



2004 Minnesota 1000

Introduction

...remember when we were talking to that guy at the Catsup Bottle...

-Carrie Hanson

Last year was my first time riding in the Team Strange Minnesota 1000, and the first time I'd done a 24 hour ride period. Now I've done several, and while still pretty difficult, you get better at it. The Minnesota 1000 is a bit of a misnomer, as except for last year, it's never run entirely in Minnesota, and you don't actually have to go 1000 miles to finish (more on that later). The rallymasters can, and do, give you all kinds of crazy places you can go - it's up to you to plan efficiently. This year we (Ron and Carrie Hanson and myself) wanted to try and win the rally, or at least be near the top. Last year, without really trying that hard, we did fairly well, and Ron even placed fifth in touring class - not bad!

After getting our mandatory bonuses (visiting the rally sponsors) the weekend before, we headed to the Bayricher Hof in Montrose, MN on Friday afternoon for the Liar's Banquet. The Hof was the location for the banquet, the start, and the finish this year, which worked out very well. I'd taken the day off in order to sleep in until 11, which ended up being a pretty good idea considering the lack of sleep in the coming days. The food was excellent, and as usual, it's fun to see all the bikes and compare them. Unfortunately, for some reason I ended up getting really ill (nerves maybe?) that night, and spending a large portion of my time in the porta-pottie - not cool, and I hoped that would be resolved by the next day. Unlike last year, we actually received some bonuses on Friday, so we went home to plan. We were up until 11 or so with Ron entering them into the laptop, and me marking them on the paper map while Carrie read them off. Our initial route based on those was around 30,000 points - pretty good since last year's winner was around 25,000. I ended up with very little sleep that night. I couldn't get Ron's Mapsource file to load into my GPS, and Garmin's website was giving me problems. Then, when I was just about asleep, I heard a crash downstairs, and thought someone was trying to break in. Lisa and the dog were camping, and the cat was sleeping next to me, so I knew it wasn't one of the animals, so I was freaked out, and ended up with about four hours sleep. Oh well, I never sleep well before distance rides anyway...

And they're off!

We went back out to Montrose Saturday morning, to find, as expected, there were more bonuses. This of course threw our first route out the window. We looked at a few possibilities, and found that going down through Iowa and Illinois to St. Louis and Jefferson City, MO would gain us the most points. It was about 1400 miles though, so we knew it would be pushing it, but that route was over 40,000 points, which would have to be close to the top. It also meant no sleep bonus, so physically it would be tough as well. We rode a long way before hitting our first bonus, which was a giant treehouse near Marshalltown, IA. The lady there seemed surprised, and not entirely happy, to see the three of us, dressed like spacemen, ride up to the campground. We must have been the first to show up there. We explained that we just needed to read her sign, and leave. The treehouse is a Lincoln Highway Interpretive Site, in case you wanted to know. It was on to our second bonus which was a bank in Grinnell, IA. I think it had something to do with architect Louis Sullivan. All I know is that it had lions with wings on it. We followed that with a visit to the house featured in the painting "American Gothic" in Eldon, IA. I figured there'd be more to it, but it was just a house. We did the standard farmer with a pitchfork pose for our photo bonuses, and headed for Hannibal, MO, for another bonus, which was just to get a gas receipt. On the way we drove through Ottumwa, where we were nearly run over by about three different cars - Radar O'Reilly would be ashamed! Why does Iowa, a smaller state than MN and with lower taxes, have so many good roads? Lots of four-lane and good pavement. I can't say the same for Missouri though - road construction there consists of pouring greasy oil on the road and slapping up a sign telling about it. You know it's not good when you see mist coming from the back tires of the bike in front of you, and it hasn't rained in days!

It was in Hannibal we met up with Brett Donahue and his Barney Glide and Allen Wilson. They were going the same way as we were, at least for a while, so we rode with them to Pittsfield, IL (to buy BBQ potato chips), and then down the Illinois River to Alton, IL. The ride down the river was one of the prettiest and most fun rides I'd ever been on - great roads and great scenery along the river flats. I'd never seen houses on stilts before but I'd imagine you'd need that there. Brett had a radar detector, so we rode behind him, and it was exciting to say the least. He's a hell of a good rider, being a former racer, and it put our skills to the test riding with him. We left them at the Reverend Lovejoy Memorial in Alton, IL (I have to wonder if the Simpsons character is named for this guy). We were concerned about this one, as it appeared to be a time limited bonus, as the park closes 1/2 hour after sunset. What we didn't realize until we were on our way, was that the sun sets about a half hour EARLIER when you go that far south - uh oh - that could be a problem. Turns out we made it with some time to spare (and later found out we wouldn't be time barred even if we'd been there later - way to mess with our minds!) Brett and Allen left us there and went deeper into Illinois, while we headed toward St. Louis.

One of my jobs seems to be to find tall objects on rallies. First the treehouse, then the Lovejoy monument, and now we were on our way (after a gas stop in Pontoon Beach, IL) to the World's Largest Catsup Bottle in Collinsville, IL, a suburb of St. Louis. I was a little nervous about this (I'm also the worrier of the group) because I'd been on the Illinois side of St. Louis before, in East St. Louis, where I once made a wrong turn and ended up in what appeared to be a war zone. I didn't want to repeat that, especially not late at night on a bike. My fears were unfounded - Collinsville was a nice town, but we had to drive a long way off the freeway to find the bottle - which I barely spotted through some trees. Apparently had we come from the other way, it was easy to see. This was the biggest bonus on the rally - over 8000 points, and sure enough,

there were three other riders there when we were, including John Coons, who helped us out by turning on his headlights to light the sign for our photo bonus - many thanks to John!

Uh oh - not another problem on a rally!

To get to our next stop, the Elvis museum in Wright City, MO, we had to go right through downtown St. Louis. It was really cool to see the Gateway Arch lit up at night as you cross the river, though traffic was pretty bad even at that time of night. As we pulled off for the bonus in Wright City, I noticed my speedometer start to bounce. That hadn't happened before, and I was concerned. When we stopped, I fiddled with the cable - everything seemed tight, and the cable wasn't broken - maybe it'd be okay. No such luck - when we got back on the road, it bounced a couple more times, and then I had no speedometer at all, and no odometers - completely dead. You have to have a working odometer to collect points. You probably could have heard my heart sink back in Minneapolis - we were in contention to win, and now this. I knew that the best case scenario was that I'd lose my fuel log and our final bonus in Jefferson City - a 7500 point bonus, and at worst I'd get no bonus points and DNF. We thought that I could collect my points up to the failure, but I wasn't sure, and the rules weren't completely clear (is anything really clear on a distance ride at 11:45 at night?).

I debated heading straight back to MN, knowing I couldn't collect any more points, or staying with Ron and Carrie. I chose to stick with them rather than ride alone through the middle of Missouri and Iowa on two-lanes in the middle of the night, so we headed down to Jefferson City. I don't think we realized how far off the interstate it was - about 25 miles, meaning about an hour round trip with the bonus. The bonus was just a gas receipt (which I couldn't claim) and we had to drive all the way through town to find a gas station. This is the freaking capital of the state and there's no gas on the north side of town? I was afraid this would be one of those "sucker bonuses" and they had some crazy law banning gas stations in city limits. That wasn't the case, and we found a couple of stations a few miles in. Apparently, hanging out at the gas station at 12:30 am is the hip thing to do in Jefferson City. At the one across the street from us, there must have been 40 people having a party in the parking lot of some convenience store. Loud music blaring, cars coming and going, people hanging around on the curb drinking, yelling to us "I WANT A RIDE" - it was quite the scene. I'll have to plan my next get together at the Mobil station too - stale hot dogs and 3.2 beer for all!

That was our last bonus before heading straight home through the deer-infested hinterlands of Missouri and Iowa. There weren't many towns or cars on that stretch, and it was really dark as there was no moon. We had to keep on the lookout for deer, raccoons, cats and drunks on the road, and we probably saw a few of each. We stopped before we needed to in Kirksville, MO for gas, as we didn't know for sure where we'd find another open station and headed for Des Moines. Near Des Moines, Carrie started to get really tired, so we pulled off at a gas station. Unfortunately, the station wasn't open, so we couldn't get gas there. Carrie slept for 15 minutes while Ron and I wandered around the parking lot (if only that Sonic next door would have been open - mmmm Sonic!).

We stopped again for gas in Williams, IA, and realized we were really tight on time - we had between 10 and 30 minutes for a window to avoid being time barred - that's too close. Any delays and we'd be

done, not to mention that it would be pushing the fuel limits on Ron's wing and my Concours. Traffic was light though in the Twin Cities on Sunday morning, and we made it back with about 20 minutes to spare - coasting in on fumes, as I'd hit my reserve fuel switch about 10 miles out. We did the usual "wander around in a post-rally daze" talking to others about their rides, before putting together our paperwork and scoring info.

The finish!

I still didn't know if I'd get any points at all, so I kind of rushed through my pre-scoring before going up to the table. I sat down, and we had to get the judge's ruling as to whether I could collect points. Turns out I could, but I couldn't claim Jefferson City or my fuel log. Whoo hoo! I could still be in contention for an award! I sat and ate with Bonzai and Border to Border roommate Paul Sundet. It was his first MN1k, so he was in rookie class. He'd run the rally alone as he thought it'd be an unfair advantage to riding with us. Yeah right - he did more miles than we did - and accumulated over 30,000 points, all on his own, not to mention he was the very last person to leave the parking lot at the start of the rally. That's a hell of a ride!

All's well that ends well - or "How we all got wood!"

Finally awards time rolled around. Two-up class was won by the Metallic Waste team, running 3-up on a sidecar rig. They actually made it 1005 miles, but I'm not sure how. Deb Nimz won the standard class on her Harley with ape-hanger bars - wow! As I said before, Paul destroyed everyone to win the Rookie Class and Touring class was next, and Ron won that by a landslide, as he and Carrie had over 40,000 points each.

Unfortunately, with that award it meant they didn't win the overall title, but first in class is still impressive. Sport-touring class was next, and other than expert, is usually the most competitive. It's also the class Carrie and I are in. After the first score was read, I knew I'd placed (I assumed Carrie had placed of course) I just didn't know where. They got to third place and read Critter's name, and since I beat him (he lost 5000 points at the table - otherwise he'd have beaten me), I knew Carrie and I were 1 and 2.

I was as happy for Ron and Carrie as I was for my own award - it's pretty cool to do that well in our second year. There were a lot of dropping jaws in the tent when first they announced that I'd racked up 34,000 points with an odometer failure and (technically) only 600+ miles, but when they announced Carrie's score it was even better, as she'd beaten some of the best riders in the country with her score - very cool. (except now she's a target - nobody wants to lose to a girl!!!) Turns out "the guy at the catsup bottle," John Coons, won the overall big prize, barely beating Ron and Carrie's score. Good job (and even better job barely squeaking in under the wire). Brett and Allen didn't make it back in time, and neither did Bob 498, who went to the Mackinac Bridge. They showed up for the end-of-rally dinner and awards though, so it was good to see them back safely.

In all it was our most successful rally outing by far - let's see how we fare next time out!

Buffalo run anyone?