

2009 Utah 1088

The 18th annual is finally in the books after some consternation over the final scores. And as usual, a good time was had by all who participated. This rally has a reputation for being one of the tougher ones in the western US, and this year the rally reminded everyone why. No less than 45 bonus locations and 3 separate alternate routes to stretch your horizons. Tension was high as the riders nervously milled around the parking lot waiting for Steve Chalmer's rider meeting and famous rock distribution. Reno John had thrown down the early gauntlet with prediction of a third place finish or better. "Thanks Reno John!" Now Steve is really going to come up with something devious.

Want to get bonuses in the surrounding states of Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, and Nebraska? Think you got the legs for that? How about getting the annual, obligatory keno tickets in Las Vegas and Reno on the same date? Make sure they have the numbers 10-80-8 on them or your trip will be for naught. Too easy? OK, then head for the geographic center of the lower 48 states in Lebanon, Kansas. That'll get you a whopping 33,000 points but MapQuest says it will take you 12 hours and 2 minutes to get there, and you better make it back in enough time to turn in all your paperwork by 7:00 am or else it's penalty points for the slackers.

This year an added bonus was to catch Bob and Sylvie Torter after a head start of 10 minutes before everyone else, and since Sylvie is riding on the back, well why not! Wouldn't it be worth the 2503 points? Originally it was going to be a 30 minute lead for Bob, but when everyone kind of thought, "Pffft, no way," then it was reduced, and 5 riders were actually able to grab the points. Rumor was that Bob had a moment of pity for the rest of the riders.

The first checkpoint is a must as you start the rally with about only a third of the total bonus locations. It is a must because you have to be there to get the rest of the locations, unless you have selected an alternate route. Aha! What's this in the new paperwork, another alternate route? Yes - get that Keno ticket now in Las Vegas and grab 17,000 points in one stop. Steve is quick to warn you that there is potential all over the state for all kinds of "4-legged critters," that may cross your path at almost any time day or night in Utah, but he doesn't say much about the temperature in Las Vegas.

It was 104 degrees as I left the casino with my big buck keno card ready to haul ass for the midnight checkpoint in Price. Between the picturesque Virgin River Gorge and Mesquite, Nevada, it was 111 degrees, and I have a blister on my knee from it touching the plastic fairing immediately behind the valve covers on my ST. But, about 4 gallons of Gatorade Blue can get you through the day.

The relative cool and darkness in Price was a welcome relief from all the heat earlier in the day but there was not much time to rest if you want to finish well in this rally, so off we go for more points and frustration trying to find them in the blackness of the night. Even if you have taken the time for significant nourishment, most riders don't eat that well while rallying, so the smell of someone smoking meat at 2:30 am in Heber gave me an instant message from my stomach to STOP! No can do gastro-intestinal tract, more points to be

had up past Parley's Canyon into Wyoming where, by the way, my thermometer was now registering 38 degrees.

One last stop back at the state capitol building, (why didn't we get info this sooner, I was just there for another bonus a scant 21 hours before?) Grimacing, I imagined Steve sleeping blissfully about that time with a smirk on his face. Everyone eventually did make it back to the rally hotel, with no serious events for anyone to worry about, which is a testament to the quality of the competitors.

Once we all gathered for the awards presentation and luncheon, Steve had one more surprise left; an arresting presentation from one of "Utah's finest(?)" to wish Maura Gatsby a happy birthday. I'm sure that Maura will want to hang those handcuffs on her bike and perhaps find good use for them at a future rally?

Helmets off to Ken Meese for his fourth, first place finish this year in four rallies! At this rate, he is going to be the Joe DiMaggio of the IBA. Congratulations also to Jeff and Melinda Bakker, winners in the two up category, by no means an easy accomplishment. And finally thanks once again to Steve Chalmers, for putting on such a great rally, and his wonderful hospitality; the BBQ alone is almost worth the price of admission. See you all next year for the "Duel in the Desert?"