

## **ButtLite III**

Trip Photos are at: <http://photos.yahoo.com/cog3k>

### **Prologue – No Good Deed Goes Unpunished**

Why do things always seem to break just before a long trip? This past birthday, my loving wife decided I needed a new laptop; the 6 year old Toshiba was starting to show its age. The hard drive had been replaced, and the screen has a dead row on it. So a brandy new Dell showed up with my name on it. About 10 days before I was scheduled to leave for Niobrara, and about 2 weeks after the factory warranty expired, the dogs were rough housing and knocked over the TV stand the laptop was set up on. It didn't survive very well; in fact, it would only run off batteries. After a delightful chat with "Mary", Dell would be very happy to fix my laptop for \$300 – see, it's out of warranty. Now I have to ship it off to Dell with a projected 10 day turn around time. Seeing as this is just a little to close to call, I break out the old Toshiba, update the OS, purge a bunch of files to make room, load Mapsource and make sure it's ready to go- this is now Plan A. If the Dell makes it back in time and is ready to go, that's Plan B. Just to make sure Plan A goes well, I order a replacement battery off eBay.

I spend a few days "downy ocean" as the locals say, at Ocean City for the rest of us, with my dad, sister and her kids. What a nice break away from the rat race and a way to get ready for the ride to Niobrara. It'll be 2 weeks before I see Jean again as our paths will cross on the road to/from Ocean City. I have to skip the IBA national meet due to work; our largest festival of the year is the Saturday after the end of the Lite. Later I find out I get to work both days of that weekend as another festival has sprung up- the joys of a new job. This will mean it's roughly 3 weeks before I really can spend any time with Jean.

The ride to Niobrara was basically uneventful. I diverted around Chicago just because and made my appointment in Des Moines for new tires. See, the closest shop to Niobrara is in South Dakota, roughly 60 miles away and I needed a new rear mounted for the rally. I was to meet Mike Allen in Sioux City Saturday evening, so it gave me a chance to see the Floyd memorial- our nation's first official memorial (1804). Sgt Floyd died during the Louis and Clark expedition, The Corps of Discovery. He was the only member of the Corps who died; later post mortems determined Sgt Floyd died of a burst appendix. It would be another couple decades before he could have been saved by modern medicine. Mike has been pumped, indeed to the point of nausea on my part, about the Butt Lite. The last 6 weeks have been nearly intolerable as he prattles on about this and that; man I miss it. I bring this up because I checked into the motel in Sioux City around 4pm, get myself a nice dinner and a brew. What a nice relaxing day before the next day's ride to Niobrara. Mike, on the other hand, has decided to leave home at some ungodly hour and head straight to Sioux City. He plans to arrive around midnight. Nothing like starting a multi-day rally with a messed up sleep cycle- what a plan! Overnight, some dipshit, slimeball steals an LED clip-on light and my power adapter for my mp3 player- moron. As we roll into Niobrara, we check out our intra-bike communications. My CB has been flawless- however, Mike's doesn't transmit. Well, that's not entirely fair, it transmits just fine, but all I hear is engine whine (possibly alternator) over the air. This will come back

to haunt us much later, when we're more stupid. We arrive in time to check-in to our cabin first before the rally. What a cabin!! 3 bedrooms, full kitchen, spacious living/dining room, screened porch, patio with grill and a view to kill for. The state park sits on a bluff overlooking the Missouri River, near one of the Corps of Discovery original campsites. We unpack and I re-dress into my official tech inspection clothing: riding boots, shorts, sleeveless t-shirt, Charlie Huber's beanie helmet and a BL III tattoo on my right bicep. Tech and paperwork check-in goes as smoothly and as efficiently as usual with TS events. I get badly sunburned in the 2 hours I am exposed to the elements; so bad so, I have a reverse tattoo on my arm from the burn around the image. This would become a conversation piece about a week later.

Once we get a ride back from the park to town, now know as the ride from hell, where the lap record was set inside the park loop roads, the consumption of adult beverages and food commenced.

Monday was rally meeting day; I did some laundry, visited the town mall and returned to the cabin in time for a late lunch and the meetings. Dinner meeting brought us rally flags and Route D sheets. Back at the cabin, we dissect D fairly quickly, develop a plan based solely upon D, guessing they'll be A, B, & C in the morning. 3100 miles in 60 hours with one optional pickup is not a bad start; surprisingly, it's a pretty obvious choice. The checkpoint is in Tombstone and I finally get to Gerlach to see what the big fuss is all about if we stick with Route D.

## **Leg 1- You Can't Always Get What You Want, But Sometimes You Get What You Need**

The riders' meeting comes way too early when you can't sleep. Routes A, B & C are handed out as a light rain starts to fall. Mike's kick ass GPS with weather radar says all the rain is to the south and east- that explains why it's raining here. Routes B & C don't seem to have anything going for them so we concentrate on A; quickly we realize it would require getting almost every location on the route sheet to equal what we have with D as planned, so D it is and off we go to the first, timed, manned bonus location just 100 miles away from the start line. Keith Collins has a teeming mass of riders waiting for the appointed hour; we're stamped as required and out of there on our way to the tallest lighthouse in Nebraska, Hells Half Acre, Boise before hitting Gerlach mid-afternoon on Day 2, plus whatever else we can grab on the run to Tombstone. On the first overnight ride in Idaho, Mike sees what real headlights are like. At one point I pull up to him in the left lane of I-84 and flip on the wing's high beams. His monster sized PIAAs look faint as I key in the CB "Put away your toys child."

Nevada, the last of the lower 48 on my list, has been finally crossed off. Let's just say I've now seen Nevada and I've had my fill. US-95 from end to end is nearly as dreadful as I-80 across Nebraska or I-70 in Kansas. The staff at Brunos, the site of the Gerlach bonus, is somewhere between French snobby and New York City rude, but without the character of either; I don't get it. We're there to spend our money at their establishment, but they didn't seem to have the time of day for us. I don't really care how good the ravioli might be, it can't be good enough to overcome the brutishness.

I can state, the accidents in the desert are absolutely spectacular; must be the lack of shoulders combined with the 75 mph speed limits that lead to cars and trucks winding up in some unusual locations along the highway.

We grab some quick shut eye in a Boulder City casino, with the goal of being at the Grand Canyon rim about an hour or so after sunrise. Somewhere past Hoover Dam, there is an elk blocking the right lane of the highway; the semi in the right lane has to swerve into the left lane to avoid the elk. Trucks are not you're friend when they come into your lane as I learned that the hard way last summer in Idaho.

I'm concerned we've run too hard too early in the rally. My lesson learned from the last ButtLite, was you have to stay "in touch" with the rabbits and burners, so when they fade, you're still running strong. We had to pass up an optional bonus, once we cleared Winslow, Arizona. Yup, there's a girl my Lord, in a flatbed ford slowing down to take a look at me. Somewhere in the Phoenix mega-plex, Mike and I get separated in traffic. He has cut a tire, but can't raise me on the CB. I can't raise him either as the truckers just squish my little radio like a bug. I figured we just got separated and he'd catch me before we get to the Tombstone exit. Here, I get Mike on the phone and he's about 15 minutes behind me at this point so we agree to roll on separately to Tombstone. As I leave the Tombstone bonus to head to the checkpoint, he's riding in, so that gap has shrunk a little. Once into Tombstone proper, we get checked-in to the Tombstone Convention Center Motel (May You Rest In Peace) and scored. We wind up in a 26 way tie for 4<sup>th</sup>; ok, that's a lie, there were 6 of us tied for 4<sup>th</sup>. Leg 2 awaits, to separate the pack a little.

## **Leg 2 – A Hard Rain Is Gonna Fall**

After the route sheets come out, it rains again. This is the second time in this event rain has been right around a leg start. You do have to wonder about rallymasters and the weather gods. There are two basic choices after getting a few hours sleep: one is to head back to Phoenix for a pin striping job before heading east to Atlanta. This reeks of both a time sucker at the bonus and there is a fair wait before the bonus is available. The other, which we chose, is to head northeast into Kansas and pick up enough points elsewhere to offset the pin striping backtrack. Kansas is where the world's largest hand dug well lives. Now that I've been to the bottom of the well, and there's not much to see but bonus points. First we had to buy Eddie some pistachio nuts and visit a post office in Yeso, NM. The monsoon rains are having an effect in this area of the country. The washes are now eroded canyons in the earth and it's very obvious there has been a lot of localized flooding. US-54 is nearly as dreadful as US-95, but instead of 3 shades of brown, there is sage brush as far as the eye can see and you can see a lot at 55 mph. And for some reason, this stretch of highway is posted at 55. The same exact highway is posted 70 in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas, but in New Mexico, where the towns are few and very far between, it's posted at 55. I suspect local revenue generation, but that's the cynic in me. After visiting the bottom of the well, Mike and I decide on a local restaurant called the Kansan. Now, keep in mind it's a Friday night and they are already out of a lot of stock for the weekend business with their next truck coming on Monday. Off into the night we go, looking for deer and other creatures of the night. This will be our first real test of the partnership as our plan calls for a long overnight with only a few hours sleep along the way. Near Oklahoma City, Mike can't go on and tells me to proceed without him. This was a big mistake which will get repeated again on Leg 3.

I head on by myself into the pre-dawn hours. I catch up with the Phillips on the way to Jasper and we ride collectively, separately there. Again, we catch up to each other on the way to Natchez and then onto Hot Coffee on the return to Atlanta. Somewhere in Mississippi, the left caliper bolt falls out; seems the service tech failed to torque it back in place. It was just a matter of time. I started to use the LD fixit of choice, when duct tape isn't the option- cable ties. As I thread the first of many cable ties into the bracket, a few locals decide they want to "help". Both stink of alcohol and one comments "this would have never happened to a Harley" to which I instantly agree.

While zipties aren't the perfect solution, they'll get by in a pinch; which is exactly where I am right now. In retrospect, I should headed to the nearest mega home improvement yard and bought an 8 x 48 bolt to replace at least that part, but no, I was starting to get stupid. This would have saved me both time and grief in the long run. They'll get me through to Atlanta where a suitable replacement should be available. The problem is, the ties only work for one hard stop, then they break and have to be replaced. Just short of the GA/AL line, the skies open up, big time. Combined with the sudden temperature drop and the major rain storm, my no longer "fog free" face shield might as well be a hunk of cardboard over my eyes. To make matters worse, my glasses fog up too, despite the use of that fog free stuff. So off go my glasses. Now, for those who don't know, I can't see well past 50 feet without glasses- everything is just mostly blobs. OK, I'm basically blind, it's pouring rain, and I have limited braking ability. What would you do? I chose to limp to the shoulder with the 4-ways on, crawl to the next exit and get a motel for a few hours. Man I wish I was riding with Mike; his GPS would have told us how long we had to wait for this nonsense to clear. I call Mike (man I need a helmet headset that works while I'm riding); he's about 3 hours behind me and has decided to collect the 2 boni that I am passing up due to my brake issues. We agree to meet at the Checkpoint and regroup.

The rain finally dissipates about 2 hours later and I get back on the road with ample time to get the one bonus near the checkpoint before I check-in. On the way there, I got real good at slowing down and nearly stopping without using any brakes. Only after I get checked-in and scored, do I go to work on finding a replacement bolt. Bob Woolridge's team is outstanding and get me operating at no charge. If I ever decide to by a "Bring Massive Wallet", it'll be from BMW of Atlanta.

Just before the scores are posted, I do my best Will Outlaw impression from ButtLite III with "Please no top 10, please no top 10, I just want to go to Nebraska." Some of the vets chortle to themselves. But I suspect better and wind up in 6<sup>th</sup> by myself with Mike only 700 points in front of me.

## **Last Leg – Gotta Keep Rollin, Gotta Keep Ridin', Keep Searchin' til I Find What's Right**

The bonus sheets are an all in-one affair with combo bonus points for gathering a few sets of locations together. Mike plots out the "super- mega rock bonus", which on its face was totally ludicrous, but made for good conversation when we pulled out 20 minutes after the rally books came out. At the Waffle House, Mike realizes he left his wallet at the service counter; that plan is now shot as it required split second accuracy at the beginning to have any chance. Off to Stone Mountain and we get separated again. Now our lack of 2 way communication really comes into play; he can only hear me and we go

in and leave by different entrances to the park. Hopelessly separated, I call him again. We agree to roll out and catch each other on the way to Nashville. I see him in front of me on 285 and announce that in the CB. He misheard me as I am in front of him and now we are in an endless game of leapfrog with each of us thinking the other is in front. This will be the last time I see him until Niobrara State Park. I catch ever rabbit on the way up 75 I can; eventually, I need gas and pull into the next exit talking to myself on the CB about needing fuel. After gassing up and ruining my riding pants (broke the other zipper this time), I call Mike to let him know that I am hopelessly behind him and his 450 mile range (the bastard). He answers the phone without the familiar drone of the bike behind him. "Where are you?" I inquire. "In a motel, a few miles from the checkpoint" in other words, about 2 hours behind me. He's trying to figure it out- realizes the futility of the original plan, which I already have surmised. I plan to make St Louis around dark and then figure out the rest later. Instead of agreeing to meet somewhere ahead of time in case we get separated (duh) or saying "come here/ stay there" (bigger duh) we decide to split up the partnership that got us this far. I'll ride onto Chain of Rocks bridge, gather every bonus I can along the way and then figure out what to do for the last 36 hours. Also, I have to buy a pair of jeans somewhere as my riding pants are now useless. They wind up in the trash can at the next exit's Wal-Mart- they have served me well. Sadly, all I can find is straight legs and they're not real conducive for wearing boots. Mile by mile I pick off bonus after bonus on the way to Chain of Rocks. I grab Reno, Illinois and on the way back to I-70 I spill an entire bottle of Gatorade into my crotch – maybe it's time for a motel, the rest bonus and some clean/dry underwear. My brakes sounds awful, but the bolt is staying place and possibly causing the rear caliper to hang on the rotor. If I do a big serpentine route from Chain of Rocks into Iowa, Minnesota, I might have enough time go gather the 2200 points in southwest Nebraska and hit the sack for 4 hours.

At Chain of Rocks, around 5am, just as its starting to rain, I run across Mike Phelps. Well, not literally run across him. I've always wanted the opportunity to ride with Mike and here is the opportunity; we compare notes and we've got the exact same route from here to Niobrara, so we agree to give it a go. After properly documenting the bonus being unavailable at the Chain of Rocks, it's off to Speed, Missouri. It's raining again, for a change and it's still dark, but this time the shield doesn't fog up like last time. A friendly sheriff leads us to Speed; probably wondering why he keeps seeing riders in spacesuits heading to Speed.

After Speed, my GPS says its one way to Monterrey and Mike's says its another. We follow his since its one generation newer. Turns out there was a user error on programming my Monterrey (dhuh). Now it gets real fun. Mr Garmin decides to lead us down 4 miles of unpaved road. No biggie, I realize, but if we would have ignored Mr Garmin and used our common sense, it would have been about 200 feet. We take our pictures of the only church Monterrey and before saddling up for the trek to Des Moines. Hey wait, wasn't I just here a week ago? On the way there, we catch some slow traffic- there's a farm tractor right in front of us. Silly human, we thought it was the tractor until the car it was tailgating turned and the tractor practically dusted us off. Wish the eastern farmers should get some of these puppies.

Mike and I get to Des Moines to pay our respects to Eddie's dad and get our bonus picture of course. Eddie had mentioned during the last ButtLite that we could have seen

his dad when we wasted time waiting to buy Big Daddy's \$10 BBQ sauce. Now, this will be the only way we'll be able to. He's buried in the veterans section of the western part of the cemetery, near the appropriately placed flag pole. Much like Indiantown Gap, it's very peaceful.

As much as I'd like to dawdle, we really need to get to Clear Lake to the site of "where the music died" on February 3, 1959. This is the night Waylon Jennings missed the flight; the day that gave us one of the biggest losses in musical history, at one time. The memorial stands along a fence row about ½ mile off the main dirt road through the area. I-35 is clearly visible a short distance away. We've used this spot for past MD2020's and I'm glad I finally got the chance to personally visit it.

Alas, we must again move on, but not after properly documenting the GS tire tracks on the small path along the corn field; geez, what a moron. It's taco time in Minkato as we hurry off to Zanz's for some much needed real food and some more decision making. We decide to take too long to decide and wind up giving up almost all of the remaining locations except one daylight only and five 24 hour ones within a few hours of Niobrara. Mike and I have dubbed these as the "gang of six" worth slightly less than the long haul to Sturgis, which has the big risk of being time barred if fatigue factors into the 900+ mile ride- this is route Eric Jewell has chosen to attempt after leaving us in Zanz. Well fatigue did factor in, about 5 hours after visiting the grave of Frances Sampson (Saving Private Ryan) and two other locations just east of the finish line. With only 3 left in our rally, I hit the wall. Now I've hit the wall before, but never this hard – Mike concurs on the need for rest and I volunteer to pay for a room for our 3 hour nap. Ever the good guy, he forks over half. Doing so forces us to give up a 280 point bonus, but sleep is more important at this juncture. You have to finish to claim your points. Mike has 1100 points more than I do on this leg as he has stopped at the Varsity and the Jack Daniels refinery. I failed to re-add JD once I abandoned the original route. I just hope it doesn't cut into me too much- Mike wants to finish in the top 10. I figure he's got that made unless some real weird stuff happens.

3 hours of sleep comes real fast and I get my first cup of real coffee in months at the next door filling station. We start south into the pre-dawn gloom. This is Day 8 of the ButtLite and the end of # IIII. Mike's GPS once again routes us down another dirt road when there is a perfectly good paved road nearby. On our way to the bonus, we see Team Newbie on the way north; probably trying to get that one we passed up for sleep.

It is an uneventful and nearly melancholy ride back to Niobrara. The rally is nearly over for us; it will be another 2 years until the next one. I light my celebratory finishers cigar about 20 minutes out – I can push the bike home if I have to. We carefully pull into the 2 Rivers Saloon and take our pictures with Lurleen, with our flags of course, prior to checking in with John. The ButtLite is now over; all that's left is paperwork.

I find a table inside the bar, spread out my papers and start my last duty as a rider. Satisfied I head over the "jail" to get scored. 9500 points, then I find out the good/bad news. So far every rider who went to Jack Daniels forgot to have their rally flag in their group-tour photo- BWHA! Maybe skipping the JD bonus wasn't such a bad idea after all, since I would have probably missed it too. Things are looking up for Team Phelps/Miller – we put a very big number on the last leg. Mike Allen is nowhere to be seen; I'm not worried yet, since I know he's a smart rider and trust he's developed a plan that will work. Jean arrives at 2 Rivers around 12:30 and we order lunch and a beer or

two. The banquet is at 5:30, so we proceed to our cabin- the exact same one as at the start – to decompress and catch up with my wife and the outside world. Mike rolls in about an hour later; his leg ended when he left his clipboard at a fuel stop. When he went back, it was gone. Semi-dejected, he opts for a nap before sinner. At this point, as much as I hate to think it, but one of my chief obstacles for a top finish has faded. Sadly, Mike knows how bad this will be, but he also knows he can stand up to the rigors of a multi-day rally which was a main concern of his 10 days ago.

At dinner, many stories and lies are told. Curt Gran literally brought the house down with the 45 Waffle House stop on the last leg; he's even formed a new LDR group: the Waffle Iron Gut Association. Gradually, Eddie and Adam work their way through the field. Some familiar names from the top of the standings as part of the mix. At one point, I realize there are only a few names and the trophy spots left. Team Newbie, the married 2/3 part, finished 10<sup>th</sup> - nice. Mike got his wish and placed in 5<sup>th</sup>. Then 4<sup>th</sup> goes to the Phillips on their Goldwing, 2-up. I believe they are the first 2-up couple to ride in the ButtLite. This leaves John Coons, myself and Alex Schmitt. I don't know what to say, honestly. I am not a whacker, burner or speed demon. I rely on steady progress and minimal mistakes. I am both glad and proud that Alex out scored me; he is a meticulous rider, rarely makes mistakes and is fiercely competitive. I plan to pay close attention to Alex next August.