

2011 Iron Butt Rally

Steve Aikens IBA # 442

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Getting Started

Where to begin? I am a lifelong motorcyclist, 65 years old as I type this. Several years ago, I had some significant health issues that, according to the doctor, had ended my motorcycling forever.

On my 63rd birthday, I decided I could handle riding again and flew to Salt Lake City, picked up a 2000 BMW R1100RT-P and rode it with a bit of trepidation home to Clovis, NM. It would be hard to put into words what that first ride on a real motorcycle was like for me, after longing to do so for such a long time.

I rode and enjoyed that motorcycle for just short of a year, when my dealer in Tucson offered me a 2007 BMW R1200RT – at “An offer you can’t refuse” kind of deal. After buying the R1200RT, I asked my buddy who was anxious to get back into riding himself, if he would like to buy the RT-P. He said he’d take it, and then asked how much. No haggling, no discussion, just “Gimme my new to me bike, I’ll give you the money you want.” He has also enjoyed the RT-P as much as I had.

I’ve been a member of the Iron Butt Association since around 1998. I heard about the Iron Butt Rally sometime in the 1980’s – before there was an Iron Butt Association - something about a handful of guys that rode their motorcycles all around the US – just riding – thought that was cool and one day, I’d do that. I had learned of the simple pleasure of long distance riding solo in the mid-70s and really liked the idea of stringing a lot of long riding days together and did that.

The more I rode over the years, the longer distances I rode in a day and when I learned of the Iron Butt Association, I immediately made plans to do a ride and join. These were my kind of people, people that simply enjoyed riding motorcycles. No unkind words toward those that didn't ride a particular brand, those that didn't ride long distances, those that didn't like to ride in a group but enjoyed riding to meet with a group, those that only liked to ride in a group – no, no, none of that. These were just people like me that liked motorcycles, and most of the people that rode them, how ever they rode them as long as they rode them in a way that didn't bring discredit to those enjoying MY sport.

Oh yes, the Iron Butt Association was for me.

My first certified ride was Clovis to Kalispell, MT, something over 1600 miles in 22 hours and change in 1998. Next came a number of rallies and other certified rides. In Oct 2000 my great friend and riding partner Rob Lentini and I decided to ride a 50CC ride and certify it. Weather conditions made that one of the most demanding rides I'd ever been on, but the most fun and the most rewarding of my life at that time. The report Rob and I wrote for that ride can be found at <http://www.nmpcs.com/50CC/>.

The one thing I simply couldn't get out of my mind was the Iron Butt Rally. The more I learned about the Iron Butt Association and the Iron Butt Rally, the more I had to ride it.

Since buying the 2007 RT, I began my serious riding all over again, noticed I'd started riding 1000 mile days pretty regularly and even though there were some lingering health issues, I was handling the rides pretty well, and really getting my life back.

Then, one fateful day, August 4th, 2010, the applications for the 2011 Iron Butt Rally opened up. I talked to my wife; Oldwhatshername [her real name is Becky, but please don't let her know I know that] and she encouraged me to get my entry in. I did.

September 20th, 2010, I received an email from Rally Mistress Lisa Landry offering me Congratulations on being selected to ride the 2011 Iron Butt Rally.!!!.

I was elated, concerned and scared I may have overstepped my capabilities too soon after my return to riding. However, I saw the challenge I had sought out so many years and my chance to attack it right ahead of me. I quickly realized it was my opportunity of a lifetime.

I started my preparation for the IBR in earnest, preparing the bike, adding the equipment I felt I needed, riding more and working harder on getting myself ready for the IBR.

Farkling up the R1200RT

Farkle: accessory. *The word farkle is generally accepted to mean a combination of "function" and "sparkle", hence, farkle.* The term is well known in the sport touring community. An enthusiast may be in the process of "farkling". The completed motorcycle would be all "farkled up". Radar detectors, Global Positioning System

receivers, heated grips, and satellite radios are some of those farkles. Other accessories are almost always aftermarket seats, side and/or top cases or bar risers, which make the motorcycle more suitable for long miles.

The very first thing that needed attention was something to sit on. Not planning on repeating my experience with Russell on my 1100RT-P – that saddle went back to them twice before I gave up and sold it - I bought a Corbin one-piece low seat. Roughly 10,000 miles later, I was pretty much forced to go back to a two-piece saddle so I could mount a fuel cell on the back of the bike. I got a Bill Mayer from a friend in Lubbock, rode out to Ojai, CA and had Adrian cut it to fit me. The seat was fine up to about 250 miles but there was a stubborn hot-spot we just couldn't seem to get fixed. I found a Russell that a guy with my build had made and finally got it right, then sold his bike. He offered the saddle for \$230 so I thought I would try it. As it turned out, it was actually just what I needed. It should come as no surprise that anyone who knows anything about long-distance riding also knows about Russell saddles, once they actually fit your butt, they're the best you can do on those long days.

Starting in July at the BMW MOA Rally in Bend, OR, I was looking for aux. lighting and proper mounts for the PIAA 1100x's that were on the bike. The previous owner mounted the PIAAs low on the front forks. This severely limits the light cast of these lights to just fill lighting that only slightly augments the factory lights. These lights need to be mounted higher on the bike, closer to the height of the factory headlight, to gain the most benefit of their output capabilities. I found a pair of mounts from BMR Enterprises that located them just under the mirrors and aimed them slightly toward the road shoulders to cover the ditch lines and up to the center of the road. The PIAA 1100x is a flood type light that offers bright light with wide coverage. I was also looking for HID's [High Intensity Discharge lights] and mounts to locate them above the mirrors. I spoke with Ian Wendler of WARN Industries about their HID's. As it happened, Ian was looking for someone to prototype some mounts for the RT.

During the 2010 Land Of Enchantment Rally, I was visiting with old friend Paul Glaves about his recommendations for a fuel cell for the R1200RT. He told me he had Ardys Kellerman's old fuel cell that came off her R1100RT and we could mount that just fine. Roughly a month later, I was leaving Paul and Voni Glaves Texas Adobe home testing out the freshly mounted cell. It worked exactly as I need it to. Thanks to Ardys, Paul and Voni for the second most important addition to my bike – to complete the Iron Butt Rally with. One other change that eventually got made out of that ride to Paul and Voni's was the addition of a pump for my hydration system. Thirsty? Push the button. Need to wet down your LDComforts to "Turn on the evaporative cooler?" – push the button. Paul rigged it up for me and ran the power wire down the drink tube to keep it really clean and easily manageable.

I was running a Garmin Zumo 550 GPS on the R1100RT-P and knew it wasn't what I wanted for the IBR for a couple reasons. First, it doesn't do NEXRAD weather. Watching the IBR5000 in 2010 unfold, there was no doubt in my mind of the value of having a heads up for severe weather. I started looking for a GPSMAP 478 and finally

found one. Got that mounted along with the Zumo for the moving map. With the GPSMAP 478, I could route waypoint to waypoint easily, have the data screen up to monitor how my times were and watch the moving map on the Zumo.

I added a TPMS Tire Pressure Monitoring System from Show Chrome to the bike. I have never been a fan of these systems. They are generally inaccurate to the point of being useless, IMO. I have always been anal about tires and tire pressures, and check them daily before I ride. However, I was following the 2011 Iron Butt Rally forum and there was a thread [topic] on tire pressure monitors. I noted with interest a post from “Wendy” that I had been missing a significant value of the monitors. The monitor has an alert function when you have an over-pressure/under-pressure condition that you set for your particular motorcycle. That means if you install it where you can see/hear it, it will alert you to any sudden deflation before it becomes critical – allowing you to get safely stopped to check out the cause. About the only thing it wouldn’t help with would be a catastrophic failure like a blow-out, which is a rare occurrence with the tire technology we have today.

I added an external voltmeter to monitor battery/charge condition. BMW has the highest output alternator available on a motorcycle. It is highly unlikely that I would over stress that system with accessories like lights and heated clothing. The cost of the voltmeter was \$30 so it was inexpensive enough to make it a worthwhile investment to just keep an eye on power and battery condition.

I kept all my heated clothing when I stopped riding. I have worn Gerbings Heated Clothing since it first came to the market in the mid-late 70’s. I upgraded a couple times to the ‘latest and greatest’ of the time and have always had it with me on my bike, regardless of the time of year. Over the years, I had become good friends with the folks at Gerbing and it was great to see them at the BMW MOA Rally in Bend, OR. At the rally, they were promoting their ‘latest and greatest’ as expected. The new gear uses a ‘Micro-Wire’ technology and heat panels instead the random wires throughout the clothing. I was interested and visited with Craig Bennett, an old friend and one of Gerbings top sales representatives about it, telling Craig I thought the new technology would be about as good as it gets and I was interested in it. Craig knows the amount of miles I normally ride and surprised me by visiting with Jeff Gerbing and I about the possibility of me evaluating it under real world conditions and writing an honest report about it – regardless of what the outcome was. Jeff agreed the IBR would be a good test bed for the new gear and decided to send it to me to evaluate. I chose the permanently mounted dual controller, jacket liner, pant liner and G5 gloves. I previously had all those garments but had the G3 gloves and a HeatTroller that were great.

Physical Fitness

Working out harder, changing my diet to slowly lose some of the excess weight I’d accumulated while I was feeling sorry for myself that I couldn’t ride, and more importantly, getting myself more fit. Upper body strength was a little slow to build and losing the volley ball I had so firmly planted around my middle was pretty slow to work

out. I started dropping about one or two pounds a month and started felling like my cloths were a little looser. Though I'm still not where I want to be, I met my 10-15 pound weight loss goal, right at 15 pounds, getting back down to 156 just before heading to Seattle for the start of the IBR. The ride to Seattle was but a small taste of what was ahead.

Final Prep And On The Road

I rode to Colorado Springs where good friend Jay Kuhns mounted a fresh set of Michelin PR3s on the bike, then headed straight into stormy weather and high winds. My final preparations for the bike included stopping at Boise, Montana's Big Twin BMW for my final oil change for the ride. I hit their front door at 1245 hrs and blew threw their service department like crap through a goose. These guys and gals are awesome. Visiting with some of the employees while I was waiting, I found everyone very friendly and knowledgeable. A few days later, I received a call as a follow-up on the service. Since I was riding, I didn't return the call but did send them an email when I got back to Clovis and could think a little clearer, thanking them for the great service and telling them I'd be back.

Back on the road again, I came up behind Bob Rippy - another IBR rider that I met in Jacksonville, FL during the IBA Daytona meet - we rode together a little and along the way, stopped at a rest stop to visit some. I mentioned I was headed to Ellensburg, WA where I planned to spend at least one night before headed to Seattle. Bob decided to join me, we got a couple rooms and had a great time visiting and getting to know each other better, mostly over dinner. Bob headed to Seattle for an appointment the next morning while I decided to hang back, just rest up and replace the headlight bulb that went black just as I got to the hotel. Once the right one was replaced, the left one needed to be replaced. Fortunately, I carry two spares and was happy that I didn't have to be concerned about those older bulbs failing when it wasn't so convenient at a hotel.

Arrival At The Start

To describe my mood as 'elated' once I reach the start hotel in Seattle and started seeing old friends would be an understatement. Once there, it really hit me - what I was about to attempt - even though at that point I had no idea what devious routing and bonus plans the Route Master, Tom Austin, had in mind. Visions of wading across flooded out interstate highways to take a photo of a monument that was also flooded over and riding into Death Valley at noon in 125 degree heat flashed through my mind. It never even occurred to me that he would send us to all lower 48 states, offer us photo bonuses of the Capitols or offer us the opportunity to grab all 48 states, and then top it off with a mild dose of all Four Corners of the United States! Yipes!

Learning of the required routing and bonus listings during the rider meeting Sunday night, it took me just a moment to question what I had gotten myself into.

Unlike previous IBR's where you're given a bonus listing and sent to plot on your own for high scoring and efficient routing to finish high in the standings, this 2011 IBR dictated a base route of some minimum of 8,325 miles or so just to finish. Previous Iron Butt Rallies had point finishers in 8,000 plus miles but the challenge was always at least 10,000 miles in those 11 days. A minimum of 8,325 miles was certainly no issue. What became the alarming issue with a dictated route to all the lower 48 states was the already known construction and weather conditions, coupled with flooding that you now couldn't avoid with any kind of efficient routing you might normally do. Toss in a couple of those Capitols – mostly during heavy traffic periods, road closures due to flooding, heavy construction in cities, severe storms and other generally unfriendly weather or road conditions and it wasn't hard to realize just how difficult this ride was going to be.

Also realizing there was insanity in my family – my insanity – I slowly began to look forward to the challenge and began to plot how I wanted to ride the IBR.

“The Plan” Leg One Checking Me Out

Still with some concern for my ability to handle the long days in the saddle, I planned to ride from Seattle to the first Checkpoint in Buffalo, NY, gathering the necessary receipts from the states along the way without concerning myself with bonus points from Capitols. To be considered a finisher, a rider could ride to the 48 states, get receipts from each state and reach each Checkpoint on time, without the need to go to the Capitols. If I had trouble with the ride, I felt I still could manage the Base Route and at the least, be a finisher of the IBR. I had decided if I could make the ride to Buffalo without trouble, I would then honestly accept the challenge to finish higher in the standings by really working the Capitols hard and getting all I could on Leg Two to Jacksonville, FL, then only go for the highest bonus point Capitols on Leg Three from Jacksonville to the finish in Ontario, CA. Though we didn't know what the bonus values would be on Leg Three until the rider meeting in Jacksonville, past histories of the Iron Butt Rally made it clear that the last Leg was always the most difficult and offered the highest point values.

Reaching Buffalo feeling great, my plan was going to work. Leg One was mostly as expected, state to state sit and ride, albeit in some pretty unfriendly weather. I did pick up two Capitols on the way but only because they were 'right there' and not taking a photograph would have just been stupid so I grabbed Bismarck and De Moines for a total 298 points with the call-in bonus. I did the rest bonus, but even though I had all I needed to do to prove I did it – the one thing I *failed* to do was enter it into my Passport Page - I *failed* in doing all the paperwork correctly. Stupid rookie error. Then add to that error, I gave up 50 of those points for two errors on my receipts. At the finish of Leg One, there I sat, in 85th place.

Ride, Live, Learn.

“The Plan” Leg Two Dramatically Different

On Leg Two, now knowing how I was doing after so many miles in the saddle, with the long riding hours, I felt I could handle tackling this ride in earnest and work on my finishing rank. I planned hit 12 of the 15 Capitols, opting to avoid the worst to get to in heavy traffic [Atlanta at 634 points – there’s a good reason it’s so many points] or those that were so low in point value, they took too long to get to make it worthwhile [Boston at 34 points and Providence at 35 points]. I did all the paperwork properly from here on to the finish Leg Two as I planned, scored the call-in bonus giving me 2325 points on Leg Two and moving me up 20 places to 65th at the end of the Leg.

“The Plan” Was Working

The plan was to go for the biggest or quickest to reach bonuses on Leg Three. Those Capitols were Tallahassee 48 points, Montgomery 696 points, Austin 1470 points, Denver 1513 points, Carson City 1732 points and Sacramento 1733 points.

Getting out shortly after the rider meeting, I was in Tallahassee at 0300, even after seeing ‘the wall’ and deciding to hit the Iron Butt Motel for a 15 minute nap. I got a good photo and was on my way to Montgomery in good time. Grabbed Montgomery at 0725, and did a run to Jacksonville, TX before doing the rest bonus, then the call-in bonus – both of which I wisely documented like I was supposed to. Austin was a breeze to get a good photo, get out of town before the traffic got horrid and add 1470 points to my score. Now it’s a 600 miles run north to Boise City, OK, a quick dip into NM, then on north to Denver in good time to get the capitol and another 1513 points before the traffic got heavy.

“The Plan” Falls Apart

Grabbing that gas receipt in Boise City, I discovered the 600-mile run from Austin on Texas’s course aggregate secondary roads in 106-degree heat was not ‘friendly’ to my rear tire. I felt the rear PR3 had enough tread to make the rest of the miles to the finish, after getting Denver, Carson City and Sacramento but it was going to be close, and more importantly, if I was headed back into wet weather, I didn’t feel the tire was going to be safe in the wet. I fully realized what going for a rear tire meant to my finish position because of the time I was going to lose waiting for a dealer to open but as anal as I am about tires, I didn’t see any option. I was done chasing Capitols. Regardless of what I did, I was going to be waiting for a dealership to open in the morning. I opted for Colorado Springs. Total cost of that rear tire - 1513, 1732 and 1733 points respectively – and a 10 hour loss of time. Arriving in Colorado Springs at 2145 hrs, I was on time for my planned ride to the capitol in Denver around 0145 hrs. Unfortunately, my decision to replace that rear tire ended thoughts of reaching my goals. My guess was I could be out of Colorado Springs at the latest somewhere before 0900 hrs, and I was. Unfortunately, it simply wasn’t reasonable to try to get the photo of the Capitol Building in Denver during the mid-morning traffic, especially when construction is an issue. However, since the run

I had planned was across to Carson City was I-70 to US-50, I decided to see what the real traffic situation was before I opted out of Denver. As expected, traffic was heavy enough by the time I reached Loop 470 that it was clear Denver was out.

The total of 8262 points for Leg Three was a significant disappointment for me. On the other hand, I rolled into Ontario, CA around 2:30am to grab some rest before stopping the clock shortly after 7 AM, getting my ODO done and getting finished with scoring around 9AM.

Even with the loss of those last three big Capitols, I still finished with 10,282 miles and 10,835 points to land me in 56th place. I am the 442nd rider to ever finish the Iron Butt Rally. Had I not had the rear tire issue and been able to score those last three high bonuses, I would have finished roughly in 26 or 27th place with 15,813 points and not a whole lot more miles. Perhaps I can ride a different ride in 2013 and make some improvements in my choices.

Conclusion:

During the Finish Banquet, Rally Mistress Lisa Landry introduced me as “The happiest guy to finish the Iron Butt Rally, in 56th place, Steve Aikens”. That was an understatement.

That morning as I just finished being scored, I went back into the waiting area to get a cup of coffee and pick up the stuff I'd left there when called to score. Route Master Tom Austin was standing by himself drinking some juice and I decided to thank him for the awesome route he devised. As I was talking with him, it hit me as to exactly what I had accomplished. I found myself tearing up and finding it hard to finish what I had to say to him and could only apologize for losing it there. I explained briefly that those were tears of complete joy and relief for finishing the IBR. To this day, I still don't think he knew exactly why it meant so much to me.

I have accomplished a goal very few people on this planet could, by successfully completing the Iron Butt Rally - following the medical fact that my riding days were over *forever* a short four years ago. I had my life given back to me by The Iron Butt Association. You see, that's the problem with 'medical facts' – there are times they don't remain 'facts' – luckily for me.....

Aikens – the happiest guy to finish the Iron Butt Rally

Scroll down for Supporters and Decompression

Supporters

The following friends and companies provided support for my success in the 2011 Iron Butt Rally, in no particular order.

Becky Nufer – My lovely wife and Number ONE Supporter

Craig Bennett

Jeff Gerbing

[Gerbing's Heated Clothing](#), Tumwater, WA

Debra and Tres Hicks

[Pettigrew and Associates PA](#), Engineering, Surveying and Testing, Hobbs, NM

Craig Ham

[Copier Supply Company](#), Clovis, NM

Deb Lower

Stan Herman

Jay Kuhns

Paul Graves

Voni Graves

Ardys Kellerman

Lisa Landry

Decompression

Well, the 2011 Iron Butt Rally is now in the history books. The Rally is finished. However, for some of us, it's not over. Returning to the real world we live in outside of the Iron Butt Rally is an experience in itself.

After wrestling with getting our entries in, getting payments made, making hotel reservations, saving money to cover expenses, insuring all the required documents were properly completed, verifying/obtaining the required insurance for the US and Canada, verifying our motorcycle registrations were up-to-date and we could prove it, making sure we had MedJet Medical Evacuation coverage's, re-visiting all our personal insurance documents to make sure our families were protected in the event something happened on the ride, reviewing wills, verifying emergency contacts – the list goes on for some serious length – we were then immersed into riding and completing the totally dedicated Iron Butt Rally safely for the full 11 riding days.

What's it like to just make the ride to a Capitol and take a simple picture? Generally, we would think of something along the lines of get there, find some cool composition with the Capitol building as the main subject – but most of all, do your best to make a building a photograph worthy of being called a 'great picture' or more often, a 'work of art'. You hit your best shots of several different compositions. You make certain you have the correct exposure, check the light – too much light, too little? Subject framed properly, pay attention to small details – does that tree limb obstruct the entranceway?

Not exactly so with a rally photo. Thinking ahead to the next turn, the next traffic light, the next cage driver in an unfamiliar city that won't see you and will force evasive action, getting to a bonus location and preparing to take your photo – Get the bike parked safely. Check the camera to make sure it's set to take the picture you need under the ever-changing conditions? Get out your rally flag? Fasten it to your bike, windshield, tank bag or anything else you can if it's possible to that the picture from your bike. Find someplace you can attach it to on a building, fence, whatever you can find that you can secure it to. Let's not forget to wind, which can send your rally flag back to Kansas, Dorothy. Can you see the rally flag and my rider number clearly? Take the shot. Check the picture, is it clear enough? Get out your Passport Book; enter the date, time and mileage. Make sure you secure everything before you take off – HEY – what about zipping up the tank bag again? Now re-program the GPS's to take you to the next waypoint/bonus. Get moving again as quickly as you safely can, get to the next Capitol and repeat. Fortunately, we only had to do that 48 times – or more for some riders.

It turned into a routine. You simply block everything else in your life out, stick to your rally routine religiously, every day for eleven days straight. There's really no way to explain to others what it's like to dedicate your entire life to reading and understanding directions and living a life focused on nothing else. You check your routing, weather, times, gas stops and of course your motorcycle to make sure you're on your best ride

game to be where you plan to be, when you plan to be there and do whatever needs to be done to document that you reached your goal – that time – so you could repeat it with the next stop.

So now the rally is over. You're home and back to your non-rally life. Everything is back to normal, whatever that is.

Or is it?

Nope – afraid not. During the rally, you essentially reset your body clock to work the best for you. Unfortunately, for most that means you have to reset it back to your home and family life. Go buy groceries, take the kids to school, brown nose the boss a little because he's not at all happy you took so much time off – right in the middle of the most important project the company won the bid on – and he needed you while you were off playing on that damn motorcycle.

Another part of the reality of getting back to what I like to call the real world is getting your mind to understand you really are back to your non-IBR life. You still wake early thinking you need to get on the road. You dream about the next Capitol – that would be the one you already visited – and wonder if your picture is good enough to score for you. Is my rally flag easy to read? Am I where the coordinates say I should be? Does my picture look like the one in my Passport Book? Wait – I'm home. I already took that picture.

Then of course, there's the reliving the ride in your mind when you talk to others. All you have to talk about is what you lived for the past couple weeks. At first, most find it interesting. Unfortunately, it gets a little difficult to carry on a conversation with someone that didn't make the ride – you pity them to a small degree because they didn't get to experience what you did. On the other hand, they can't understand you're not interested in what they've been doing to get the latest and greatest project off the ground.

For me, decompression from the Iron Butt Rally took about two weeks to reach the point where I could actually carry on a conversation that didn't start with “during the rally, I hit a pothole that had just swallowed a Volkswagen in Maryland”.

I've finally reached the end of my decompression time and believe I am now back to my normal self – whatever that is. I'm loaded with memories of a really challenging ride – and looking forward to improving on my finishing position in 2013.

“I don't suffer from insanity – I'm enjoying every minute of it.” And now I can prove it.

Steve Aikens
Clovis, NM
IBA # 442