

IBA Border 2 Border

A Border to Border and 5/6 - A DNF and then redemption! (this is a long story - you'll see why!)

Prologue:

Since sometime last winter, the Minnesota LD Riders group had been planning a group run from the Canadian Border to the Mexican Border to earn the record for the largest group to complete the Iron Butt Association's Border to Border ride. The ride was scheduled to start in Morris, Manitoba, and end in Nuevo Laredo, Mexico - about 1650. Finishing in under 36 hours was required to gain B2B certification. 24 hours gained you B2B Insanity certification. Team Newbie (Ron and Carrie Hanson, myself, and now Paul Sundet) was going to try for 24 of course. I outfitted my bike with a 4 gallon fuel cell, XM radio, heated grips and a new CB in preparation for the ride. I was ready to go. In addition, Lisa was going to fly down to Austin and meet up with me on the way back, where we could stay with my aunt Diane and uncle Mark for a few days of vacation.

I left for Morris at about 8 am on Thursday, stopping to have lunch with a friend in Fargo. It was a cold ride, never going much above 50 degrees. I was starting to rethink not having heated clothes (this comes back to haunt me later...) I reached the Canadian border at Emerson about 3:30. Of course just my luck - I get pulled off for a random search. Never mind that the border guys knew exactly what I was there for, since 40 other bikes had already gone through that day with fuel cells and luggage. Oh well, they were just doing their jobs, and the inspectors were pretty cool, joking with me and stuff.

After that it was on to Morris. I had stopped at Pembina, ND to get out my passport etc., and the bike started really hard, like it was flooded. Hmm - wonder what that's about. Same thing happened at the border, and when I filled up with gas in Morris, a lot of gray smoke popped out of the tailpipe. That's not good. When I got to the motel I noticed a small amount of gas dripping out of the air filter box. Arrgh! I didn't need this! Norm Grills, a long distance veteran, came over to lend some advice. He thought it was probably something stuck in one of the carbs. I started the bike again, and it ran fine, so whatever it was must have cleared itself out. I felt somewhat relieved at that point and we figured that it would probably be okay.

It's always fun to look at all the bikes decked out in rally mode for these things, and this was no exception. There were about 80 riders in the rally with bikes ranging from a little Honda Shadow to the biggest Goldwings and even a Victory, all with fuel cells and GPS systems and lots of other doodads. I think there were three other Concours' in the rally. After the milling around, we all went to dinner, and then to bed, to prepare for the next day.

Five-sixths and a DNF:

We got up around 4:30 as we had to be at the border to sign out around 5:30. It was COLD out. Around

38 degrees (though it was supposed to be 26, so I guess that 38 is a slight blessing). Oh well, I figured it would warm up eventually - we were going south after all. Boy was I wrong.

Our sign out time was 5:31 am. I made note that my mileage was 17666. (666 - THAT can't be good...) and we were off. Our first fuel stop was Sisseton, SD and we were making great time through the Dakotas. The weather was clear, though still a little cold. I wasn't feeling too bad - the heated grips helped, but not having heated clothes made it a little rough. Our second fuel stop was Onawa, IA. It had started to cloud up at that point, and we lost Paul coming out of the gas station there - his VFR is chain drive, so I think he had to oil his chain. Ron and Carrie and I continued on toward the Kansas turnpike, winding through a stretch of two lane in Nebraska - the only non-interstate on the route.

We had all signed up for K-tags, so we could zip right through the toll plazas on the KS Turnpike. When we got to the entrance around Topeka, while looking for the K-tag lane, Ron and Carrie took a wrong turn, and ended up going in the wrong direction. Ron got on the CB and told me to take a right, and I went on in the right direction, alone. The next fuel stop was the service plaza at Emporia, KS. About 15 miles before that, it started to rain pretty hard, and it was pouring when I hit Emporia. I filled both tanks, and was going to go inside to pee, when an idiot in an RV pulls up wanting me to move the bike so he can fill up. Doesn't this assclown see that it's pouring rain out, and I'm on a motorcycle? I move the bike out in the rain and go inside to take care of nature's call, and to put on my "waterproof" gloves. When I got out, Paul was at the gas pump filling up - he had caught up, so I decided to wait for him to finish before I left. A few minutes later we were pulling out when Ron and Carrie pulled in. We figured they'd catch up eventually.

Paul and I continued on, and the rain kept coming. It cleared up for about 15 minutes near Wichita (resulting in a really great rainbow), but then we were delayed by a big accident that took the interstate down to one lane. Of course as soon as we passed that, it started pouring again. We reached the KS-Oklahoma border, and neither of our K-tags worked at the toll plaza. We had to wheel the bikes around to a screaming attendant who I think thought we were trying to skip the toll.

About ten minutes later, Ron and Carrie caught up to us and the weather started to get worse. Over every hill, it got darker and darker. The weather channel on XM was talking about severe storms with high winds and hail near Dallas. Not good, since we were supposed to be in the area in about two hours. Finally the rain was coming down in sheets, and there was lightning everywhere, so we pulled off the road near Oklahoma City. I was soaking wet and miserably cold when we went to eat at an IHOP, and we had to ride through about 2-3 inches of water to get back to our hotel. This was bad. Water had seeped into my "waterproof" boots, my "waterproof" gloves, and through my jacket. At least everything in my saddlebags was dry, and the hotel had laundry, so we could dry our other things, so that was a plus.

At this point, I started to do the math and realized that if we left as planned at around 6 am to make it to the border in around 35 hours total, I wouldn't get back to Austin until 11 pm or so if I could even make it at all that night. I didn't feel right about not seeing Lisa and Diane and Mark when I was supposed to, since Lisa flew all that way, and I don't see Diane and Mark very often. I called Lisa and told her I was probably going to bail on the Border to Border and stop in Austin.

We left at 6 am and the weather was still drizzling and cold - around 50 degrees. My jacket and pants were still wet, and once again, with no heated clothes, I was miserable. Traffic in Texas was a nightmare from Dallas-Ft. Worth southward, with lots of trucks and idiots who don't signal. I dropped back from the other three, as I couldn't keep up their speeds, and I stopped about 30 miles out of Austin to call Lisa and tell her where I was. Then I had to call the LD Riders number to tell them I was going to be a DNF (did not finish). That was a tough call to make only four hours from the border. I sat down on the curb at the gas station with my head in my hands - I was completely physically and mentally spent at this point, and probably had a touch of hypothermia. I got to the house in Austin about an hour later after getting lost once and dealing with some weird wind gusts, traffic and road construction - just what I needed at that point. I was done, 5/6 of the way to the end. The others made it with about an hour and a half to spare - good job guys!

Wheels start turning:

Austin was great - it's a really cool city, and we had a fun time, boating, drinking beer, eating BBQ and Mexican food, and just generally relaxing. But I was really unhappy that all the time and money I spent preparing for the ride was essentially wasted, since I wouldn't get my Border to Border certification.

I had planned on doing a Bun Burner 1500 home, through Arkansas, Tennessee and Illinois, riding up the Mississippi River valley. I started to think about another plan instead. I was still only 300 miles from the Mexican border - what if I did the ride from south to north? I made a few calls, and talked to Lisa about my plans. She understood how important this was to me (thanks Lisa!), so I made plans to go to Laredo Monday night and leave Tuesday morning for Canada.

Redemption!

The more I thought about it, I didn't want to stay in Laredo, and I probably wouldn't have been able to sleep well anyway, so I decided to start my ride in the middle of the day. I had Lisa and Diane sign my IBA witness form, and at 11 am, I left for the border. About 20 miles from Laredo, my XM radio quit on me. The antenna jack shorted out. That was fine, since there was a recall on it anyway, and I was sending it back for replacement when I got home. But what to do for the ride - I didn't want to go for 30 hours just listening to NOAA weather radio and truckers telling dirty stories. I had a hunch that proved correct - that I could get a new XM radio at a truck stop since XM is big among truckers. Sure enough, the Pilot truck stop just north of Laredo stocked XM Roadys. I just called to have the new radio added to my account, and I was off to the border.

I had talked to Ron the day before to tell him what I was doing, and he gave me some good instructions as to where to go to cross the border and get out quick. No need to drive in Mexico any more than I have to! I followed the signs to International Bridge 2, paid my toll, got the receipt and crossed the bridge. Mexican customs pulled me over (what, do I look like a criminal - I'm a customs agent magnet!) They asked me the usual questions, and let me go right away.

I had to take a left, go two blocks, and take another left, and then I came to the toll booth to enter into the US. This was important, because this was the receipt that proved I'd entered Mexico, and signified my start time. Start time was 3:35 pm. I then got in line for US Customs. The line was really long with about eight lanes of cars about 15 deep in each lane. It was really hot too, as the thermometer on my bike read 116 degrees (it was probably around 95 - the thermometer is right under my windshield). A hispanic guy on a Shadow with Nebraska plates was lane splitting to the front, but I didn't dare with the saddlebags on, so I sat. The temperature gauge on the bike kept rising. No big deal - it always goes up like that in traffic in heat. I kept looking at it though, and it kept going up, into the red zone. Uh oh - it never did THAT before - I was getting nervous. Some guys in an old pickup were joking "aren't you hot with all that stuff on?" Yeah, but it was better than how I felt on the way down. Then a Mexican guy in a station wagon yells over "Hey buddy, you're losing water!" I look back to see coolant spewing out the overflow tube.

Oh shit! This is REALLY bad now. I was still about six cars back from the customs booth. I didn't want to turn off the bike, for fear that it wouldn't start again. I crept over the line on the bridge that signified the border - at least now I was technically on US soil if I broke down. Finally some nice people let me cut in front of the line, and I pulled up to customs.

Customs guy: "Where are you going?"

Me: "Canada"

Customs guy: "How long have you been in Mexico?"

Me: "About ten minutes - to get a toll receipt, and I'm overheating. I need to get somewhere quick!"

Customs guy: "What's in the bags?"

Me (frantic now): "clothes in the left, tools in the right!"

Customs guy: "What's that thing?"

Me: "Auxiliary fuel tank - can I go?"

Customs guy: "You're leaking coolant." (no shit Sherlock - I told you that before!)

Me: "I know - I need to get out of this line"

Customs guy: "Go ahead then."

I pulled into a gas station a couple blocks away to assess the situation. No more leak when I shut the bike off, so it must have just boiled out of the overflow. At least I hadn't blown a radiator hose, which was my main fear. I got on I-35, and the bike cooled down to normal, so everything seemed okay. I was on my way!

Because of the heat, I wasn't using my fuel cell. In that kind of heat the fuel will expand and go out the vent hose (which I learned the day before the trip when it hit 95 back home). Plus riding alone and starting at an odd time, I knew I'd need to stop more often. I wasn't planning to go for 24 hours, as I was already behind for that. I'd just take it at my own leisurely pace.

The weather was great and I cruised through with stops in San Antonio and Waco for gas. My third stop was Denton, TX (home of the famous and tragic Von Erich family of pro wrestling fame) where I noticed something pouring all over the ground under my bike. NOW what could it be? Turns out it was just water from my Camelback which I'd nudged open when I pulled up to the gas pump. I put on some warmer

clothes and took off.

I was really starting to get tired when I hit Pauls Valley, OK, and I was considering getting a cheap room for a few hours sleep. I was afraid I wouldn't wake up early enough though, so I pulled into a Denny's and decided to eat instead. I was the only one there, so it didn't take long to get breakfast, and I was on my way again, feeling a lot better.

I stopped for gas at the same exit we stopped at on the way down in the storm, and kept going. I started to see animals in the ditch - mostly fox and raccoons, but still, I didn't want to impale myself on a deer like Eddie James did on the Iron Butt, so I stopped in northern OK around 4:30 am for a little sleep at the Iron Butt motel. I got out the Screaming Meanie to set it for 40 minutes. Nuts - the battery is dead. I went into the store to get a new one, set the timer, and laid down on the curb to sleep, 40 minutes later, I woke up just as all the truckers who were sleeping there were also leaving. It's amazing what 40 minutes of sleep will do.

The sun was now coming up as I hit the KS Turnpike (stupid K-tag still didn't work). I stopped at a service plaza for gas and food and called home as it was about 7 am now.) It started to rain a little on the Kansas-Nebraska border, and my contacts were bothering me. I bought some eye drops for the outrageous sum of \$7.00 at a store next to a casino. I stopped again for gas on the Iowa - Nebraska border, where it had just rained enough to make the roads slick. That's always nice... I continued on through Council Bluffs - Omaha (there's more casinos there than Vegas!) and Sioux City (the worst smelling place on earth, with a rendering plant right next to the freeway) before stopping at a rest stop to change my contacts as my eyes were killing me.

My next gas stop was Elk Point, SD, just over the border with Iowa. This was the only place without pay at the pump, so I had to go in to get a receipt. Nuts - the time was wrong on the receipt. That's no good. Fortunately, my credit card carbon had the correct time - I'll just use that. It was here that I decided to fill the fuel cell again. Gas is kind of sparse along I-29 in the Dakotas - best not to run out. The wind was really bad in South Dakota north of Sioux Falls, and I took a short break at a rest stop before stopping at Hankinson, ND for my final gas stop. I called Ron from there to see if I had to go back to Morris (Carrie left her purse there) - he said no, and off I went, straight through for 215 miles to the border.

I reached Canadian customs approximately 8:50 pm, 29 hours and 15 minutes from the time I paid my toll in Nuevo Laredo. I had no witness though, and was hoping the duty free shop in Emerson was open. I pulled up to the customs window again and got the usual round of questions. I was the only person at the border:

Customs guy: "ID please - how long will you be in Canada?"

Me: "Hopefully not more than an hour - I just need to get my form signed and get a receipt to prove I crossed both the Canadian and Mexican border for a motorcycling award."

Customs guy: "An award hmm? Sounds important. Pull over under that canopy and come inside. I'll get an immigration officer to help you." Me: "You'd do that - thanks!"

I went inside and met with the officer and explained my need, saying that as a government official, he probably had better things to do than help me, but that the guy at the window said he might be able to help. He couldn't have been nicer. He asked me a few simple questions, and filled out my form, complete with badge number and official customs stamp. He even stamped my passport, which rarely happens when going to Canada. The kindness of the Canadian immigration people really lifted my spirits after being on the road for 35 hours (counting the time from Austin to Laredo).

I then went to the duty-free shop to buy a Canadian Flag decal and a bottle of water to get my receipt. The duty free people were quite amused with me. I just stood there alone in the parking lot after that staring up at the sky. It took a lot longer overall, but I finished my border to border ride. US Customs thought I was weird (they pretty much knew I was from the original group). I explained about the weather etc. They just let me go without anything else, after which I rode back to Grand Forks, found a hotel, showered and slept.

Two days later, I still can't believe I did it. I sat up last night filling out my IBA logs and forms and mailed them out today. The B2B is one of the rarer IBA sanctioned rides - few people attempt it. I'd already done a SaddleSore 1000 and a Bun Burner Gold 1500, but I'm most proud of this one because of what let up to it and how I pushed myself to do it after I didn't think I could. Most people think distance endurance riding is nuts, but the sense of accomplishment when you finish is like nothing else. Why do something so crazy? Why not? What did you do last weekend?

Time: 29:15

Miles (odometer): 1685

Miles (GPS): 1643

Moving average speed: 69.4 mph (GPS)

Total average speed: 56.17 mph (GPS)