

This was only my second rally (Void 6 and 7). To put things in golf terms, I see myself shaping up to be the rally equivalent of that golfing buddy you only call when your real golfing buddies are unavailable. I'll make it through 18 but I'll need 8 or 10 balls and you won't need a dowsing rod to find the water.

I began with the efficiency of a Swiss watch by declaring my route the night before. *This is a good start.* Later, sequestered in my hotel room diligently pouring over the rally book I realize my first declared bonus location (STL) is not available until 9:30 the next morning. *I have now severely sliced my drive on hole one!*

Despite the inauspicious beginning I begin by winding my way to Jim Thorpe's statue and bagging my first points of the day (THO). From here's it's on to Cabela's (CAB), the stadium in York (SOV), a historical sign in –well – somewhere (TAP), and the entrance to Fu nkstown (FNK). *Damn! I'm ticking them off. Oh, I'm on a roll. This must be what Columbus felt like when he discovered Ohio!*

Now the roads begin to open up and traffic dwindles. The RT hits its stride and it's all I can do to maintain a safe and legal speed in all condi – grphhh argh – sorry I choked. The road kill café (RKC), the smiling muffler man (FAR) who silently acknowledges my rally prowess, then another historical marker (MOS). *I'm racking up points like Tommy on the Madame LaRue pinball machine. The phrase "fish in a barrel" is rattling around in my helmet as my confidence swells. The phrase "pride cometh before a fall" is gurgling in my gut.*

My next scheduled stop is listed as a "10 minute walk . . . each way" (JMP). How bad could that be? I'm a reasonably fast walker. Besides, there's a handy little parking area at the beginning of the trail – wait did I say *trail*? I enter the area and immediately spot some motorcycles. *Ahh, good, other rallyers.* Wrong! On the park bench, in somewhat amorous embrace, sit two young-ish ladies who smile and say, "You're the seventh nut we've seen pull in here so far", (*well ok, they didn't say the nut part but I can read faces*). After weighing the possibilities of being mugged or ravaged by these ladies I conclude I can outrun both of them and start off on the path, which is described in the park's sign as "A leisurely half hour walk . . .". I begin by skirting a field. *This isn't so bad.* Wind through a stand of trees. *It's actually a little darker than I thought.* Come to a bend in the trail. *What was that noise? Do lesbians growl?*

Several quick snaps and I've documented the pyramid. *Did John Marshall piss someone off in Virginia to get his monument stuck back in this Godforsaken – oh shut up and start walking.* It's on the way back that I begin to contemplate the thought of finishing this ride sans helmet or jacket which are currently lying on my bike (it's beginning to cool off too). Would these punk-ish young ladies actually think it stylish to wear a full helmet and textile jacket? Nay. *OK I'm walking faster now.* [note to self for future rides: a one mile walk in Virginia leaves one sweaty. Too sweaty to actually don a helmet and jacket for a few more minutes]. *Crap, I think I hear that muffler man laughing.*

From here I'm off to Solomon's Island on a beautiful Virginia evening. My stroll through the woods notwithstanding, I'm not doing too bad on time. Runners often speak of the high they reach as they hit their stride and I can feel the endorphins percolating- *wait, I think I have to pee.*

As you can see my ride to this point, though tested, is progressing reasonably well. But just as the duffer who strikes the perfect approach shot is destined to shank the chip shot, the worm, as they say, is about to turn for me.

Napoleon had his Waterloo and I now have my – Fredricksburg. What about Fredricksburg you say? Two words TRA-FIC. Since there were no accidents in sight the only thing I can figure is the residents of the area spend Friday nights reenacting the approach to the parking lots to the Superbowl and the Indy 500 when they're in the same place on the same day (I know, that would be Indianapolis for you rally sticklers – bam 7 points). An hour and a half later and bonus locations are dropping faster than a 401k in 2008.

OK the fishing pier (SOL) and another historical marker (BRI) and I'm thinking, " I could really use a man about now". No you perverts, I mean the MANDatory rest period. Still, I think I've got one more bonus in me before I stop – let's try that airport in the middle of nowhere (OCA) – that shouldn't be too bad. Optimism at 1:00 am is a wonderful thing. Unfortunately, it's most often the byproduct of sleep deprivation and delusions of grandeur . I cruise into this tiny patch of an airport, dark, deserted and easily accessible. An obligatory stamp in my book and I'll be off for some rest. *At this point I look more closely and notice the fish in the barrel are phiranna!*

To make a long story short – circle the building – no mailbox. Cross the airport and circle the terminal –no mailbox. Circle the hanger – no mailbox. Re-cross the airport – call Scott. New instructions – take picture of sign – no mailbox. Arrggg. Watch Bob Lilly arrive, circle building – no mailbox and take picture of sign. *Maybe that was an hallucination. Regardless, he's definitely not the MAN I've been waiting for.*

Suffice to say I found a fleabag – er – lower priced accommodations and settled in for several hours. *OK so I over ticked the rest period. I wanted a shower, sue me.* The following morning I managed to pick up bonuses GLD, MIN, WLU and DIN on the way to rally headquarters. Snapping the final picture (a woman sitting on a dinosaur??), the sublime weirdness of the ride closed in on me. *Wait –is that one of the women from the park yesterday on that dinosaur?*

At the scoring table I prided myself on planning, accuracy, penmanship and the fact that I was one of probably only a handful of riders who had had a shower that morning. Docs – check. Pictures – check. Receipts – check. Time on camera – exactly one hour off – *wait that's not supposed to be.* Yes it's true, I diligently double checked minutes and seconds on the camera' clock. You know the rest.

As with mediocre golfers, it's often the 19th hole that tops a perfect round. By far the best bonus of all for me was FIN. Camaraderie, laughter, lies – it's amazing what 3 hours sleep and alcohol look like mixed together. Kudos to Scott and Gary and the staff who made the event run (thanks Tonie for stifling the chortle when you noticed my camera's clock).

Final note to Hotch and Pete, despite you whimpering out- er – turning in for an early start, I managed to deplete the Outback's supply of Captain Morgan to cover for you. See you all next time.