

Colleen Thompson's Utah 1088 Experience

During the fall of 1994, after finishing my second season as a motorcyclist, I succumbed to a temporary fit of insanity and signed up for the 1995 Utah 1088 endurance rally.

The 1088, for those who don't know, is an annual June event in and around Utah covering (this year) 1100+ miles in a 24-hour period. It's organized by Steve Chalmers, who fondly refers to himself as the "Rally Bastard" and is this year's Iron Butt rally master also. The event is a fundraiser for a children's charity founded by the Utah Highway Patrol Association.

In prepping for the event, I did the following: changed oil and switched to Mobil 1; bought a fiber optic light panel for reading maps at night; hacked a very handsome hole in the fairing of my R1100RS to install an extra accessory socket for same; took both my wheels off all by myself for the first time ever and got new tires put on, removed front brakes to check for wear, put wheels back on (Mechanic in Training, here); acquired the right size Aerostitch suit with one day to spare; and did without normal amount of food and sleep for three days prior, due to nerves. Friday afternoon my spouse-equivalent David and I rode the 300 miles from our home in Jackson, Wyoming to Salt Lake City, the start/finish point, and checked into the Airport Quality Inn five minutes before an important rider's meeting that I had completely forgotten about. Chalk one up to luck. It was exciting to see all the bikes (66 of them) lined up in their barricaded parking lot. On closer inspection I started getting nervous. Most of these things had auxiliary fuel tanks on the back, extra driving lights, and desklike apparati attached to the handlebars. My extra accessory socket began to shrink in importance. A lot of the bikes had Iron Butt license plate frames. They were also clean and shiny. I could not smother the urge to tell everybody who came by that it had rained all week before I left, precluding the planned bike-washing. Nobody seemed to care, and I passed tech ok.

Only one last (unplanned) preparation remained: that night I woke up at 3:00 and couldn't go back to sleep, due to some woman screaming in the parking lot, and got up in the morning with butterflies and a painful stiff neck. We're ready now!

As people milled around waiting for the last pre-rally meeting, I asked Steve how many women were entered. "Solo?" he asked.

"You're the only one. Only two have ever finished." Well, now at least I had a modest but definite goal: not to have a DNF (Did Not Finish) by my name at the end.

The meeting started at 11:15. Steve went over some stuff, telling us in essence that we were going to speed but we better not get caught and spoil his relationship with the HP; and to clinch it, and to great laughter and applause, he announced that we would all be required to carry our license and registration in sealed envelopes (initialed by Steve across the flap). All the patrolmen in the state had been instructed, in the event they pulled over a bike with a yellow 1088 sticker on the back (our tech approval stickers), to ask for "the envelope". Riders finishing with untorn envelopes would receive 400 bonus points.

The rally works like this: there is a base route with four checkpoints that you must sign into during specific time windows in order to be A Finisher. You must finish before 12 noon Sunday. There are about 30 questions along the base route (things like "what does the sign at milepost 137 on Interstate 70 say?").

Answering every single base route question correctly is good for 500 points. There are bonus legs, which range from things like 71 points for finding the stuffed penguin at Little America and recording some information from its accompanying placque, to 299 points for going off the base route to Jackson, Wyoming (no THANK you!) and acquiring a gas receipt dated 6/24/95. Nobody fell for that one, a sucker bet for sure.

The really good prize, a 1995 BMW K1100LT, went to the person who brought the most donations for the charity. Winners in the riding part of the rally would get placques and fame and envy. I determined to forget the bonuses, and just concentrate on finishing.

During our meeting a phalanx of gold Harleys with Highway Patrol aboard rumbled up and precision-parked in front of our lot. We all admired their parking ability and David, responding to a journalistic urge to get a juicy quote from one, later reported them to be totally devoid of any sense of humor.

We were handed our rally packs, containing route instructions and maps, at 11:45. We had 15 minutes to study the route and plan a strategy before starting. I was happy to note that aside from one stretch at the beginning, all the roads were very familiar to me. One thing in my favor. David took notes from my instructions so we could rendezvous early Sunday morning. Hw

was a spectator, not fool enough to have become a competitor. My new red Aerostitch was stiff and I was unfamiliar with the zipper routines. The rider next to me, Howard, also had a red Stitch, and at my request let me feel his to see how soft mine will eventually get. He gallantly offered to unzip my armpits, since it was pushing 90 degrees and the sun was hot. I acquiesced. He said "Now that we've gone this far, could you find room in your life for a middle-aged doctor?" I thanked Dr. Howard but politely declined. Ladies take note: the men really like it if you ride your own bike.

Five minutes to noon the Harley HP left, to take up posts along the beginning of the route, or so Steve assured us.

Dr. H's friend, also in a red Stitch, told us that the best thing to do was hit the first bonus leg--a shooting range just a few miles away where we were required to pony up \$5 to shoot a 9mm pistol (bonus worth 329 points, best shooting score wins the pistol)--because while standing in line to shoot we'd have time to study the rest of the route and see what bonuses to do. My previous strategy went out the window and I headed for the range as soon as Steve let us go at noon. Sure enough, every underpass along I-80 had a gold Harley under it. I behaved. The shooting range was around the corner from our newest Beemer dealer, Humble Motorcycle (or Humble BMW, as we fondly call it). I beeped and waved hi-hi on my way by. The range's parking lot was already full of bikes, parked in alarming fashion all over, but I ran inside and the line wasn't too long. Ten minutes later it was very long behind me, and no doubt the civilians were wondering whatthehell was going on. Following the advice of Gary Eagan, in line in front of me, I donned the goggles and eargear when it was my turn, went in, handed the nice man my five bucks, and said he needn't bother loading the gun, just please initial my form. Saved a couple of minutes there. I had no desire to actually shoot the thing.

And then the rally started in earnest. We were routed on some state highways at the beginning that had abrupt turns and cars towing boats and horrendous potholes and fresh, gooey tar strips. I tried hard to ignore my front tire squirming around on the latter, but a lot of The Guys complained later about it too, so it's not just me who dislikes them.

For the map-readers out there, here was our route (and I can recommend all the non-interstate roads as excellent): start Salt

Lake Airport. East I-80 to Utah 65, north to Utah 66, west on I-84, north on Utah 39 over Monte Cristo Summit (gorgeous and a fun road), south on Utah 16/Wy 89 to Evanston, east I-80 to US 189, north to US 30, east to I-80 again, east to US 191, south to Vernal, Utah, south on US 40 to Dinosaur, south Colorado 64 over Douglass Pass to I-70, west to Utah 128 at Cisco, south to Moab, south on US 191 to Blanding, west on Utah 95 to Hanksville (a great road), west on Utah 24 to Loa (a greater road), north on Utah 72 to I-70 (a supreme road), west to Salina, north on US 89 to Thistle, west on US 6 to I-15, north to Lehi, west on Utah 73 to Utah 36, north to I-80, back to airport. Circumnavigating Utah in 24 hours. Whew.

I learned early on not to follow another competitor, finding out the hard way that we didn't all have exactly the same route questions. I had to double back twice on a section of interstate under construction before I finally landed at the milepost I needed to answer Question #2, How Far Is It To Elberta, Utah? First checkpoint, Evanston, Steve was there at a pullout with an interested Wyoming sheriff observing the festivities. I gnawed a hunk of homemade jerky and drank some water. I got there in the last quarter of the checkpoint's 2-hour window, delay caused by standing in line at the shoot.

I saw one of our guys getting a ticket in Wyoming. Normally there are no cops out there, but two patrol cars had come out to see about a car accident, and they must have wondered what bestowed the sudden riches of speeding motorcycles on their beat. Like shooting fish in a barrel. Later quite a few riders reported getting their envelopes torn in Wyoming.

After that things settled into a routine, stopping to answer questions (there were almost always other bikes stopped at the same places), riding in groups only to be separated by gas stops or traffic or bonus legs, everybody hitting the same bonuses--the easy ones--running around Little America with helmets on and pen and paper in hand, demanding frantically of bewildered clerks "Where is the stuffed penguin?". Those poor, poor civilians.

In Green River, Utah, a bonus leg had us locate a small town park and find some information on a monument there. The Rally Bastard later claimed he knew ahead of time that the park's street would be barricaded for a parade and a fair would be set up in the park. I wouldn't put it past him to be telling the truth.

On the mesa above Vernal there were two more patrolmen (Utah), measuring skid marks in the road. A car with parents and two small children was parked there. I learned later that two of our riders were over the side of the hill, with totalled bikes, no injuries luckily. They had come around a blind corner at a (no doubt) good clip and the car was in the middle of a U-turn there. The checkpoint in Vernal was at the Highway Patrol office (!). I think I was in the middle of the time window for this one, so I was gaining ground at least. It was getting dark so I was happy not to have to hurry--I have large-ungulate paranoia. I had to go over Douglass Pass, never one of my favorite roads, in full dark. Missed the gas stop on gaining I-70: I waited till I got on the on-ramp to use a street light to check instructions, and then discovered the gas was *east* of the intersection. (Did I mention that I never got around to getting out the map light or using the new accessory socket?) I decided to push on for Moab because I wouldn't be able to turn around for many miles, at the next offramp.

The River Road to Moab is narrow, twisty, right on the edge with river below. It's a little scary in the daytime due to heavy traffic. At midnight it's a dream. Tooling along under the starry sky, not rushing, being passed at occasional intervals by other bikes, I enjoyed the traffic-free road. Rolled into the Moab checkpoint at 12:58 a.m. with 214 miles on that tank, and my gas light had just come on. Blessed R11.

Gassing up at a Maverick store in town, I spent a few minutes with two other riders, all of us under the disinterested gaze of all the local cops who stood around drinking coffee for the whole time. I managed to eat a pemmican bar and drink some orange juice. I wasn't really hungry, though my last real meal had been dinner Friday night.

Motoring through my favorite desert in the starlight at a modest 60mph or so, being passed frequently by bikes with really really bright driving lights, was very pleasant. I started to get pretty droopy around Natural Bridges National Monument and went the four miles off route to the visitor center to answer a bonus question and incidentally splash water on my face in the restroom (visitor center restrooms always stay open at night). That helped. On the way to Hanksville I tried various stay-awake methods: remembering all the words to American Pie; riding with visor open for the cold air (eyes dry out though); unplug the

vest, on the theory that discomfort keeps you awake; hitting myself in the helmet. None of which worked very well. One thing that did help was fishing jerky out of a front pocket without stopping the bike (this maneuver requires removing left glove), folding it into a small enough bundle to wiggle under the helmet, and chewing. Then getting glove back on. After a while, though, I ran out of jerky.

Hanksville arrived with the lightening of the eastern sky at 5:00 a.m. I finally gave in and took Steve's advice: when in desperation, drink an entire Mountain Dew *really fast*. I don't normally do soft drinks, preferring lighter beverages like Tanqueray, but this situation called for extreme measures. Boy, did my eyes pop open right away!

Which was a good thing because then I got to travel my very favorite Utah road, 95 west from Hanksville to Capitol Reef, in the gentle predawn light. It was like swooping through the atmosphere of another planet (they call that area Luna Mesa for good reason). It was also light enough to see animals, allowing a little brisker pace.

On the ego curves through Capitol Reef, I saw one of the many red K-bikes of the rally pass me going the other way. Then I looked closer and noted the soft luggage. None of the others had soft luggage. It was David. He joined me for a nice bonus leg hike up one of the trails a mile or so to check the distance to Navajo Towers.

The rest of the morning passed pleasantly, with us trying not to terrorize the good Utahns on their way to church in the many small towns. At a gas stop in Salina, leaving I-70, I overheard one of the other women (there were five two-up couples in the rally) mention that it was only 130 miles to Salt Lake. Ah, I thought, we have plenty of time. As we got closer to Salt Lake and the time neared 11:00 I didn't think much of it. Too bad I hadn't looked ahead at the route more closely. Not having a desk on my handlebars, I was relying on the typed route instructions, and couldn't see my state map. Otherwise I would have allowed for the big bulge in our route as it went way south and west before going through Tooele, southwest of the airport finish line. We left I-15 north of Provo and headed west on a state road. My clock read after 11. A little further down the road, I saw a sign that said "Tooele 47 miles". I knew Tooele was at least 20 miles

this side of the airport. For the first time, I smelled DNF. This was near Cedar Fort. I pinned the throttle. The last 24 hours was not going to be a big waste if I could help it. I passed David doing triple digits, and kept it there between towns. This must be the second-emptiest road in Utah. Luckily. I would brake for white cars (UHP is all white cars) and slow for towns, but the rest of the way I guess you could say I was paying double attention to the 55mph speed limit, literally.

At one point there was...road construction! It being Sunday, at least the equipment wasn't working, but there was a multi-mile stretch of unpaved, loose-dirt road. I am normally a total wimp on unpaved roads. But it's amazing what a little motivation will do. I motocrossed through it at an admirable speed, gnashing my teeth when I got caught behind an elderly couple who was out for a leisurely Sunday drive.

In near-panic mode, I stopped in Tooele to record the number of the pay phone at McDonald's. One question remained, at the old Saltair resort on I-80; my clock said something like 11:43. David caught up with me here and said something about his needing gas. I had over 200 miles on this tank. I said "No time. Go ahead!" and took off. I blasted the few miles to I-80, and rushed down the interstate, braking whenever a white car approached. As the Saltair exit came up, I made a quick calculation. It was 11:53 and there were still several miles to go. Regretfully, I passed up the last route question and 500 points. At least you didn't have to have all the questions to be a Finisher.

I passed three more bikes on the way to the hotel exit; not trusting my clock to be exactly right, I passed them (still at, um, a good pace). The HP was really missing a bet by not having a speed trap set up at the finish. Turning into the hotel parking lot, my rear tire skidded on a clumsy downshift to first, but Steve signed me in with two minutes to spare. Relief.

David showed up a few minutes later and kindly fetched a beer as I peeled out of the sticky Stitch and found some shade. What a feeling of accomplishment. People were comparing notes about bonus questions (how many people *were* in that historical marker picture at the Fruita School?) and mechanical adventures, and it turned out a lot of folks besides me didn't finish all the questions.

My wonderful R11 performed flawlessly, not a hitch anywhere, didn't even use any oil. Used a lot of bugs is all. My riding buddy

Nefarious Phil had a great time, fulfilling his role as conversation-starter everywhere we went, and has just 8 miles short of 40K on him. (Nefarious Phil is a three-foot rubber lizard.) And my stiff neck had actually gotten better. Beautiful, therapeutic R11. After nap-time came the banquet and awards. Many sets of tires were given away. Gary Eagan won the bike, and the competition, for the oompth time. I placed 27th out of 47 finishers (would have had 17th with that last question, oh well. Next year!), and came away with a finisher's placque and great memories.