

## ***Not Superman 2009- Mini-Rally***

Pics at:

<http://s280.photobucket.com/albums/kk178/rallybubbas/2009NSR/>

I entered the Not Superman Rally to prepare myself for the upcoming Iron Butt Rally. Now, how will a mini-rally prepare you for the Iron Butt Rally, the 11 days of 1000 mile days? I hear you ask. While I wanted to enter the 2-day rally, I'm still new at my job and have basically, no leave. Every day I have is committed to the IBR, plus a few furlough days. So I planned to do the mini-rally as if it were a middle/late day of the IBR by riding all night on limited sleep to get there, do the mini-rally (which are the hardest rides to do well in IMHO) and then ride home after my "rest bonus". So in that respect, it worked.

NSR, like a few other rallies, hands out the bonus books early- not just the lists, the entire rallybook. This allows ample time for planning and second guessing. Mike Allen drafted Gary Stipe into riding the mini-rally as well, so the three of us (Larry, Shemp and Moe) had planned to ride together. We had an excellent planned route- very, very tight, but massive points if completed. At 650 miles, it would be a tough ride too- just what I needed.

Mike has the excellent pre-rally arrival plans. Recall his ride in for Buttlite III- he left home two days before the rally and expected to be fresh for the ride. This time, he decided to up the ante and leave work the night before the rally, ride straight through the night and arrive just in time for the 5:30 riders' meeting- geez, what a great plan. Gary, on the other hand, left home on Friday morning and rode straight in via the last few stops on our planned route. I left Thursday night after rush hour with several programmed stops along the way (stretched it out to 1200 miles for a 950 mile one-way ride) as well as checking out the first few stops of our route; Gary and I would then compare notes, make adjustments as needed and inform Mike of our findings and decisions.

My ride out was frustrating at best, scary at worst and exciting. I'm working on the Villains Wanted grand tour and I had an extensive list of stops along the way- I also took the trip as an opportunity to do some scouting for future rallies. The Villains were extremely frustrating and inconsistent. I found Kentucky to be the worst at adequately identifying towns- I went 2 for 24 until I finally said "screw it" and rode straight to the part of our route I was tasked with scouting. Over night, very late at night (roughly 3am) I was routing between two Villains: Looneyville and Rushville, WV. Jill, the bitch, routed me down a one lane tar and chip road- no problem. Then she tells me to turn right and I confront a ford. Not the kind made in Deerborn, then type that cross creeks and rivers. I've forded before with HMMBEE; it's not an ideal machine for fording creeks, but as long as the water isn't too deep, it will do the job. I stopped about 20 feet short of the water's edge, decided on a line to the far shore and set off at a slow and steady pace. A quick splash and I ride out the other side. The water was only a few inches deep-

Whew! The road is now gravel- good gravel. Jill says 'in 0.7 miles turn left,' I so do. The "road" turns to a rock ledge nightmare. I was fearing for the oil pan and everything else on the underside of HMMBEE as it has no skid plate like dual sports and dirt bikes do. I carefully descend the "road" and come to another ford. Here I stop again. This one is much wider than the last one and the water looks deeper- but you really cant tell in the dark how deep. To compound the issue, I cant see where the ford exits on the far bank- even with all of my lights on, I have no clue as to where the "road" goes once it enters the creek. Deciding that I better get out of here if I ever want to see my wife again, I put my tail between my legs and do a three point turn in the close in side of the ford. The water here was just about axel deep; so it must be deeper in the middle. I extract myself, retrace my route in its entirety all the way back to I-79. That was not fun and I don't want to repeat that again real soon. When I get to the motel, I pull up Google Earth to see the area and realized the "road" had a right-hand curve while doing the ford which is why I couldn't figure out where the exit was on the far bank. Here's the link to the area: <http://tinyurl.com/looneyville>

I napped in a rest area in eastern Kentucky, then proceeded to strike out on Villain after villain. Frustrated, I hit the parkway system and steamed southwest towards the Tennessee line near the Mississippi River to start my section of the route. The Bonus coordinates were spot on accurate. I arrived at the second bonus heading north and noted there was quite a collection of cannons at this particular park, and the bonus was a very specific one- a 32 pounder. I chuckled to myself that not every rider out there would realize that a 32 pound gun from the Civil War era was HUGE and not one of the smaller 6-15 pound cannons that were literally everywhere. I left the park and continued north to the last stop (first stop tomorrow) and found the courthouse in question- this one had 2 cannons, but only the southern one was the bonus) and arrived at the host hotel about 10 minutes behind our planned schedule. That's not real promising as this was supposed to be the "easy" part of the route.

After a quick trip to Walmart, I checked into the motel and to the rally. Dave Derrick was there to greet the riders- its always good to see Dave. Then we hear the story of poor John Frick and his new Light Truck; bad gas, then dropped by the dealer. Ouch. That's gonna be expensive. There is an impromptu riders meeting to cover self scoring. Gary arrives moment before it starts. After the briefing, Gary and I compare notes. We agree that we need to drop the second stop in favor of keeping the much more valuable boni later in the route and swapping our optional BBQ bonus for the last one much closer to the planned route, but worth 15 points fewer. A quick call to Mike to tell him that we changed everything about the planned ride and off to early bed. At 4:30 the alarm goes off and I see I have a cryptic text from Mike on my phone. I check with Gary; he's got the same message, but we're not sure what it means. We find out that he was officially DNS himself; he pulled over in Nashville and got a hotel for the night. Maybe he has finally learned.

Gary and I set out on our ambitious route- we have a time table and know where our "issues" are; the only real wildcard is the middle third of the rally, plus any weather or traffic that arises. Fortunately, it was relatively cool this day with some scattered thundershowers in the afternoon.

In recent rallies, I try different techniques to improve my rally record keeping and/or processes. In the OnC, I tried the ‘holding the rally flag at arms length and never getting off the bike unless absolutely necessary’ method and it worked like a charm, so I used it again. I added a record keeping change tho- normally, I record all bonus data directly in the rallybook for longer rallies or on my note cards on shorter ones. This time, I tried to input the record keeping directly into my GPS. The method went:

Arrive at Bonus

Document Bonus

Press the “Save this location” button on my GPS

Name it “ODO-time” in a 24hr format

And move on.

I found this did save a little time and prevented/ curtailed reading my own writing issues, plus I had an electronic record now. It took a few stops to get the hang of it, but by the time we got to upper Alabama, I had the system down. Alabama? Yup, sweet home Alabama. Home to Helen Keller, which was the bonus. More on that later. Before that was the 1938 art deco Greyhound Terminal Bldg marked “halfway station” in Jackson, TN. Gary and I mused as to “halfway” to what? A search of the web didn’t reveal anything, but our guess was halfway timewise across the country. After leaving Helen Keller’s home, we knew the stretch of US-43 would be the make or break of our rally. Mostly limited access/ country highway, it was a true wildcard for keeping our rally pace on schedule. We left Helen Keller’s home with an ETA to the finish of 5:27pm. We left the next bonus (in Franklin, TN) and the ETA had shot to 6:18. Everything was fine until we got to Spring Hill and 43 became a suburban sprawl nightmare of rats nest traffic lights, strip malls and tract housing. In retrospect, once we got into the mess, we should have bailed to I-65 a few miles to the east and back tracked to the bonus. It couldn’t have possibly been any slower.

As we were leaving the Civil War era Carter House, it started to sprinkle. At the Cash-Carter graves (June, Johnny and Rozanna all died the same year- I had forgotten that), the sprinkle picked up and north of Nashville it became a thunderstorm. We cleared the statues of the two chiefs (Fly Smith and Whitepath) at the Trail of Tears Park in Hopkinsville we had gotten back a few minutes. I also knew I needed one last fuel stop as I had not started the rally with full tanks- I know, what in the world were you thinking. I had such inconsistent ranges out of the tanks on the ride in (anything from 280 to 360 miles) that I felt there was no way I could do 650 miles on only one stop. Oops. We exit I-24 near Paducah and I whip into a fuel station for a few gallons. Gary faithfully pulls in- I ask “you cant make it either” to which he replies “I can make it”- “go go go, don’t wait for me”. I wanted only \$5 worth- quick in and out. I started the pump and went to the cooler for a Gatorade. When I returned it was already at \$10 so I just filled it up. I arrived at the finish line only 8 minutes behind Gary- which isn’t too much of a stupid penalty.

NSR has this unique thing called “self scoring.” Basically, it’s a web based app where the riders submit all their bonus documentation. There is no sitting down at scorers table, no final review none of that traditional “post-rally decompression space” with rally

staff. It worked fine; I just didn't care for it. I also discovered this new recordation technique comes with a pitfall- there is no real easy way to extract the data from the GPS. I resorted to attaching my Garmin to my laptop and down loading all the waypoints to sort out the ones I was after. I have decided though, this is the perfect technique for situations where using traditional methods are not advisable- like in the pouring rain or trying to get away from a big scary dog or the like. It should be reserved as the exception, not the rule.

After self scoring, I proceeded to the room where the post- rally festivities were to take place. There were several riders still self scoring and some decent local Q as the entrée, but Gary was right. We needed a sweet to go with it- 'nana pudding or something. I got summoned to the scorers table where Dave and John were sitting; this cant be good. Turns out my picture from Helen Keller's home was being denied as I took a picture of the incorrect sign; the correct one was apparently just down the fence and was the only sign with the sought after phrasing. Well, there goes my rally; Helen Keller was the biggest and most valuable bonus on our entire route and "poof" it and the 1500 points that went with it were gone. My guess is it cost us first and second place from just short of 7000 points to the mid-low 5000's; turns out I was right. That's two rallies in a row where I have screwed the pooch on boni due to sloppy rider practice- the previous one only hurt but didn't matter. This one hurt and mattered. Lesson Learned.

Sunday morning, I hit the road around 7am local and headed east. 15 hours, 5 Villain, and a quick stop at the "estate" later I was putting the bike away for the evening. Overall a successful, albeit disappointing, weekend. All that's left is some final maintenance and I'm ready for the IBR.