



2011 Team Strange Team Lyle Rally

So normally right now, I'd be writing my ride report for the annual Team Strange Minnesota 1000. However this year, because of the Iron Butt Rally's move from August to June, the MN1k has now moved to the last weekend in July. This happens to be my wedding anniversary weekend. Now back in 2004, Team Strange scheduled the Return to Niobrara rally that same weekend, and thanks to my understanding wife Lisaberg, I was able to attend. However this year, she happens to be pregnant with our first child (due in December), and I felt that it probably wasn't a good idea to spend our anniversary on the bike. I was somewhat bummed, since I'd ridden every MN1k since 2003, but I'll just have to skip this year.

Fortunately however, the powers that be at Team Strange decided to schedule a new event for this weekend. The eight-hour Team Lyle rally, to benefit the Eddie's Road charity. When I saw this, I was one of the first to sign up – I was going to get to rally this weekend anyway!

This rally was unusual in a number of ways. First of all, it was only eight hours, which is different than the usual 12 or 24 hour format. Also, there were no photo bonuses. Fortunately, I'd ridden in the MN1k Riders Unplugged 2 rally (I didn't do a ride report for that one – too lazy) which was a 9 hour rally, so I was familiar with a shorter format.

As often happens, I wasn't all that prepared going in. We just moved into a new (to us) house that has needed a lot of work, which has taken up a lot of my time. As such, the night before, I was up late breaking up ceramic tile in the basement so we could paint on Sunday. In addition, I didn't know where my regular USB cable for the GPS was, so I just grabbed something out of a pile of cords in a box. In yet another setback, I'd been having problems with the Buell. It was running poorly, and showing a check engine light. After spending two weeks and a bunch of money trying to diagnose the problem, it turned out to be a fouled plug. Oh well, now I know how to read error codes.

I figured, "this won't be that serious – it's an 8-hour charity rally." Of course I was wrong. Over 60 riders were signed up, including big dogs like Conway and Leir who weren't in the IBR this year. Still, I wanted to do well.

I woke up at 6 (which is an hour earlier than usual for me) and rode down to Bob's Java Hut and was greeted by Bart and Lurleen, and talked to a bunch of the usual riders like Jim Weatherhead and Kevin Kocur as well as Kerry Person, who was helping out. The bike was running just fine thankfully, so I was at least comfortable with that.

We received our rally packets with around 30 bonuses. Most of which I was familiar with, as many were in the East Metro and Western Wisconsin, including two in the area I grew up in. I considered just using maps and foregoing the laptop, but I figured that it's always good practice to prepare like I would for other rallies, so I got out the computer.

For some reason, Garmin's mac software, which I've never been a fan of, despite being a Mac geek, was acting up. It froze up on me a couple times before finally working. Then, because of my grabbing a bad cable, I couldn't load my points and route into the GPS. I ended up borrowing a cable from Rick Corwine (thank you!) to get it loaded, but I'd wasted a ton of time, leaving a half hour past the 9 am release time. (resulting in a comment from Bart "hey, you know you can leave now.")

Finally, I got on the road, only to find my points loaded, but not my route. Ugh. I learned a while back that it's smart to list your bonus by number on a separate sheet, so I set course for my first stop, which was in Forest, WI to read a plaque below a windmill. At the same time, I took a few minutes to reset my route in the GPS, so I'd know my arrival time back at Bob's. It said 3:35 pm, and the rally ended at 5. Now because of traffic, I'd routed fairly conservatively to not DNF, but I didn't think I'd routed THAT conservatively. I figured I'd missed something, but I didn't want to waste any more time, so I rode on.

The next stop was a church in Sand Creek, WI (I think that was a church) and then the first of three required stops for a combo bonus (meaning getting extra points for completing multiple bonuses). The combo was to get three National Park Service passport stamps, the first being the Ice Age National Scenic Trail near New Auburn, WI.

In this case, in addition to the combo, this was a two-part bonus. The Ice Age stamp was the first, as well as writing down some info at a parking lot about ten miles farther down the road. I've ridden (rode?) enough of Bart's rallies to know that the two-part bonus likely meant that there was a really cool road that Bart wanted us to experience, and I was right. Co. Rd. M was a great ride through the woods, despite the damp weather, and me almost hitting a dog that wandered out in front of me as I came over a hill. I had met up with Kevin Kocur at the Ice Age center (they had cute baby turtles at the counter), and again at the parking lot. I figured we were running similar, but not exact routes. We exchanged the traditional "you suck" greetings between us.

I didn't attach my fuel cell for this rally because I didn't have time, and because it's a pain in the ass to attach, so I was concerned about fuel at this point. When I was having trouble with the bike in the weeks prior to the rally, my fuel range had dropped significantly, and I didn't want to risk it, so I rode about five miles farther east off route to get gas, instead of the 13 miles back to the last station I'd passed. When I was at the gas station, I saw Kocur go by and ride north, as well as a couple on a Goldwing (sorry, I can't recall who you were). I realized at that point I'd missed something, because my route had me backtracking

along M to US53. It wasn't until later I realized my mistake. I missed not one, but two bonuses (Bruce and Cumberland) that would have put me in the top ten. D'oh!

In any case, I held to my route and backtracked along M (no complaints, since it was a great road) to 53 to head north to Trego, WI, to get the second NPS stamp at the Namekogan visitor center, where I was greeted by a very pretty park ranger who looked a lot like Katy Perry. (I was not the only rider who commented on this). I've been by here many times, as it's on the way to the cabin, and a nearby monument was a bonus on a previous MN1K. I saw the couple on the Goldwing again as I was leaving. They probably got the bonuses I missed.

After that, I headed south back towards the cities, still with a big arrival cushion. I stopped in Clam Falls (also a bonus location, although different on a MN1k) and then to St. Croix Falls, WI to get the third and final NPS stamp. I've ridden the county roads between Trego and St. Croix Falls dozens of times, and I never tire of them. Great riding.

I stopped for gas and a Diet Coke in Cushing, WI, and ran into Kocur again leaving St. Croix Falls.

My last scheduled bonus was in my hometown of Forest Lake, MN, to get some info off a monument at a rest area. The stretch between St. Croix Falls and Flaketown (as we called it) was horrible. US 8 is an awful road (one of the most dangerous roads in MN) with slow traffic, turning cars and just general idiocy. Add to that the steady rain that was falling at this point, and this part of the ride sucked. I was glad to hit I-35.

After picking up the Forest Lake bonus, I realized I had some extra time. I still wanted to plan for traffic in Minneapolis, but I knew I had time to get a bonus off East River Rd. in Fridley, not far from where we used to live. It actually turned out to be a smart move, as taking 94 into Minneapolis was a lot quicker than taking 35W, and the bonus was only a mile out of the way. Despite the rain, I picked up the Fridley bonus and headed to Bob's, arriving as one of the first bikes there, around 4:35. Kocur was the only one I saw there before me.

I scored right away, got something to eat, and watched the bikes roll in. There were a lot of DNF's. Part was due to the oddity of an 8-hour rally, but also because traffic was really bad in the cities on Saturday afternoon, which I'd planned for. Still, I knew my score wasn't great. I ended up 17th out of 51 riders who started, which was okay (I've somewhat resigned myself to being a middle of the pack rider at this point.) Had I bagged the Bruce and Cumberland bonuses, I'd have come in 9th, which wouldn't have put me on the podium, but would have been top ten.

In an odd turn of events, as I was leaving, Aaron Petty, recently back from Ecuador for the summer (and my scorer for the rally), said "hey, you live west of here – can I get a ride home?"

Now I've literally ridden with a passenger less than a dozen times. A poker run with my wife as well as a couple of rides to get ice cream, and once taking Carrie Hanson up to Moon Motors when Ron was out of town or something. I wasn't prepared to take a passenger with no helmet or gear through uptown, and onto the freeway in the rain. He reassured me (kind of) by pointing out that he's ridden "bitch" in a third world

country with his wife driving, so I said what the hell. I did try to hand him my riding glasses on the 394 ramp, thinking that it had to be miserable in the rain with no eyewear, but I don't think he noticed (probably eyes closed hanging on for dear life). We made it safely to Golden Valley, and I hopped on 394 to head home to Minnetonka, pulling into the new garage for the first time post-rally. This was the Buell's second rally finish after my DNF in the MN2K last year (stupid tire) and the bike performed flawlessly. While I won't make the MN1k this year, hopefully I can squeeze in another rally this season, maybe if the GLMC runs the Harvest Rally I can finally actually ride in it after two Did Not Starts.

As always, thanks to the Team Strange crew of Bart Bakker and Lisa "Lurleen" Erbes for a great time, as well as the volunteers John Pedrow, Aaron Petty and Kerry Person and anyone else I might have missed. These events are always so much fun – don't ever think the work you put in isn't appreciated – it is.

Now I have to go read up on the latest IBR reports. Go Strangers!