

2003 Mason Dixon 20-20 Ride Report

By
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As it is in many areas of my life I am often rushing at the last minute to finish final preparations for any undertaking. And so it was for my final push for the 2003 running of the Mason Dixon 20-20 Rally. I was enrolled in the 48 hour class and I knew this would be a great test of my new bike and equipment, provided I got it installed and operational in time. My new 2003 R1150RT has been undergoing several modifications in readiness for this seasons collection of endurance rallies. Some equipment had been delayed with troubles from suppliers and late shipments. Some final modifications were completed the night before, and the day of, leaving for York, Pennsylvania, where the Mason Dixon starts and finishes. The last minute installations included HID lights and establishing electrical power to my new tank bag, both of which had arrived only the day before.

Some further modifications on the RT were the addition of an auxiliary battery and associated wiring to handle the increased electrical requirements of additional equipment, especially driving lights. I also run dual GPS and established power for them and a computer that resides in my tail trunk. I also established a hardwired data connection between them. Much of the addition work was beyond my capabilities and couldn't have been done without the help of my friend and retired electrical engineer, Itzik Barpal. I have added a Bill McAvan auxiliary fuel cell with a beautiful fuel tank cover fabricated by Linda Tanner, and the first use of it would be on the rally.

Finally, all was ready and I left late for the short ride over to York. I arrived on Thursday evening about 8pm and met up with Rally Master Rick Miller and a few other riders. I had a very enjoyable late dinner with a couple of riders before retiring for the night about 11pm. Before going to bed I sorted all the stuff I would need over the next two days to minimize the distractions getting to what I needed and establishing the beginnings of a system to standardize the storage and retrieval of critical supplies and equipment. For example, all the parts of my tool kit were sorted into categories and stored in the left saddlebag. I was a little nervous about riding in this rally due to the newness of the motorcycle and the untested state of all the equipment installed on it. The bike itself is an excellent platform and I had such great experiences on my old R1100RT that I knew the bike would stand up to the rigors of the ride so I wasn't worried about that. But, with all the equipment installed for LD riding as yet untested, I knew this would be a challenge and a great chance for evaluation and fine-tuning of the systems. Everything installed is designed to provide maximum information and comfort with the least possible distraction. There would certainly be further changes needed after the rally.

Inevitably, as with any thing that is rushed I had problems getting power to my tank bag. The connector I used was not holding and kept pulling out. The problem was still not solved when I went to bed and I knew I would have to work on it some more in the morning.

Registration opened at 8 in the morning with odometer checks to follow. After I completed those necessary tasks I went to work on the tank bag. After several frustrating tries I decided to just hard wire the connection and deal with the disconnect feature later. Getting that accomplished, I moved the bike to the impound area and went in to relax before the riders meeting at 11. We had a nice lunch of salad and sandwiches before we got down to brass tacks and Rick began discussing the rules of the rally and handed out the 48-hour rally packs.

Upon opening the rally packs I noted that many of the 48 hour bonus point locations (BPL) were the same as the 24 hour BPL and these had been available on the web site for about 10 days. I had done extensive plotting and study of these and that helped with the route planning for the ride I would make in the coming two days. As soon as the meeting was over we were free to start whenever we were ready. As it was with everyone, I was very anxious to get routes set and get going. Somehow I just couldn't get focused on what I needed to do to get some efficient planning going. I probably wasted 30 minutes futzing around trying to take short cuts with the planning process. I realized this was only making me frustrated and I finally took all my material back inside and started from scratch. I renamed all the applicable 24-hour BPLs and plotted the new 48-hour BPLs. This took about another 30 minutes and from that I was able to come up with a route that I felt could be a winner. The list of BPLs included a big point location at each of the 4 corners: Russelville, Arkansas; Stonington, Maine; Key West, Florida; and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. The highest was the finishing BBQ at the Poker Run from Hell in Russelville, Arkansas. I decided this was doable and built a route that took me south to North Carolina and Tennessee then west to Arkansas. I could collect points both going and coming back and felt this could be the winning route.

It was now almost 1:30 and I felt I was late in my departure. I made a critical error at this point and hurried off to ride my route without noting the time of availability in Arkansas. From my memory of one of the 24 hour BPLs that was available on Saturday from noon to 1600 I thought the Arkansas bonus was good until 1600 on Saturday as well. It was only good until 1400 on Saturday. I blissfully went on my way, unaware of my error. In fact I was so blissfully unaware of my lack of completion of my planning process that I didn't even verify the beginning route to the first BPL. I just assumed I would get on I 83 and head south. As I did so my GPS started rerouting me and if you know the limitations of the Garmin GPS, then you know that when it is recalculating the route it is essentially useless as a reference map until it is done. I decided I needed to turn around and head west on US Highway 30 to Gettysburg and then proceed south from there. That was an even bigger mistake because US 30 is two lane all the way through to Gettysburg. It took me an hour to get to Gettysburg with all the traffic, trucks and small towns to go through.

I finally got going when I merged with US 15 south and headed west on I 70. My route took me west on I 70 to I 68 to just past Cumberland and US 220 south into West Virginia. As I approached Cumberland I saw a notice that stated I 68 being closed a couple of exits past my exit for US 220. Little did I know that just over in the next valley was a huge 100-car pile up in heavy fog. I heard later that I 68 was closed for over a day. Problem for me was that everyone else was also taking the exit I was and I found myself in a very long line of single lane traffic that was going nowhere. Knowing the clock was

running and that my opportunity to make the first BPL was slipping away, as it was daylight only, I made a decision I usually don't like to make. I decided to move past the traffic on the right shoulder. It took about 4 miles of careful going before I was past the intersection that was causing the logjam and from there traffic opened up nicely. I made good time, in spite of the occasional rain and light fog down to Seneca Rocks and got the required photo of me with Seneca Rocks in the background. According to the timing I had set for myself based on the mileage to each BPL and an average speed of 60 mph, I was about 1 hour late leaving Seneca Rocks for the next BPL.

My next stop would be Beech Mountain in North Carolina and the GPS route showed very little interstate highway and a lot of mountain road riding. I knew I would not be able to come close to my average basis speed of 60 mph and would lose more time to Beech Mountain. At this time I still believed I could arrive in Arkansas before 1600 and decided to keep pressing on. Since I had taken so long to get to Seneca Rocks, which had been a daylight only bonus, it became dark soon and that coupled with the misty, rainy, foggy conditions slowed me down even more. Throw in some tight, twisty mountain roads and I knew I would be even later arriving at Beech Mountain. To make matters worse I had miscalculated the area of GPS map detail to load in my GPS and about half way to Beech Mountain I rode off the area that had the detailed maps loaded. All I had available was the GPS base map. I needed that detail to make the arrival to Beech Mountain but didn't have it. As I approached I needed to keep stopping to refer to the mapping program I had on my computer to decipher the proper arrival route. It showed an arrival to Banner Elk from the west but I sure couldn't find the road. I had to go around and approach from the east and then from there ask directions from a Banner Elk policeman to get to Beech Mountain. The upshot of it was that when I left Beech Mountain I was two hours late on my planned route.

By this time though I was committed and knew I just had to keep grinding it out. And so it was, continuing on in the same conditions, rain, fog and tight mountain roads, I made my way to the next BPL at Highlands, North Carolina. And, to add insult to injury, at some highway junction before Highlands, as I was accelerating from the stop, I noticed a white flash in the location of my forward shelf. I thought at the time I must have kicked up a piece of paper or some such explanation. I didn't realize until almost 24 hours later that it had been my E Z Pass transponder departing the bike. ☹ When I reached Highlands I was almost three hours behind, but things looked like they were improving to the west and I knew as soon as I got out of the mountains I would be able to make better time. The problem was, all the intensity of the mountain driving and the increased vigilance required by the wet roads and weather conditions were taking a heavy toll. I was becoming fatigued and knew I would need to stop for a rest soon. I normally have a down cycle in the early morning hours and again in the mid-afternoon hours. I try to plan my rest stops around these known cycles to keep my self as alert as possible when riding. I wasn't quite ready to take one of the programmed stops so I just pulled off to stretch and have a bite to eat.

As I continued on westward from there I was given hope by the rapidly improving weather conditions and the brightening sky showing clear conditions to the west. I was

on my way to Chattanooga to get a photo of the inclined railroad, the top of the inclined railroad that is. Fortunately, I was able to find my way to the summit quite easily and arrived there with no further lost time. I was still three hours behind and knew it would be tight getting to Arkansas by 1600. I figured I had the time zone change working for me so I felt I could still make it. That is until I finally took a good hard look at the rally book and saw that I had to be there by 1400. I knew I couldn't make that and confirmed it with my GPS routing. If I could maintain an average speed of 65 mph I could arrive right at 1400 but that took no consideration for two fuel stops and the traffic I knew I would encounter. On top of that there were no consistent interstate routes between here and there and then there was that issue of my needing to stop for a solid rest period. At that point I decided to abandon the attempt at Arkansas and calculate a new strategy at my next fuel stop about 100 miles away. I decided to head north towards a BPL southwest of Lexington. I planned on taking my first programmed rest period of one hour at the fuel stop and use a couple of minutes to plan the route for my final 24 hours.

As I was heading north in the early hours of Saturday morning, there was very little traffic and with the sun coming up with clear skies it was just beautiful riding through the Tennessee countryside. I came around a curve and saw what I quickly realized what was a serious two-vehicle crash that had just occurred. A pickup truck was on its top about 50 yards off the side of the road and a car was upright but facing the wrong direction on the right shoulder. Both vehicles were seriously damaged. The driver of the car was just getting out of his vehicle. I quickly pulled over and my first move was to call 911 on my cell phone. I notified the dispatcher of the crash and location and then moved to render assistance. The driver of the car was walking around dazed but there were no signs of the other driver or occupants. I searched the truck and surrounding area for signs but there were no other people there that I could find. After some time of searching I looked at the evidence of the crash and determined the driver of the car had fallen asleep and hit the truck which had been abandoned or broke down by the side of the road. I helped the driver of the car who appeared to have no serious external injuries until the authorities arrived and then resumed my travel northbound. I calculated my time at the scene was about 20 minutes and later called Rally Master Rick to notify him that I had stopped to render assistance for 20 minutes in case I needed that time later arriving back at York.

A short time later I stopped for my fuel and rest stop caught a nice nap and determined a route for the remaining time in the rally. I decided to go north to Hell, Michigan, stopping to pick up boni along the way and from there head back to Pennsylvania rounding up what ever I had time for before I needed to be back at York at noon Sunday for the finish of the rally. In my consideration of the route I figured I was no longer on the winning route, but I probably still had a chance for a top 5 finish. In my calculation I took a more conservative approach than I had in plotting the Arkansas route and planned a 60 mph average. I included plenty of time at each BPL and about an hour buffer at the end. I also included time for the second programmed rest period of two hours, which I planned to take in the early morning hours of Sunday morning.

After the rest stop I headed north to Pleasant Hill, Kentucky and the Shakertown historic site. There I was supposed to find historical markers in the parking lot and get a photo of

one. I searched for awhile but couldn't locate them. I asked the woman at the information booth about the markers and she told me they were normally there but were currently taken down for renovation. Apparently other riders were there when the information booth was not open and took an inordinate amount of time looking for the markers before deciding they were not there and took a picture of the entrance sign before leaving, proving they were at the location. I was lucky in arriving when the information booth was open and almost immediately found out the signs were not there. I was able to take the picture of the entrance sign without the frustration of the wasted time looking for markers that were not there, accompanied by the nagging awareness that if someone else found the markers the points would not be awarded. I left there at 1300 Saturday, right on schedule for the remaining route.

After making my way through Lexington on a new circle route recently completed I was able to hop onto I 75 northbound towards the Neil Armstrong Museum. I remember the trouble I had going through Lexington last year during the Feast in the East VIII before the new circle route was open and how frustrating and time consuming that was. The new circle route put me ahead of schedule, a rare occasion indeed. This was the first time during the rally I was on sustained interstate and was able to make good time. The Kentucky State Patrol was thick like flies though and a prudent 5mph over the limit was the order of the day. I was still ahead of schedule as I approached the Armstrong museum but I was becoming aware of another problem.

This was the first rally I have used my new auxiliary fuel cell. In past rallies with the RT stock fuel tank I had no problem staying hydrated and taking a pee break at each fuel stop. Now, however, the range of my fuel stops exceeded the range of my bladder. What to do? I decided to tough it out and see if I could wait until I arrived at the next BPL. The last 100 miles were very challenging and the last 30 miles were brutal. I was excited to see a gas station just across the street from the museum and stopped for a pee break, fuel and a huge sigh of relief before going over to photograph the space capsules. Note to self: Look into pee tubes before the next rally!

From there it was up through Ann Arbor to Hell, Michigan. The weather had been great all the way from Tennessee northbound but the clouds were gathering and it looked like a few thunderstorms around Ann Arbor. Fortunately, the route circumvented them and there was no rain at all. As I took the scenic roads to Hell I kept looking for evidence in the roadway for Good Intentions. None in sight. I guess the road to Hell is not paved with Good Intentions after all.

From Hell I proceeded south past Toledo to join up with the Ohio Turnpike that would take me back to Pennsylvania. It was getting dark now bringing a close to Saturday and the way I was feeling I knew I would not make it to the time I had planned for my rest period. I stopped about midnight for my two-hour rest stop at a rest area on the turnpike. After refueling I pulled into an area out of the way and set my screaming meanie for two hours. I laid down on the grass next to where the bike was parked. It was chilly, temperature in the low 50s, so I plugged my Gerbing clothing into my tank bag which

took power from my auxiliary battery and was able to stay toasty warm for the sleep without worrying about draining my main battery. Very nice!

After the rest stop I felt quite refreshed and headed toward the first stop in Pennsylvania, Jim Tainton's gravesite. Apparently, at the time of his death, he was the oldest registered motorcycle rider in the state of Florida. How he got to Pennsylvania is your guess as good as mine. About 50 miles before the PA border the mist and fog started up again. By the time I hit PA it was raining lightly. As soon as I got off the turnpike I was back on the mountainous roads with rain and fog reminiscent of my previous night in North Carolina. My arrival at the Tainton gravesite was accompanied by heavy rain, which created a problem keeping the rally book dry while I recorded the time and odometer readings. I made do by parking under a tree which lessened the impact somewhat, but made me aware of another issue I would need to address before the next rally.

The next BPL was the devil's highway PA 666. This road is very twisty; narrow in places and getting to it was little better. I was becoming more and more aware of the energy it was taking to ride these roads and stay safe. It looked like I would be taking another rest stop before long. Finishing off PA 666 I headed toward Pittsburgh for a BPL on the University of Pittsburgh campus. I was glad it was early Sunday morning, as I knew there would be minimal traffic. I was in that time where I normally get my down cycle and sure enough was fighting to stay alert. As I have learned in the past, it is a battle that cannot be won by soldiering on and the only solution is to stop and rest. So just before dawn I checked into the Iron Butt Motel some 50 miles north of Pittsburgh and slept for about 20 minutes on the bike. It made a world of difference and I once again started off refreshed and alert.

The arrival into Pittsburgh was without problems and I was back on the map detail of my GPS so I proceeded directly to the location. When I got there I was surprised to find myself directly in front of the item I needed to photograph. Got my photo lickety-split and headed out of Pittsburgh. It was the easiest bonus in a city I have ever gotten.

From Pittsburgh I headed to vicinity of Somerset, PA and the United Airlines Flight 93 crash site. This was a very moving time for me, as I approached the location, because I work in the airline industry and this one hit too close to home. I was saddened by the fate of the crew and amazed at the bravery of the passengers in preventing further tragedy to our nation on that fateful day in September 2001.

From there I knew I was in the home stretch and was very comfortable on the time, even though I had used up my hour buffer. I proceeded to the Indiantown Gap National Cemetery to pay my respects at the Jim Young gravesite. It was a bit of a challenge finding the specific gravesite and I was worried it might cause me some delay. Perseverance paid off and I had a few extra minutes to say a prayer of gratitude. I headed back to York noting that I would arrive with about 10 minutes to spare. I wheeled into the parking lot to check in with Dale and he logged me in at 1152. Eight minutes early and I didn't even need to call in my stop to render assistance card.

The scoring experience was pretty painless, with the caveat that I was dogbeat tired and only wanted to go to bed. Since I had until 1400 or so to complete the scoring process, I took a little time for creature comforts. I checked into my room for the evening, took a shower and organized my photos and receipts in the comfort of my room. After everything was in order and organized, I headed to the scoring area to get pre-scored and then finalized with Rally Master Rick. After some discussion on a technical issue with the two-hour rest stop Rick notified me of my score of 9,701. Since I had calculated that the Arkansas route would have netted me a couple thousand more points, I figured the winning score would be about 12,000. I was happy for a rally well and safely run so was satisfied with the results as they were.

From the scoring room I headed back to the room for some much-needed sleep and slept until about 1800 when it was time to get up and head to the banquet. I finally met up with my friends Bill and Melanie Wade, who had ridden a successful 24-hour rally to get a two up Saddlesore. It was a great Banquet with great food and fellowship. As the exploits of the various riders were brought out it was a time of fun and laughter. Finally, Rick started reading the scores with recognition for the top 20 in each category and trophies for the top 5. As the top 5 were read for the 48-hour rally I was nervous and amazed when I found out I had won the highest score. I am humbled and honored to have done so well in such a great group of talented and competitive riders.

I am very grateful that everyone was accounted for and safe during the rally. I look forward to future rallies and the great fellowship of the riders who participate in these events. It is truly an honor to be counted among you!