

2004 GLMC Buffalo Run

The Introduction:

If you recall, last years Buffalo Run Road Rally resulted in both the thrill of victory, and the agony of defeat. We all came back with wood, but I came back in more pieces than I started with, having broken my ankle on the ride. Well, it's that time of the year again, Labor Day weekend - time to head back out to Milbank for the final bonus points rally of the year.

The Bike:

Never one who wants to do things the easy way, I had something special planned for this rally. My normal bike for rallies (and everything else) is my Kawasaki Concours. This is a touring/sport-touring class bike, depending on the rallymasters, and that's a pretty crowded category. What if I decided to ride a different bike this year?

My friend Dave Nahan, lead guitarist in our band shoot lucy, had an old 1980 Suzuki GS1100L sitting in his garage. It hadn't been ridden in about four years and was pretty much left for dead. He was moving about 50 miles away this past May, and I inquired as to whether he'd have any interest in selling it to me. After about 3 cans of starting fluid, he got it going, and left it with me to see what I could do. The full story on the old GS is here.

The Ride:

I borrowed some soft saddlebags from fellow Team Newbie members Ron and Carrie Hanson, and the bike was ready to go. I left on Saturday morning by myself, in case the bike broke down and I needed to go get the other one, and arrived in Milbank around 3 p.m. Bob "498" Johnson was at the Super 8 visiting with others and he seemed glad to see me, and that the bike had made it. The others showed up around an hour later, and we headed to dinner at the City Limits - the usual pre-rally dinner place. The bike generated a lot of attention. People asked a bunch of questions, and the Harley Davidson mufflers I added were kind of a unique attraction (they don't make stock exhaust for that bike anymore, and HD stock mufflers are cheap because they usually go for salvage when people add straight pipes). There were some other old or strange bikes there, including an old BMW airhead, an old Moto Guzzi, and a 1979 Kawasaki 440LTD. That was to be my competition.

There were two options this year, a 12 hour, or an 18 hour rally. I chose the 12 hour based on the bike I was riding, while Ron, Carrie, and Paul Sundet chose the 18 hour version. They had to get up at about 4 a.m. for the 18 hour version, while I got another two hours of sleep or so (though I did wake up initially when Paul did). Around 6 am, I woke up, showered, and headed over to the City Limits for check in. As usual, there were a TON of bonus locations, and I think they used the same list for the most part, for both rides, because there was no way you could get to some of them and back in 12 hours.



The weather was pretty bad that morning as well, with lots of rain and fog. Combined with me not knowing the reliability of the bike, I chose to stick close to home, planning a route that never went farther than 100 miles from the start/finish. This meant not a lot of points, but I'd see what I could do. I started out hitting some of the usual GLMC bonus stops, like Nicollet Tower, the Vinegar Museum in Roslyn, and Pickerel Lake, before running into some really scary fog. Visibility was about 150 feet at times, and I was really concerned that someone would come up behind me and not see my tail light.

I headed up to Hecla, Kidder and Hillhead on what was marked only as a "broken road." It would have been better had it not been paved at all. There were potholes the size of truck tires everywhere and slaloming them in the rain and the fog was lots of fun (sarcasm off). After picking up the bonus in Hecla, I had to make a decision. There were no real possibilities anywhere nearby, so I could either head back and look for scavenger hunt items, or head down near Huron, where I could potentially pick up 2500 points. It was early, so I headed south. Along

the way, I passed the spot near Verdon, SD, where I crashed a year ago. I decided not to stop and relive the moment.

The downfall:

Near Doland, about an hour north of Huron, the sky got eerily dark, after about an hour of sun (and me taking off my rain gear). I headed south, thinking that I could go around it, but the storm basically surrounded me, and I was caught in a horrible mess of pouring rain and lightning. I turned around, and decided to head back towards Brookings, when the wind shifted, and the storm moved in that direction. By this time I was soaked and needed gas, so I headed back to Doland to wait it out, since the GS1100 has little weather protection. I ran into (not literally) Donna Lamme, another regular rally rider, and talked to her for a bit. She was also heading south, but she wanted to pick up something else in the area as well. I had wasted a lot of time with that storm, but oddly enough, it had now cleared up to the south, so I headed toward Huron. I picked up the bonus there (a restaurant where Charlie's Angels star Cheryl Ladd used to work), and went to look for a big bonus for 1000 points. This was the Noble monument out in the middle of nowhere, next to a river and down about 12 miles of gravel.

As has been stated before, I don't like gravel. However, the old Suzuki was surprisingly easy to handle in the dirt. For an 1100, it's fairly light, and it has a low center of gravity, so it was really no problem at all. Problem was, I couldn't find the monument. I had the GPS coordinates, but all I saw were fields and cowpaths, so I gave up. At this point, I realized that it was going to be really close as far as making it back in time. I'd wasted so much time looking for the monument and dealing with the storm, it was nearly 6:00 and I was 110 miles from Milbank. Uh oh. I had to stop for gas in DeSmet (former home of Laura Ingalls Wilder along with damn near every other town in the midwest) and get going quickly again. I took the back roads to Milbank, as the route is more direct than I-29, but it was no use. I was 16 minutes late and ended up being time barred. I was a DNF for this year's rally. I just turned in my ride sheets - no scoring this time - and grabbed some food and beer to wait for the 18 hour crew to come in. I was the second to the last 12 hour rider in - another came in 4 minutes after me, after looking for the same monument (he found it).

I found out from our friend Kerry "P" Person, who was there but didn't ride due to a crash a few weeks back, that Ron and Carrie had cut their ride short because they were overtired from a long trip the week before. They were at the motel sleeping, and would be there in a few hours. We waited around, but very few 18 hour riders came in early. Only Michael Nimz was in, and he showed up soon after I did.

Finally, around 11:30, they started to come in. It was getting close to 12, and no sign of Paul. Hootis came in and showboated up and down the highway to come in with 15 seconds left, but Paul didn't make it in time. He joined me in the DNF column about 10 minutes later. Seemed he had gone down on some gravel, which made it all the worse. VFR's are not dirt bikes!

The End:

Awards and breakfast were the next morning. Ron and Carrie tied for third in their class, despite only riding 550 miles, and as usual, Hootis won the whole thing. I figured out that my score wouldn't have been enough to place without that monument bonus, so I didn't feel quite as bad about the DNF. That and this ride didn't result in six weeks in a cast! Actually, I didn't mind at all, because my real goal was accomplished. That was to take an old, non-running bike, and fix it and ride it in a rally without it breaking down. I did that - and it worked perfectly, so really, the bike finished the rally, it was just the rider that DNF'ed. I'm planning on bringing the Suzuki out for next year's Buffalo Run too - maybe this time we'll both finish!