



Going the Distance

10,000 miles in 10 days? For riders bitten by the long-distance bug, the question isn't "Why would you want to ride an endurance rally?" but "Why wouldn't you?"

BY ALAN RIDER



CHASING THE SUNSET THROUGH THE GOLDEN light and purple shadows washing over Montana's Bitterroot Mountains, I'm struck by a moment of clarity: This transcendent experience would make a fine answer to all those people who wonder why anyone would want to enter a 10-day, 10,000-mile motorcycle endurance rally.

Admittedly, the past six days of the Motorcycle Endurance Rider Association's inaugural 10-n-10 Rally are a bit of a blur, but I can tell you they've been filled with unforgettable moments like this. I've covered roughly 6000 miles through triple-digit temperatures and marble-sized hail, while living off a diet of Clif bars and beef jerky and wearing the same clothes for way longer than I care to admit. And I've loved every minute of it.

Unfortunately, as the sun drops below the horizon, I'm left with the dim realization that even if I could adequately describe this over-the-top experience, it probably wouldn't help me explain the peculiar satisfaction I get from riding these back-to-back 1000-mile days. In fact, the baffled looks I've gotten on past attempts have all but convinced me that endurance rallies are one of those activities—like, say, golf—where someone either gets the attraction or they don't.

That said, the 18 hours a day I spent in the saddle during the 10-n-10 this past August gave me plenty of time to chew on this "Why?" question. And somewhere out there I hit upon three broad elements of the endurance rally experience that I believe make it something every serious motorcycle enthusiast ought to try at least once.

Endurance Rallies 101

Before we go much farther, I should take a minute to explain how endurance rallies work.

The easiest way to wrap your head around the concept is to think of them as two-wheel scavenger hunts. Rallymasters pass out a list of bonus locations where riders are asked to perform tasks—from bringing back a simple receipt to having someone take a photo of you kissing a willing stranger—to earn a specified number of points. The more difficult the assignment, the more points it's worth.

Because there are always many more bonus locations than any one rider can possibly reach in the allotted time, winning becomes a matter of smart planning. The rider who manages to put together a route that earns the most points, while also making it to the checkpoint(s) and finish line before they close, is declared the winner.

That's what makes this game as much of a mental challenge as it is a physical test. It also helps explain why many rally riders find the activity so addictive.

People Who Get It

Tell someone you're planning to ride in a 10-day, 10,000-mile motorcycle endurance rally and you'll likely get one of two reactions. Either the person you're talking to will be a little awestruck or, more likely, they'll just write you off as a complete nutcase.



“Having the rallymaster’s list of bonus locations to keep your brain engaged makes it easier to ride long distances without being bored to tears. Rally riders are also a great bunch of folks who won’t look at you like you’re nuts for wanting to do this in the first place.”

Gary Deitrick
Jerome, Idaho

Oddly enough, both responses point to one of the main attractions of these events. In a world where the average motorcyclist considers 350 miles a long day, endurance rallies offer long-distance veterans and curious newcomers a level of acceptance and camaraderie that’s just downright hard to find anywhere else.

“I’m a newbie, but this endurance rally thing is pretty exciting to me. Partly because it’s a chance to push my limits. Maybe I can do this or maybe I can’t, but I won’t know unless I try. Combine that with the solitude, and the chance to explore new places and rallies can become glorious adventures.” **Cletha Walstrand**
Ivins, Utah

Which helps explain the instant rapport I felt with the 35 men and women who signed up to spend way too much time and money preparing for and running the 10-n-10. Clearly, these are folks who get it.

To be fair, much of the credit for this amiable atmosphere also goes to MERA founder and 10-n-10 rallymaster Steve Chalmers. Unlike some endurance ral-

lies where the rivalry between top riders can get a little intense, Chalmers set out to create an event that was about fun first and competition second.

Toward that end, Chalmers set up an e-mail list exclusively for riders entered in the 10-n-10. While the list gave us all a chance to get acquainted and share a few laughs, it also turned out to be infinitely practical. From getting answers to my newbie questions on rally strategy to finding someone willing to help me install a few choice pieces of equipment on the 2009 Yamaha FJR1300AE I’d borrowed for the event, these folks couldn’t have been more helpful.

What really impressed me, however, was the extent of their generosity. On two occasions, 10-n-10 riders who’d experienced a crash or a major mechanical meltdown, which they assumed would keep them out of the rally, were quickly offered spare parts and even spare bikes to help them get it together in time to make the starting line.

Months of this electronic interaction also meant the group had some shared history by the time we rolled into the parking lot of the Salt Lake City hotel that would serve as Rally headquarters. Because very few of us had ever taken on a motorcycling challenge of this magnitude, this quick familiarity also helped create an immediate we’re-all-in-this-together bond as we stood around checking out each other’s heavily modified bikes

and comparing notes on the routes we’d planned.

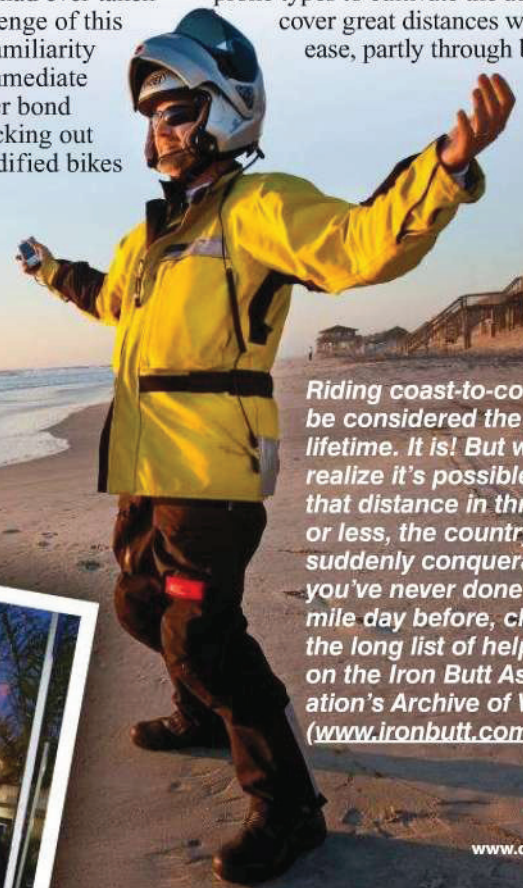
Of course, everyone knew full well that this mingling would be short-lived. Once Chalmers dropped the green flag at 10:10 the next morning, we’d all be entirely on our own.

A Reason to Roam

While the chance to hang with like-minded motorcyclists is great, most long-distance riders will admit this opportunity to rub shoulders and bend elbows is only part of the endurance rally’s appeal.

Though I can’t speak for everyone, my experience in the 10-n-10 convinced me the real allure here is the handy excuse they provide for us to indulge our wanderlust. After all, it’s this insatiable curiosity that explains why long-distance types are always ready to ride that extra 100 miles, for no other reason than the possibility there might be something interesting—a view of snow-capped peaks, the smell of new-mown hay, a funky café that serves up a mean slice of pecan pie—around that next bend in the road.

This desire to go out to see what we can see inevitably leads us wanderlust-prone types to cultivate the ability to cover great distances with relative ease, partly through building



Riding coast-to-coast might be considered the trip of a lifetime. It is! But when you realize it’s possible to ride that distance in three days or less, the country seems suddenly conquerable. If you’ve never done a 1000-mile day before, check out the long list of helpful tips on the Iron Butt Association’s Archive of Wisdom (www.ironbutt.com/tech).



PHOTOS BY BRIAN BLADES

