

The Long Ride - Or How To Become One With Your Harley

Why would anyone want to ride a thousand miles in less than 24 hours? Perhaps to get a pin, or a patch, or even to get a license plate frame that reads “Iron Butt Association – World’s Toughest Riders.” None of these reasons applied to me. My reason was that Neil Mitchell had done at least one, was wanting to ride another one with me, and I couldn’t stand the fact that I hadn’t completed the ride while he had – and also because Scott LaShier had done at least one as well (the young pup). Several other East Coast VA HOG members have completed an Iron Butt as well, so testosterone levels made me want to do it too.

My normal approach to riding is to enjoy the ride – feel the wind, get warm in the sun, smell the things in the air that you can’t smell when you are in a car, and watch the scenery and the beauty of the world around you. None of these things apply on an Iron Butt Ride. There are three levels of Iron Butt: the SaddleSore 1000 – 1000 miles in 24 hours, the Bun Burner 1500 – 1500 miles in 36 hours, and the 50cc Quest – Coast to Coast in 50 hours. Coast to coast in 50 hours, you gotta be kidding me! I chose the Saddle Sore 1000.

I started out from a small condo my wife Mary Ann and I own in Bonita Springs, Florida – 1038 miles from our home in Woodbridge according to the odometer in our car. I hate to admit this, but I rode down to Florida in a truck along with two friends and my Road King was on a trailer keeping company with another bike. Some issues at work conspired to make my planned Iron Butt down to Florida not possible. So we left on Wednesday, October 25 and 16 hours later found ourselves in sunny and warm Southwest Florida attending the Florida State HOG Rally in Fort Myers. I was leaving for Virginia on Monday October 30 pursuing the Iron Butt, while my friends were staying on another week.

I keep a 96 Dyna in Florida so that I have something to ride when I’m down there. It’s a great little bike with less than 10,000 miles on it when I bought it from the original owner about 18 months ago. After riding the Dyna around Florida several days before I was to return to Virginia on the Iron Butt it seems that the rear axle “castle nut” came off somewhere. I was cleaning up the bike after a ride and noticed that the axle had come out several inches and was wedged against my chrome Python exhaust pipe. My immediate thought was “damn, what’s that axle doing scratching my chrome?” But it didn’t take long to realize that the exhaust pipe was the only thing keeping the axle from coming all the way out and the wheel from falling off – not a pleasant experience if you are on I-75 going 70 mph.

So I went to Naples HD and got a “castle nut” and cotter pin (the parts guy said it was a miracle that I was alive to pick up these parts), Advance Auto for a torque Wrench, and Wal-Mart believe it or not for a bike lift – you have to get the weight off the rear wheel before you can move the axle back into place. By Saturday night I had everything I needed to put the Dyna back on the road – except for a washer, which I didn’t know I needed until late Saturday. Of course I was cursing my luck because this was making my

Iron Butt preparation a bit rushed plus I wanted to spend some quality time relaxing in the swimming pool and hot tub before leaving early Monday October 30. Next morning (Sunday) I went to the Harley dealer on the Road King and got the washer. On my way back I stopped for gas near my condo and when I tried to start the Road King it was dead – nothing, nada, zilch. Damn – who do I call? HD? Insurance Company? Friends? Ghostbusters? I immediately called the friends I drove down with who interestingly enough were standing in line at the parts counter at Ft Myers HD and within an hour appeared at the gas station with a new battery. Yeeha, the cavalry had come through! Battery installed, the Road King roared to life, and I was home free. But - batteries just don't conk out like this one did so I figured I better get the charging system checked out before I rode off the next morning on the Iron Butt.

I got back to Naples HD by noon and they took me in right away, checked out the Road King and found a bad stator – bike was not charging the battery. So four hours later I was leaving the dealership with a running Road King, got home, fixed the Dyna, and started packing the Road King for the Iron Butt to Virginia. My plan was to leave at 0600 for what I estimated would be an 18 hour trip home. I got my food: beef jerky, dried fruit, salted almonds, Jolly Ranchers, breakfast bars, water, and gum; and I got my tools: including oil, an air pump, and tire repair kit – and my satellite radio for music, talk shows, and old time radio shows. My routine was to ride 125 to 150 miles, stop for gas, john break, snack on the gerbil food, walk around for a few minutes, and get back on the road. My goal was to run with the traffic, normally ridding 70 to 80 miles per hour.

Starting out temperature was 58 degrees, which rose to the low 80's by mid afternoon, dropped to the 50's when the sun went down, and was in the low 40's by the time I reached Woodbridge Virginia, so having the right mix of riding gear was important. At nightfall I stopped to put on over pants as it was getting pretty chilly. A note of caution here - never place your open, full face, flip up helmet on your bike seat – you'll regret it. That's what I did and I knocked it off the seat getting the over pants out of my bag, breaking one of the hinges and scaring myself into thinking I would have to ride the last 300 miles without a face shield. Fortunately I could get the helmet to stay together and 18 and a half hours after departing from Bonita Springs I arrived at my home in Woodbridge and had a bowl of Rocky Road ice cream with my wife, who was still clutching her rosaries thankful I had made it home at all. What a feeling!

Ride Statistics	
18 hours, 38 minutes	Time
1,034	Miles ridden
27.7 gallons	Fuel used
\$65.91	Fuel cost
37.1	Average miles per gallon
\$2.37	Average cost per gallon of fuel
55.3	Average miles per hour
The Experience	Priceless

Now let's revisit a few things. Do you believe in miracles, and if not in miracles than in coincidence? Originally I was going to ride solo down to Florida. Because I had to work all day and evening until 10pm the day before I was to leave, I was going to be too tired to get up early and ride so I hitched a ride in the truck. If I hadn't, the stator would have gone out on the way down and I would have been stranded on the road by myself somewhere. Then when I was in Florida I planned to only ride the Dyna, hell - I figured I'd be on the Road King on the way back. But since I hadn't gotten all the parts I needed to fix the Dyna the first time I had to use the Road King - which broke down. I would have been stranded on the road back to Virginia with a busted stator if I hadn't used the Road King to get the Dyna part that I failed to get the first time. And what were the odds that when I called my friends for help they would have been standing at the parts counter at the dealership, be able to buy the battery I needed, and get it to me in about 30 minutes? Finally, what were the odds that I could get to the dealership on a Sunday in time to get the Road King fixed before they closed and in time for me to get home and pack for the Iron Butt to leave early Monday morning as planned? All of these events occurring as they did must have cosmic meaning. In my opinion there must be a higher power.

I gotta tell you though it was a great ride home; the bike performed flawlessly, used no oil, and was I relatively comfortable the whole 18 and a half hours. My neck got a little sore around hour 16, but while I got tired, I never got sleepy. I had assured my wife that I would stop the Iron Butt attempt if I got fatigued or had physical problems, but in my gut I never considered not finishing the ride as an option. My whole focus was on completing the ride, taking it a segment at a time, riding each leg of about 125 to 150 miles until I was done. If you want to read more about the Iron Butt Association and Iron Butt riding go to <http://www.ironbutt.com>. Now I need to figure out the next stupid thing I'm gonna do...maybe skydiving.



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