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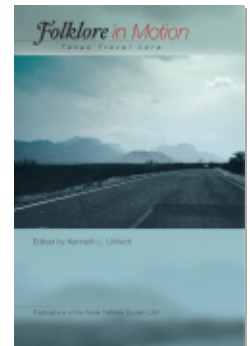
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IRON BUTT SADDLESORE

by Paul N. Yeager



Three-thirty A.M. comes early to a city boy working nine to five. That was the meet-time to join a group of motorcyclists trying for a Saddlesore 2000. The ride was to start at 4:00 A.M. on the Summer Solstice 2003 and cover over 2,000 miles in less than forty-eight hours. This entry-level jaunt for joining the Iron Butt Association had been organized by Beverly Ruffin of the Houston BMW club, and I figured if I was ever going to do anything official on a motorcycle, it would be because somebody else had set it up.

I left the house around 3:00 A.M., just as my kids were coming in for the night. I said I was glad they were home safely and they wished me luck on the ride. I knew they'd be sleeping the next eight or ten hours, and they knew I'd be out pounding wind somewhere in West Texas when they woke up. It was an odd moment for all of us.

The meeting place was a filling station on I-10 at mile marker 761. I rolled in shortly after 3:30, the last one to arrive. Six others were there, having already gassed up and gotten receipts. After a round of murmured hellos at my arrival, each went back to quietly poking around his or her bike. Three-thirty was too early for chatter. The other bikes included a thirty-year-old BMW slash-5, a twin cruiser with ape-hanger handlebars, a couple of older-model Honda Gold Wings, a cross-country BMW GS, a basic BMW R bike, and me on a K1200LT, so smooth and comfortable it's like cheating.

I filled the tank and paid with cash, and the hermetically-sealed attendant gave me a receipt which showed only the cash amount on it. As with any group of like-minded folk seriously dedicated to an idea or an ideal, the Iron Butt Association has its specific rules and rituals. For example, they require meticulous record generation and maintenance—receipts and sometimes photographs are

needed to prove that riders were physically in a certain place at a certain time. To have my ride certified as a Saddlesore 2000, I needed a receipt showing the name and address of the gas station printed on it, and the time and date of the transaction. This is the ride's official start time. The amount of the purchase is irrelevant.

The attendant didn't accept that there was a practical difference in what he gave me and what I wanted, but he reluctantly humored me and after a couple of attempts, produced a suitable document. A side benefit was that the effort at tactful negotiation had helped wake me up. Beverly noted my mileage on her clipboard. For the beginnings and endings of rides, witnesses must certify your mileage in writing. The preferred start witnesses are firemen, judges, notary publics, or authorized Iron Butt members, and Beverly was our authorized Iron Butt member.

We waited until a few minutes after four to be sure no one else was going to join us, and then headed out. I realized that I had forgotten my camelback water carrier, so I peeled off from the group and headed back home. I had pre-packed the bike the night before, to keep from having to think too sharply at that time of morning, but I had put the camelback's water bladder in the freezer, out of sight and out of mind. I only thought for a second about blowing it off, knowing the forecast for the deserts west of Ft. Stockton was for temps over 100. I had a mental image of the arid land out there and knew I was going to need that water.

After momentarily stirring up the house again, I got back onto I-10 and headed east, mentally checking off the landmarks out of Houston—the big highway fork into Baytown, the olefin plant at Cedar Bayou and its astonishing smell, the San Jacinto River Bridge with the monument lit up off to the right, and then the high bridge over the Trinity. For me, the bridge across the Trinity makes the real demarcation line that separates Houston from not-Houston. Now I was really on my way. I felt pretty confident about making the first thousand-mile day. It was the second day I wasn't sure about.

Fatigue is the number-one enemy of long distance motorcyclists, followed by deer. Fortunately, rice fields cover much of the

flat prairie east of the Trinity and there is no place for a deer to hide and suddenly, perversely, jump out in front of a bike in a kamikaze attack. I clipped along at a pretty good pace and kept expecting I'd come up on the other riders. I had added less than ten miles with my detour, but I didn't catch up with them until I pulled into the last gas station before Louisiana, over 120 miles away. They had already finished refueling and were heading over to the golden arches next door for breakfast. I thought to myself, Well it's clear I'm the rookie here, being late to everything. The elderly fellow on the thirty-year-old motorcycle wasn't having any trouble keeping up.

We pulled into the Tex-DOT Visitor Center at mile marker 880 a little after six. The Visitor's Center sits close by the Sabine River, the border between Texas and Louisiana, and for over ten years this has been the traditional starting point for the Texas Solstice Run, an event informally hosted by the BMW Club Motorcycle Club of Houston. Wheels roll at 6:14, the Official Crack of Dawn, and the goal is to ride across Texas and get to New Mexico before sunset. That's eight hundred and eighty miles if you stay on the 10.

The Run is always held on the Saturday closest to the Solstice, and with sixteen-some-odd hours of daylight, riders only need to average a little over sixty miles an hour to be having supper when the sun goes down. But that includes stopping time. Like most long distance events, the Run is more about having quick stops and as few of them as possible than it is about going extremely fast down the highway. It's about staying in the saddle and riding. As an endurance event, the competition is really with yourself.

All bikers are welcome in the Solstice Run and nearly a dozen riders were waiting there for us, including a couple of newish Gold Wing 1800s from Dallas and a fellow on a naked Harley who had ridden down from Ft. Worth. "Naked" means the bike had no wind protection of any kind. I wondered how he'd do over the course of the day. Beverly welcomed everyone and explained that some of the riders in the group were trying for a Saddlesore 1000. Those riders would take a detour in Van Horn that would add



Stopping at the Tex-DOT Visitor Center

some forty miles to the last leg. With the miles we had already ridden coming from Houston, we would log one thousand and thirty-four miles, give or take. She handed out a sheet of paper with the printed route, and as I stuffed it in my tank bag, Beverly looked down at her watch and said, "It's 6:14. Time to go."

The two new Wings were the first ones out, followed by the guy on the Harley. I was a little peeved at myself for not being ready to mount on the instant, but shortly got my earplugs in and my helmet and gloves on, and I was off too. Normally, riding at dawn makes me feel in synch with the coming day. To prepare for this ride I had been riding during the early morning hours for the last week or so, each day getting up half an hour earlier than the day before. On the last day I rode almost four hundred miles before I rolled in to work at 9:15.

Each morning I had been in a different place as the sun rose, out in the rural areas south and west of Houston. For many of us city folk, any apparent relationship between our jobs and the rising and falling of the sun is coincidental. It is exotic for me to be start-

ing off the day with all the things that pay attention to the sun—the birds, the livestock, the country folks. That last morning, as I rounded a big sweeping turn, a flight of roseate spoonbills coasted over the treetops, blazing pink in the level sun. We locked into one of those perfect coincidences of time and place as my curving line of travel intersected their flight line like a dance.

However, the sense of dawn-as-a-new-beginning disappeared when I merged into the traffic on I-10. None of the magic of the earlier mornings infused the atmosphere on the Interstate. It was business-as-usual: get out of my way Charlie and devil take the hindmost. At least the pace was brisk, I thought. I couldn't stop the hope from popping into my brain that traffic might keep this pace all day and maybe I could make good time. And if I made good time today, would I have anything left for tomorrow?

Patches of fog hung low over the highway in the woods between Orange and Beaumont, and I passed the naked Harley in a clearing between patches. The fog evaporated on the approach into Beaumont and when the highway turned south in the middle of town, the sun was already pushing on my left shoulder. This was maybe 6:45 A.M., and the bike thermometer read 81. The air was tangibly humid and felt warm even in a mesh jacket. This was going to be a real summer day. I had a few sips from the camelback to test the system. The frozen block in the bladder was melting and the ice water was perfect.

The flat coastal prairie and rice fields between Beaumont and the Trinity River do not make very interesting countryside and there is little temptation to take your attention off the progression of the road. I tried to relax into the groove of the ride, thinking of the pacing of thousand-mile-a-day riding.

My brother Peter first told me about the Iron Butt Association and their eleven-day, 11,000-mile Rally that circles the continental U.S. "Do the math," he told me. You know those are eleven long days. Moreover, one doesn't ride from one corner of the U.S. straight to another. Oh, no. That would be too easy. Instead, one needs to ride into Nova Scotia or Alaska or something extremely out of the way in order to rack up sufficient bonus points to even

place, much less win. People who hear the exploits of the Iron Butt riders for the first time often shake their heads in wonderment. "Why would anyone want to do that?" One of the highest compliments one Iron Butt rider pays to another is, "You're nuts." They are definitely a unique group.

Besides the Rally, the Iron Butt sanctions escapades such as the Ten Forty-eight Plus One, where you ride to all forty-eight lower states and then to Alaska in under ten days; and the 100 CCC, where you ride from one side of the U.S. to the other in under fifty hours, and then turn around and ride back in another fifty. Not long after I rode the Saddlesore Solstice, Tom and Rosie Sperry from California rode two-up from Mexico to Canada and back, over 3,000 miles in under forty-eight hours. They set the records for the first two-up BunBurner Gold 3000, and the first-ever border-to-border-to-border in under forty-eight hours. They also earned a laudatory, "You're nuts."

Not just anyone can enter these events, though. Riders have to already be members of the Iron Butt Association to officially attempt one of the big jaunts, and to become a member one has to make one of several entry-level rides like the Saddlesore or the BunBurner 1500 (1,500 miles in thirty-six hours).

These rides developed in the early 1980s, before the first Iron Butt Rally. Les Martin at the California Motorcycle Touring Association offered certifications for rides documented in California, Nevada, and Oregon. When he retired in 1993, he ceded the names to the Iron Butt Association, and certifications were then offered nationally. While the IronButt.com web site guidelines state that the Interstate Highway system offers the quickest and safest way to cover the miles, recent Saddlesore 1000 rides have been made entirely within the borders of most states and several cities, including Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and New York. John Ryan made the New York attempt and at one point was pulled over by one of that city's finest. The officer was evidently perturbed at seeing Ryan pass by so many times in his circuit around the city, and wanted to know what the hell was going on. After a bit of back and forth, Ryan explained he was trying to see

how many miles he could go inside the city in a 24-hour period. Happily, this satisfied the officer and he let Ryan ride on. "OK," he said, "I just wanted to know."

More than once I've heard, "Do you know how crazy all that sounds?" Most of the folks in our little group were hobbyists, like me. Our ride was the equivalent of Iron Butt baby steps, climbing a little hill, though even at that I had some questions about how I'd do on the second half—the thousand-mile ride back home. I wondered if I had the endurance to keep from getting drowsy on the bike. But that was tomorrow and I had a whole day of riding ahead of me today.

I came again to the Trinity River. Fingers of the river penetrate the woods all over, beautiful in that morning light to a swamp rat like me. A heron coasted lazily over the water and I slowed to savor the view across the Old and Lost Rivers and their many baylets and islands. The reverie ended abruptly at the end of the causeway as I plunged back into the greater Houston metro area and the universe of the world's petroleum capital. Suddenly tanker trucks were everywhere.

James McMurtry wrote a line in one of his songs, "Walk between the raindrops, dry as a bone," and that's how I tried to run the Houston traffic. Since it's my hometown I believe I have a sense of its pulse and rhythm, and I'll probably find out the hard way that that's blooey. I made it through fine, though, and was past the Brazos River a little after 8 A.M. So that's good, I thought, starting to do the math and smacking myself for again trying to jinx things.

I focused on the road, the bulk of my attention on getting through traffic safely, on achieving the horizon. With the stock tank, my bike will travel two hundred miles, more or less, before it needs gas. I visualized each stop as the end of a tunnel. I didn't watch the scenery go by so much as mark the steps of land between me and the next place my feet were going to touch the ground.

My first stop was in Columbus, on the Colorado River, regarded as the first western river as the traveler moves from eastern landscapes to the west. The Colorado crossing is about 190 miles

from the Sabine, and the next tank took me out of the coastal plain across rolling hills to San Antonio and the Balcones Escarpment. I got in and out of these stops in under ten minutes, twice as long, I'm told, as the big dogs. Still, they were no-frills drills, all business. Without running, I wasn't sure how anyone filled a tank and drained a bladder in much less time.

West of San Antonio, I-10 climbs the Escarpment onto the Edwards Plateau and dives into the Texas Hill Country. This is one of the prettiest stretches of I-10 in the state, and I felt blessed that the sun was perfect and not too hot, and my mind could wander out across the landscape for a time instead of projecting itself down the road to the next scheduled stop.

Somewhere around Junction I slid out of my dream state and then rode head-down across the rest of the Edwards Plateau to Sonora. It was about a quarter to one, and I decided I was hungry enough to eat a gas-station cheeseburger. It's a good thing humans can belch. Eating a greasy burger in the middle of a long ride is not recommended, but I didn't know that then. It's better to eat something that's not going to hammer you as your body works to convert it to useful energy. A lot of riders eat power bars, nuts, dried and fresh fruit, jerky for the meat-addicted, and they drink lots of water.

After lunch, I unpacked a water-cooling vest and one of those crystal-filled neckerchief thingies and soaked them in the bathroom sink. The camelback was still at least half-full and half-frozen but the hottest and driest part of the trip was coming up, so I bought a bottle of spring water and the attendant let me load the bladder with ice from the soft drink fountain. "Technology" like the water vest, the camelback, and the earplugs extend a rider's limits. They put hours on the day, and in the case of the water vest, can be the difference between riding through an impossibly hot desert and arriving for drinks on the other side, and going stark raving loony from the sun pounding down on your head with the heat of a thousand demons.

Long distance riders in general and Iron Butt riders in particular know that properly applied technology lets them go farther

without getting beaten to death, and in the case of Iron Butt Rally riders, that can be a competitive advantage. All the serious bikes have driving lamps that could start a fire if trained on something long enough. Little shelves and mini-holders abound, loaded with one or two GPS units (the laptop computer is in the top box that sits atop the auxiliary gas tank); a couple of radar detectors; a com center where the cell phone, CB, satellite radio, and other communications get plugged in; and extra mirrors turned to see the blind spots left by your stock mirrors. To read the map in the tank bag pocket at night a gooseneck map light with a rheostat switch is needed. Many bikes carry satellite transponders that tell people over the Internet where they are located. And then come the off-menu items, the little custom touches that each rider has put on his bike to give that little extra boost. I have a little shelf on my bike, too, but aside from the occasional radar detector the only thing on it is a statuette of a roadrunner, a *paisano* as they say in West Texas—a little buddy for good luck. That as much as anything shows me as a hobbyist rather than a really hard-core long distance



A *paisano* companion enjoys the Hill Country view

rider, a big dog. (I do have extra driving lamps, though, and they really do light up the road.)

The bike's clock said 1:30 and the thermometer showed 92 degrees when I pulled out of Sonora. I had taken nearly forty-five minutes on that stop, much longer than I'd intended. Still, I'd ridden nearly six hundred miles since four that morning, and back out on the highway I felt rested and strong. I decided to regard the time as well-spent spilt milk.

West of Sonora the hills drop away and flat-topped mesa-lands rise up, with tens of miles of flatland separating the bluffs. Where the Hill Country is semi-arid, the semi- part has evaporated out here. I had to go back and view the photos I took to be sure something grew out there—my memory is of a barren, brown land stretching from horizon to horizon, where nothing lives but the wind.

Wind farms have sprung up in considerable numbers on the bluffs around Ozona and Iraan (Ira-Ann), testimony to the force and constancy of the winds in those bleak lands. I remembered my first motorcycle trip out there years before. My wife, Janice, and I were on a fully loaded bike getting our first lesson in gyroscopic physics and inertia and how a two-wheeled vehicle counter-balances in strong winds. We were easily at a 45-degree angle running down the straight-line road, feeling it was our speed that kept us off the pavement and if we slowed down even a little, the wind would drop us like a hot brick.

The winds weren't blowing on this ride, though. The hot air was still riding across the desert. The thermometer on the bike read 98, but the water vest and neck cooler kept things just about comfortable under the mesh jacket. The camelback was essential now, and I thought of myself earlier that morning looking ahead to that moment when I would thank myself for going back to get it.

I hadn't seen any other riders, and wondered where they all were. I passed Bakersfield and its singular geologic icon, Squaw Tit Mountain, and pulled into Fort Stockton around 3:00 P.M. At mile marker 260, I had come almost three-quarters of the first thousand miles and once again started to count my chips before the game



Passing Bakersfield

was over. The next stop was around 4:30 in Van Horn, at mile marker 138. Because of the way the towns are spaced, both of the last stops had been only an hour-and-a-half apart.

As I coasted into the gas station I finally saw another rider from the Run. Curt Summers, one of the Gold Wing riders, was getting ready to pull out. We exchanged howdys and he asked if I was going to stay on the 10 for the Solstice route, or if I was going to take the Saddlesore route. I told him I was going for the Saddlesore, but thought I'd understood that it was actually shorter than staying on 10. In any case, I said, it went by the Guadalupe Mountains and was a much prettier route than the 10. Later, I found out that because I had really not been paying attention during Beverly's briefing that morning, I'd flipped the critical information—the detour didn't subtract the thirty-five miles, it added them. It *is* a prettier route, though. Curt climbed on his Wing and silently motored off towards the Guadalupe, and I hustled through the gas drill as quickly as possible and rode after him.

One of the most bizarre experiences I have ever had occurred several years earlier on this highway, just north of Van Horn. Janice and I were headed to the Guadalupe Mountains one sunny day, and in the distance I could see a huddle of turkey vultures picking at something on the left side of the road. They were unconcerned about us until we got pretty close. They began to waddle off in different directions and one of them slowly launched himself into the air. He reminded me of that cartoon vulture when I was a kid who sang, "I'm bringin' home a baby bumble bee . . ." He had the whole sky to fly in, but he turned to cross the road right in the path of the bike. Even as I watched him I didn't believe he was going to do it, but evidently this is a slow reacting species and he couldn't help himself. Perhaps he was target-fixated. I had slowed but still the bike's wind fairing thunked him.

Though it was a solid thunk, nothing on the bike sounded like it cracked and for a moment there I thought of just continuing on, no big deal. Then I realized something sufficiently odd had happened to warrant stopping and checking things out. Janice was wondering what took me so long. I pulled to the outside of the shoulder and we got off to check out the damage. The hair on the back of my neck stood up under my helmet. The front of the bike was covered with long, ropy strands of fresh meat, ghastly dreadlocks of red and pink and white strips piled in layers that conformed to the curves of the fairing, at once gross, disgusting, astonishing, and surreal.

I eyed the place of our encounter as I passed it this time, and rode on. Presently I came along side the Sierra Diablo, the Devil Mountains, and caught sight of Curt on his Gold Wing, a dot at the end of the road. I hustled to catch up, but at some point he saw me in his mirrors and took off. There is an unspoken rivalry between LTs and Gold Wings. They're both the biggest bikes on their teams, built for long distance touring with a passenger and all the bells and whistles, and powered by sophisticated and very potent engines. The road was not particularly well surfaced and there were many little hillocks and diplets, but it ran straight for ten miles at a stretch and we were the only two vehicles as far as the eye could see. We ran the ton for almost forty miles across those



Approaching El Capitan, the Guadalupe Mountains

low hills and shallow dips, and probably didn't see five other vehicles in either direction.

We approached the feet of El Capitan, the southern bastion of the Guadalupe Mountains, rising up red and majestic in the hazy westering light. Our highway T-ed into another and we turned left to head directly into the sun. The salt flats and cracked alkaline hills that flank the mountains feel like an ancient dune-land boundary between land and sea. From there we rode out onto an undulating surface that looks like the bottom of the ocean with all the water removed. I'm a swamp rat, and this looked like the bottom of the desert to me. The sun moved slowly down the sky, hot, hot, hot.

I thought since I was on the last leg of the trip I could spare the energy needed to ride as fast as I had while chasing Kurt, but as usual I discounted the reality. Moreover, after two successive hour-and-a-half legs, I wasn't mentally prepared for one that was going to take two-and-a-half hours. The mountains receded behind us and nothing rose up ahead to draw the eye and the mind forward. The flat land expanded and it seemed like we were riding on a giant treadmill,

going nowhere. The sun fell lower and lower and I couldn't believe it was taking so long to get to the rim of El Paso. To make things worse, traffic lights started showing up every few miles. At one of the lights I pulled up next to Curt and nodded, and over the course of the next few stops we said howdy, complimented each other's bikes, agreed it had been a hot ride and that we were looking forward to mile marker zero and a cold beer. A shower would be good, too.

We finally got to the loop around El Paso and turned north toward the Franklin Mountains. Although the air was quite hazy, I expected something called the Franklin Mountains to be real obvious at that point and was discouraged that I couldn't see anything resembling mountains. I was definitely smelling the hay in the stables. We rode a few more miles and encountered increasing numbers of lights and a lot more traffic. I started getting impatient. At one light I asked a fellow in the car next to me which way it was to I-10. He said the quickest way was to go up two lights and turn left. Curt and I both thought we should be going straight rather than turning left. We puzzled over that for another light and then Curt asked the driver next to him which way it was to Anthony. "Oh, go straight," he said, "you'll come to the mountains. Drive right over the top and Anthony's on the other side."

That sounded exactly right. I was so glad Curt had asked *the right question*. Clearly, my brain was firing on even fewer cylinders than usual. In the Iron Butt Rally members rode days like this for eleven days, and after only one I was not asking the right questions. What would I be like on day eight or nine, for example? More to the point, what would I be like in the morning? The thought of nodding off on a bike scares me—you really don't want to lose your balance even for a second.

We stopped at a red light and suddenly the mountains were right there in front of us, backlit and shimmering in the thick haze. The stoplight changed and we crossed over onto the Woodrow Bean Transmountain Parkway and into the Franklin Mountain State Park. After all that flatland riding it was a kick to suddenly be rising up a curvy road to the top of a mountain, even if it was a little one. We crested the top and saw El Paso and Juarez spread out



Mile Marker Zero

below us, the river curving through and separating the U.S. from Mexico. We slowed to savor the view for a few moments, then headed down to I-10 at the bottom of the mountain. A few minutes later we were gassing up at mile marker zero and I collected my final receipt for the first leg, time stamped, location stamped, official. It was a little before 7:00 P.M., Houston time, for a total ride time of just under fifteen hours.

The vice president of our club that year was Floyd Crow. He checked my mileage at the end point of the first leg, and then Curt and I had that beer. We wandered around the motel parking lot, trying to adjust to not riding, then chugged the bottom half of the beer and broke for our rooms. I slept like a dead vegetable that night, and way too early the phone rang to wake me. For several minutes I grogged dizzily around the room trying to decide if I was going to do the second thousand miles, or get some more sleep and hope I could stay awake for the straight shot back home, only seven hundred and seventy miles.

As I moved around I gained momentum, and finally got to where I wasn't running into the furniture and things. What the

hell, I thought, now that you can walk a straight line, go for it. The other Saddlesore riders had assembled outside. Unlike twenty-four hours earlier when everyone had been pretty quiet at the starting station, today we had a very chatty group. As the rest of the group gassed up, a fellow in a pickup pulling a trailered Harley drove in. It was a gleamy, creamy, custom showpiece bike, with a long front end and high handlebars. I wondered where he was going at 3:45 in the morning, and wondered what he thought about our group in our long-distance motley.

We pulled out at four and headed west into New Mexico. Between Anthony and Las Cruces, I-10 passes miles of dairy farms and feed lots. The stench is monumental and I wondered how many places on the face of the earth smelled that bad for that many miles at a stretch. I wondered if anyone made aux oxygen tanks for motorcycles. We arrived in Lordsburg a little before six, about twenty miles from the Arizona border. This was our turnaround point; from here we'd head back east to Houston. We rode around looking for a place to eat, but nothing was open. We gassed up and were swinging back toward the Interstate when golden arches blinked on nearby, like on Interstates all around the country.

The ride back was relatively uneventful and much of it was on auto-pilot. The high point of the day proved to be sunrise, coming up behind the Organ Mountains outside Las Cruces. The air was clear and cold and the light very crisp, and I felt extremely far away from Houston. The temperature would increase fifty degrees as we rode back across the state, to a high of 102, and again the camel-back and the water vest were the difference between sanity and riding wildly out across the desert screaming.

Jim Green rode with me, on a cruiser with ape-hanger bars. The controls on handlebars like that are at head level, and holding your hands up that high gets very tiring after a while. I appreciated the extra effort it took to make a ride of two thousand miles with his arms held up like that.

My biggest fear for the return trip had been sleepiness, and I did get drowsy once, around four in the afternoon. We pulled into

a gas station just outside Boerne, about thirty miles before my planned stop in San Antonio. This meant I would have to make one more stop than scheduled, but I felt lucky that that tingly, swimming-in-the-brain feeling that signals the cliff-drop of oncoming sleep had not crept over me until then. Even if I had to pull over every thirty minutes, I didn't want to drift into sleep even for a second.

We got back to the gas station at mile marker 761 a little after 9 P.M. We had ridden over two thousand and fifty miles in about forty-one hours, and we were pumped. And right then and there we were able to savor the fact that someone else knew what we'd just accomplished. I don't think there's a bigger answer than that to the question, "Why do you do that?" Just a private feeling of satisfaction, bolstered by knowing someone else knew what you'd done, and knew firsthand what the achievement really took to accomplish. In some ways it's a big deal, and in other ways it's not a big deal. My IBA number is in the 15,000s—over 15,000 folks joined up ahead of me, and there are uncounted other long distance riders who are not in that particular "club," riders who have circumnavigated nations and continents and the globe itself.

Riding the Saddlesore initiated me into some very good company and I feel like a kindred spirit in a way. I've learned some of the customs, rituals, and lingo of modern day long distance riders who mount their two-wheeled motorized thoroughbreds of amazing technological sophistication and ride across the continent. Two thousand miles in two days might be baby steps, but it's a great way to spend the weekend. And it made me want to take bigger steps, to go farther. Not necessarily in short periods of time, in Iron Butt fashion, but to go long distances nevertheless—to the edges of the continent and back, criss-crossing from side-to-side and then some day, top to bottom. Of all the continents. In the meantime I feed my daydreams of Janice and me wandering the globe as two-wheeled gypsies by taking a ride from some place here to some place there, and finding some loop that comes back around again.



Gretchen Lutz