entire day and well into the night. The riders that went to Canada had two more days of rain on top of that. By the second day I had a pretty good case of trench foot. I had made my way from St. Louis over to West Virginia and crossed over the Appalachians in the middle of the night in the pouring rain. By morning the rain was gone and I headed to Key West. I was stopping at different bonuses locations, collecting a picture or information as the bonus required, each scoring me points that would be added up at the checkpoint. All I could hope is that the points I collected would be enough to keep me in contention for finishing. I made it down to Key West and headed back up towards Orlando when my electric windshield twisted to the side and was rendered completely useless. It took some time but I bolted it in a stationary position but riding was hard with the wind buffeting my helmet. It gave me a headache and I had two more days before I would be at the checkpoint in St. Louis to try and fix it. I called a couple friends and they posted my issue out to the internet. I kept collecting bonuses and got myself back to St. Louis where some friends would have a windshield assembly waiting for me and would install it

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