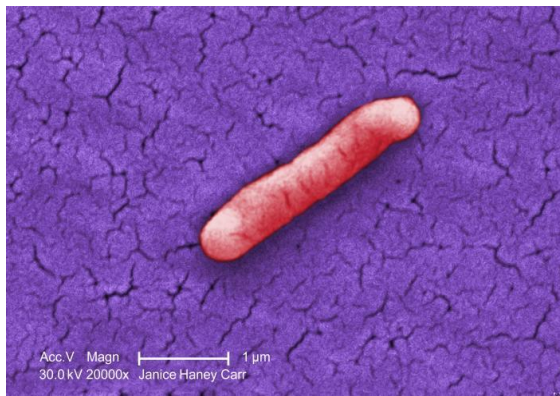


“Team Sal’s” Big Adventure

Reflections from the back of the 2010 Iron Butt 5000 Rally pack

The tests are back! And, in all fairness, I must retroactively announce that a second team rode the 2010 Iron Butt 5000 Rally (IB5K). In addition to the very successful “Team Lyle,” the much less accomplished “Team Sal” also competed. Actually, at the time I wasn’t positive that I was rally riding with a “teammate” – perhaps “unwelcomed passenger” is a much better description – but I had my suspicions.

On the way to Denver, apparently during my Friday morning breakfast west of Kansas, my passenger – who I’ve nicknamed “Sal” – unexpectedly joined my adventure. Dang those “scrambled soft” eggs!



My IB5K teammate, Sal

Who knew that a major egg producer with a 2+ year history of *Salmonella enteritidis* bacterial contamination was experiencing an unprecedented outbreak? Who knew that over 1,000 folks had already been so intensively sickened by egg-borne salmonella bacteria that they required medical attention? See what I get for leaving my work Blackberry at home!

Salmonella enterocolitis, an infection in the small intestine, is the most common

presentation of salmonellosis. Symptoms may include abdominal tenderness, cramping, and/or pain; diarrhea; nausea and/or vomiting; fever and/or chills; and muscle aches and cramps. The prognosis for salmonella enterocolitis is usually good. Symptoms go away in 4 to 7 days in otherwise healthy folks. But, there are some people who experience severe or prolonged symptoms that require physician directed antibiotics therapy.

Enough of the geek speak! Sal announced his intentions to ride the IB5K with me just before the Saturday afternoon tech inspection and ODO check. Quickly realizing that I just couldn’t tell him “NO!” I struggled to accommodate my new teammate. A major consequence of salmonella enterocolitis, like most other diarrheal illnesses, is dehydration (what a rally-riding compatible problem?!?). And, as we all know, immediate replacement of fluids and salts (i.e., electrolytes) is a simple and successful remedy for dehydration. A trip to the nearby Wal-Mart yielded a handful of Cottonelle moist wipe travel packs (what a wonderful invention) and several boxes of Propel powder packets (e.g., hydration system

friendly, sugar-free electrolyte therapy). I avoided the anti-diarrheal medications (e.g., Imodium), however, because they can actually prolong the salmonella infection.

By Sunday afternoon I felt I was managing the circumstances fairly well (isn't that a key lesson learned from "Against the Wind?" Work with what you're given.). But, the thought of gearing-up and riding into the August heat was, frankly, more than a bit daunting. I knew that excessive rally-induced dehydration, given that Sal was riding along, might be more than I could handle. So, as I set down Sunday evening to plot a Leg 1 course, Sal kept intruding – both physically and mentally – and prodding me to pick a route that would, as much as possible, (1) avoid ambient temperatures that would exacerbate dehydration, (2) allow for frequent opportunities to use my supply of moist wipes in modesty preserving surroundings, and (3) provide for an extended rest and recovery period at the end of the Day 1 ride. Although in my heart I wanted to reach for the more challenging bonuses, I knew I had to prudently manage my limitations.



Team Sal at IB5K Start

My stops on [Leg 1](#) are detailed elsewhere. What's not evident is that I saved the Ames Monument and Mother Cabrini Shrine until the end of my journey. While I hoped that Sal would get bored riding through Wyoming and leave me alone, I was really worried about the onset of fatigue. On the first day, I quickly discovered that my concerns were justified. Leaving Casper, WY without refueling was a huge mental error. Getting back in rally mode after an overnight rest in Billings, MT was challenging (it took me 15 minutes to check my tire pressure?!?). Indeed, after visiting the Ames Monument I felt like I'd been on the road for days rather than hours. An extended pit-stop at Cheyenne helped; but it was clear that I was operating at a physical and mental deficit.



Devils Tower Wyoming

Back in Denver, the ride to the Casa Bonita bonus renewed wonderful memories. When I was a kid,

my family traveled across country in our big blue Oldsmobile 98. After enduring the unbelievable scenery of Kansas and eastern Colorado from the backseat of that “road yacht,” a visit to Denver’s Lakeside Amusement Park to ride the world-famous Cyclone wooden coaster left an indelible memory. Over 40 years later, routing past the old park and seeing the Cyclone lifted my spirits tremendously. But, after negotiating the Casa Bonita maze I was just too drained to climb the 373 steps to the Mother Cabrini Shrine and headed straight to the hotel. After good luck at the scoring table and a bite of dinner I stumbled off to bed.

As long as I can remember, one side effect of serious dehydration for me has been nighttime muscle-cramping. I’d hoped, given all the electrolytes that I’d been slurping, that I might avoid that problem and, luckily, had made it through Sunday and Monday nights without a problem. Tuesday night proved different. Cramps in my legs and left shoulder made for a very uncomfortable rest. Stretching and more electrolytes helped a lot. But, the shoulder cramp wouldn’t release and was so intense it was making my left hand numb (i.e., scapula entrapment). Thankfully, at the Leg 2 riders meeting Greg and Pat Blewett recognized my distress and took time to help me. Greg skillfully massaged the muscle until it released. I could feel my fingers again! Pat, who is a physician and top-notch diagnostician, started asking questions I didn’t want to answer (sorry Pat!). That “doctor look” on Pat’s face showed that she suspected something more than normal rally fatigue but with the Leg 2 rally book in hand she had more pressing concerns. Greg and Pat’s kindness was so wonderful and greatly appreciated.



Pat and Greg Blewett

My teammate, Sal, announced his intentions to help me with Leg 2 route planning almost as soon as I opened the rally book. Despite his “help,” I quickly saw what I thought would be both the “top rider” and “middle of the pack” finisher routes. All of these, unfortunately, involved two things I believed “Team Sal” needed to avoid: (1) hot weather and (2) Atlanta. Hot weather was problematic because Sal had made me very sensitive to dehydration; my system could tolerate another day of heat, but not much more. Atlanta wasn’t good because my home is about a mile

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south of I-85 and given my condition I feared the “sirens of my comfy bed” calling me to DNF.

With passport in hand, I eagerly searched for a “classic” northern high pointer like Thunder Bay or the bridge crossing the Straits of Mackinac. But, while studying the Leg 2 routing options I got scared. I just couldn’t find enough points along a “northern route” to earn finisher status. After an agonizingly long time I discovered my mistake. Because of the symbol/color



Route on Second Leg of the Iron Butt 5000 Rally

combination I’d assigned to very high bonuses, I didn’t see a key bonus in northeastern Pennsylvania. That problem solved a route and strategy for finishing the rally fell into place.

The strategy was a simple “if/then” approach. I reasoned that it was the fourth day of my salmonellosis episode so the most obvious symptoms should diminish soon. But, at the same time, I knew I had to preserve and, if possible, restore my energies. So, I chose to spend Wednesday moving eastward at a leisurely pace that would place only minimum demands on my energies and then take an extended rest break Wednesday night. My hope was that I’d feel well enough Thursday morning to return to “rally mode” and finish. Alternatively, if the journey eastward proved too challenging then I could call the Rallymaster and take the shortcut home.

Of course, this “rest-then-rally” approach carried tremendous risks for DNF. Basically, I would collect no points on the first day of Leg 2. Then, over the next 50 or so hours, if I swept up essentially every bonus between Des Moines, IA, Minneapolis, MN, and Pen Argyl, PA, gathered the call-in, rest, and fuel log bonuses, made it back to Spartanburg on time, and had good luck at the scoring table, I would barely have enough points to earn finisher status. It was a long shot. But, I still had a chance.

Taking my time double-checking my route plan and loading the bike, I was one of the last riders to leave the checkpoint. Stopping at K-Mart for more supplies, I left Denver about noon with bags of ice stuffed in my chest pockets and slowly worked my way across a very hot northeastern Colorado and southern Nebraska. Although

I had to stop every couple of hours, I reached Omaha shortly after sundown, found a motel for the night, and quickly fell asleep.

Thursday morning I awoke an hour earlier than I'd planned and felt much better than I'd expected. As I made my way to Des Moines, it was clear that I would arrive at the grave of Edmund James much too early to collect the bonus. I thought



The cornfield memorial to Buddy Holly, Richie Valens, and J. P. “The Big Bopper” Richardson.

about just waiting to gather the 214 points before heading north towards Minneapolis. But, my “rest-then-rally” plan required that I push as far eastward as possible on Thursday; I needed miles more than points! None the less, I stopped by to pay my respects to Eddie’s father since I wasn’t visiting Eddie’s memorial in Atlanta. The ride from Des Moines was enjoyable. I encountered several other IB5K participants at the monument commemorating “the day the music died,” chatted with the friendly folks at Zanz, and loved the aroma of Bob’s Java Hut (plus, I got a MN2010 mug!).

Somewhere around Madison, WI I realized that my teammate, Sal, must have had enough of rally riding – or at least, enough of me! My gamble on cloudy skies and cooler than normal temperatures across Minnesota and Wisconsin seemed to be paying off. My stamina was improving. The skyline of Chicago was a welcomed sight just after sunset as I worked my way to El Famous in Summit, IL. It was while zipping across Indiana, eating an El Famous soft taco, and looking at the “What Would Eddie Do?” sticker on my windshield that I had my first “aha!” moment while rallying. I’m still struggling to find the right way to explain what happened. All I know is that was the best taco I’ve ever eaten!

Arriving in South Bend, IN late Thursday night I started to sense that I might actually have a chance to earn IB5K finisher status. I’d just covered almost 1,000 miles with nine stops in around 20 hours. But, I realized the real test was still ahead. Once back on the road Friday morning I’d have to cover almost 1,550 miles and gather 6 bonuses in less than 30 hours. One of the bonuses involved visiting downtown Cleveland while the other five required navigating several secondary roads (all of which, oddly, were “under construction”?!?).



A huge Holstein cow statue

There was a welcomed crispness in the pre-dawn air as I headed towards Cleveland, OH. Cleveland traffic was surprisingly light for morning rush-hour (at least compared to Atlanta!) and I was back on the interstate heading across Pennsylvania sooner than I'd expected. Given his surprised look, I figured the fellow mowing the grass at the Monroe Twp, PA cow statue bonus hadn't seen any other riders. As I continued heading east I relished in the thought that I might

be boldly going where no other IB5K participants were foolish enough to venture!?!

Realizing that my sense of humor was returning I kept myself snickering all the way to the Little League Baseball Museum. Unbelievably, there was a lull in the Little League World Series action during my visit to South Williamsport, PA and I was able to efficiently capture the bonus and get back on the road.

The mid-day coolness of the Appalachian Mountains was delightful as I negotiated the interstates and secondary road towards Bethel, NY. In the months prior to the IB5K I'd discovered, like I'm sure other riders have, an odd characteristic of Garmin GPS units: Different models, working from the same map set, can yield starkly different results. From experience I knew that my Nuvi 550 (which I used primarily for onboard route planning) was more trustworthy in such circumstances than my StreetPilot 2820. So, trusting the Nuvi, I was able to quickly navigate a bridge closing detour to and from the site of the 1969 Woodstock Festival in Bethel, NY. Saving those few minutes, I hoped, would not be critical as I turned toward Pen Argyl, PA.



My best 'batter's stance.'

The carnival and craft fair was just getting started for the evening when I passed through Pen Argyl to visit Jayne Mansfield's headstone. All the "carnival food" smells were so tempting! And, the joyful looks of anticipation among young and old alike walking to the fairgrounds were striking. For the first time in over a week, I found myself really longing to see my family. The sun was setting as I



Jayne Mansfield's headstone.

southwestern Virginia for almost 10 years, I took that warning very seriously. The stretch of I-81 that lay ahead – particularly between Staunton, VA and Fort Chiswell, VA – is a [notoriously dangerous ride](#) in perfect weather conditions. Dense fog could make it almost impassable. Plus, I-77 between Fort Chiswell, VA and the North Carolina state line – especially the normally delightful curvy drop down from the mountains at Fancy Gap – could also be a challenge with limited visibility. How much of a delay would the fog cause? What if there was a roadway jamming accident? While there were good alternative routes south (for example, US 220 at Roanoke) all required more miles/time and could be even more difficult to navigate in fog.

Just south of Strasburg I visited the Iron Butt Motel for about 45 minutes. Then, before getting back on the road, I double-checked both my documentation and math, and decided to forgo a bonus near Sam Black Church, WV to head straight for Spartanburg. That trimmed about 90 miles off my route giving me, I hoped, sufficient cushion to navigate the foggy Blue Ridge Mountains and any other challenges along the remaining 420 miles.

After riding very slowly and cautiously for almost 2 hours I emerged from the mountains of Virginia into the foothills of North Carolina. The journey was more difficult than I'd anticipated with very low visibility in several spots. So, near Dobson, NC I took a short break; sipping a coffee and walking around a bit. It was just after 5 Saturday morning and I was about 150 miles from Spartanburg. My friend Jack, who was riding up from Atlanta to help celebrate the rally finish, called and our chatter helped me stay alert as I rode around Charlotte and headed into South Carolina and on to Spartanburg.

turned south onto PA-33 and an overnight ride to Spartanburg. But, hearing that everyone at home was well and that they were looking forward to seeing me at the rally finish helped me both focus and enjoy the last stretch of the adventure.

After stopping outside Allentown to gear-up for cooler temperatures and to check the weather forecast, I began reevaluating my ride plan. The weather ahead wasn't ideal with heavy fog forecast along much of I-81 in Virginia. Having lived in

Somehow I managed to ignore the shiny new Krispy Kreme just down the street from the rally finish checkpoint and pulled into the parking lot just after 7 Saturday morning. Dale “Warchild” Wilson met me at the checkpoint and his big smile and



Unloading the bike in Spartanburg

warm greeting almost induced a “Twilight Zone” moment; I was startled to see “that” side of Warchild! But, quickly realizing that I’d not emerged from the fog into an alternate reality, I made a point to thank Dale for his kindness. Sometimes it’s the little things that are most enjoyable. Even now, visualizing Warchild’s big grin makes me smile. Several friends and fellow rally riders were there too and it was great to see everyone. But, with a bit of work still

to be done (i.e., scoring), I chatted only briefly before visiting Ira Agins to check-in and stop my rally clock.

After getting cleaned-up and double-checking all my documentation I signed-in for scoring. There was essentially no wait and I quickly passed through the process of getting my camera memory card dumped to a USB drive and then moved along to have my documentation reviewed. Two issues arose during the scoring process. Like many other riders, my Waffle House receipts – which did not include date/time/location details – were not acceptable. Next time I’ll pay using my credit card. Questions about my documentation for one higher value bonus were a bit more anxiety producing. On Leg 1 of the rally there was one bonus that had caused problems for some riders. Basically, the bonus directions focused on a “historical monument” but directed us to photograph a nearby “sign” rather than the monument. In that instance, I took pictures of both the monument and sign just to be sure. At one Leg 2 bonus I encountered a similar circumstance. Thankfully, after careful review by the scoring crew, the bonus was awarded. Next time I’ll call the Rallymaster. Two important lessons learned for my next run at the Iron Butt Rally.

In the months prior to the rally several IBR veterans generously shared their insights with me (Thanks Bob W., Jim B., and Kevin L.!) about the event. All of them said basically the same thing: “Since it’s your first IBA multiday rally, don’t worry about your finishing position; just finish.” As I headed back to my room for a nap, I finally understood the value of that wisdom.

My midday nap was interrupted by lots of hugs, kisses, and gleeful squeals when my wife and children arrived. What a delightful way to wake-up! The rest of the day was a whirl of fun activities with the family. We explored the hotel, looked at all the motorcycles, got cool Sponge Bob stuff from the hotel, had lunch, and talked with lots of other LD riders. It was a blast.

Throughout the day, it was obvious that both my daughter (she's 9) and my young son (he's 3) had suffered considerable separation anxiety while I was off gallivanting across the countryside. It was most apparent in my son who suppressed his natural tendency to roam around exploring the hotel. He wasn't "clingy;" but he wasn't letting me out of his sight! During the delightful dinner, Jay seemed to drop his daddy vigilance just a bit and was using the banquet table as a "fort" when I was called to receive an IB5K Finisher Plaque. But, as you can see in the photo with Lisa Erbes, he quickly tracked me down! It's a precious photo of a spontaneous moment (I wish my daughter had been so bold!) that I've already dreamt may come back to haunt me in just a few years!?! As one of my friends said, "I know we need to bring new riders into the LD community, but don't you think 3's a little young?"



Someone missed his Daddy!

About six weeks have passed now since I returned home from the IB5K. The little RT's wounds have been healed by the wonderful folks at BMW Motorcycles of Atlanta. And it took Jay and I only two days, with lots of breaks to play in the water hose, to scrub away all the bugs and road grime. Physically, I've recovered well. But, I fear I'm suffering from a bit of "rally remorse." Basically, there's an ongoing struggle between my rational and irrational sides. My rational side recognizes that, despite some difficulties, I finished a demanding 5 day endurance rally. At the same time, much like a golfer after playing a bad round, my irrational side makes me feel like I left way too much on the IB5K course. Needless to say, I'm already looking forward to competing in future multi-day rallies and hope I'll get another chance to test my mettle in the delightful Iron Butt Rally caldron.