

Chris Comly's Ride Report for Void 7

My declared route was: THO, FEL, RRS, LIN, GAS, RKC, FAR, MOS, JMP, MAN, OCA, GLD, CHM, SWN, WLU, DIN, ROR, TRN, BTW, FIN. Worth noting is my ride of choice is not what many would consider ideal for rallying. I ride a 2006 HD Sportster with a 4.5 gallon tank and no aux fuel. However, I am already ahead of myself. This rally report is incomplete without knowing a little of the history of my wanting to participate in the Void 7.

A long time ago in a galaxy far far away, I came across the events page on the IBA website and started reading about rallies. I thought, that sounds like fun. And thus my quest to participate in one began. Unfortunately, all of the east coast rallies for the past 2-3 years have conflicted with other events I participate in. Then came the Void 7 and 2012. At first I had a conflict with an Autism ride I participate in each year. Then my riding buddy who I do an annual bike trip with had to move our annual trip up a week so it began on Saturday Oct 6. Our ride for this year was to start by heading down Skyline Drive and the Blue Ridge Parkway. I asked myself: where in the back woods of Virginia is Lynchburg anyway? A quick look at the map and my mind started thinking maybe, just maybe, I could start my annual bike trip off with a rally and have my buddy meet me in Lynchburg since that is about where we would likely stop anyway. A quick email and it was confirmed, I was going to participate in my first rally. All I had to do was register and get the paperwork in. I had a full 3 days before the deadline.

Of course, things cannot all go that smoothly. A week prior to the rally I decided to violate one of my cardinal rules: Don't attempt to fix something that isn't broke one week prior to leaving on a 3,000 mile trip. I had my GPS wired through my batter tender connector, and I decided to require my perfectly functioning GPS to free up my battery tender connector in case I needed to charge my cell phone while on the ride. I successfully rewired the GPS and decided to test everything. Flipped the ignition on and everything worked great, for a total of 10 seconds, when my auxiliary lights went out and the GPS went dark. Played around with the wiring and decided to stop before I broke something else. A few days later I figured I would take one more look at it, got out the trusty volt meter and wiring diagrams, checked relays, and poled and prodded. At last I decided to check the ground before giving up and when I pulled on the ground wire it was slack. Aha! I pulled the ground wire out when I tucked all the wires away. 5 minutes later I was back in business. And I had 3 days left.

I was also one of the Allentown starters. I was concerned that I may get stuck in traffic heading to Allentown in the morning I got a room at the Best Western with Hammy. After a semi-restful night's sleep we were up early and ready to go. Off to find a gas station with a good receipt. After hunting around, we settled on a Wawa. Got my gas at 8:54 and called in since I did not want to take the chance of fouling up the text. After that I waved good by to Hammy and was on my way to the first stop, Jim Thorpe. Of course I was wondering where Hammy was off to, but I figured that I would find out the next day. I knew right where Jim Thorpe was and it was an easy place to get to.

Got my picture, and was off to my second stop, The Heater from Van Meter in Cleveland OH. Yes, you read that correct. I chose to head out to Cleveland OH for the 49 point bonus. I had an uneventful trip across the state of PA and was even able to take my jacket off. Heading north in OH I noticed the sky did not look very friendly and the shoulders of the road were wet. Sure enough I started getting wet about 15 minutes out of Cleveland. Also noticed traffic heading out of the city was moving rather slowly at 3pm, also not a good sign. Got into town and was following my trusty GPS (with a current map), and noticed that it did not think I was on the road. A quick look down and I saw tarmac under the wheels so I knew the GPS was mistaken. When the road turned left and I needed to go right, I realized something was really wrong. Turned around, found a road going towards where I needed to go, and got to the stadium. Of course, the GPS thought I had already made my waypoint and was now showing me the way out of town. A quick stop and fiddling around with the GPS and I was back on track. Found the statue, took my picture, dropped all my papers in a puddle of water, and was back on my bike on my way out of town and headed for my next stop, the railroad station in Mars PA near Pittsburgh.

As I barreled down the OH Turnpike I check my gas situation and noticed my gas station choices were either 5 miles ahead or 30 miles ahead. Since I was 140 miles into my tank and I normally hit reserve

(yes, I have a carburetor) around 155-160 miles I decided I needed to exit before the PA border. Not sure what the problem was but there were 8 cars deep at the toll booth and they were not going anywhere. Waited for 5-10 minutes and figured my GPS had to be wrong about the next fuel stop, so I got back on the road. Crossed into PA and my fears were realized, my GPS was not wrong and there was no gas. I hit reserve and decided to go into conservation mode, so I slowed down and ducked behind a truck for some drafting. My fingers and toes ached from crossing them so hard, and I watched the miles tick away. At long last, I saw a sign for the exit with fuel, and began to think I may make it. Sure enough, I did. At the pump I added 4.359 gallons of gas into my 4.5 gallon tank. Checked the odometer and I had gone 191 miles, by far the furthest I had ever gone on a tank on my Sporty. From there I got to the railroad station after dealing with some traffic and got my picture. Saw another rider, said hello, and was on my way to the next stop, Lincoln Borough VFRC Hall.

Along the way it started getting dark. Found the coordinates and started looking for the hall. Drove up a driveway and my headlights crossed the front of the plaque. Shined my headlights on the plaque and counted the names 3 times and got the same result each time. Wrote down my numbers and was on my way to the 1937 gas station.

Road some great roads through WV on my way to the gas station, unfortunately it was way too dark to see them. Pulled over and let a pickup truck pass me and wound my way through the hills. Found the gas station and got my picture. It was really cool looking and wish I could have seen it in the daylight. As I was packing to leave a gentleman came up to me and said hello. Turns out he was the owner. We chatted for a bit and I explained it was a stop on a rally. He was very pleased to hear that and said if he had known he would have had it open and would have let people come in and check it out. I didn't want to take any more time to explain that most would likely not take the time since that would take even more time. I said goodbye and headed off to the Road Kill Café.

My trip to the Road Kill Café was uneventful other than coming across a few deer. Found the sign, got my picture, and was on my way to The Farnham Colossi. Other than having my GPS take me onto a 3 mile long dirt road, I found the coordinates without problem, however no Midas Man. Drove up a driveway and there it was, towering above me. After some creative positioning of my headlights, I was able to get a picture. Of course, it was 11pm and I left my bike running so I hope the people living in the house next door enjoy the sounds of a Harley idling next to them ☺. From there it was off to Mosby's Rangers HHM. Found that with no issues, and got back on the road to John Marshall Park. Followed my trusty Garmin and turned where it said to turn. Saw a sign for a 15mph speed limit and then another sign that said to proceed slowly, or something to that effect. Shortly thereafter the road turned to dirt. The GPS said only a few miles of this and there was no room to turn around so I continued. I decided to check the settings in my GPS and realized that I did not have any avoidances set. A tap with my finger and corrected the issue of my GPS sending me down dirt roads. Stopped for gas and realized it was about 2 am and I was getting a bit tired. Decided it was time for a break so I found a hotel, got a receipt, and got a room. Took the first 45 minutes winding down and going over my rally book entries, set my alarm for 4:30 am and closed my eyes for 90 minutes of sleep. Up and out with a little over 3 hours rest. Checking my schedule I saw I was about 20 minutes behind schedule but still on track to get in before 2 pm. Not bad.

Next stop was John Marshall Park. I read about this stop in my hotel and realized that it required a ½ mile trek each way through the woods to get to the monument. Now common sense says to skip this since: 1) I was already behind schedule, and 2) This would put me further behind schedule. Not sure why, maybe it was just stubbornness and not wanting to deviate from my plan, or lack of sleep, but I decided to do it. Got to the stop and started wandering about a field looking for a path. Found a sign, noticed the grass was trampled a bit, and headed off into the woods. 5 minutes into the woods my flashlight gave up making light, so I used the flashlight app on my iPhone. Half ran, half walked through the woods. Came to a Y and chose right, and 10 minutes later was wondering if I had chosen poorly. At long last, I came across the pyramid shaped monument and got my picture. Then I noticed the moon was bright enough that I could see so I did not need to waste the battery on my phone to make light. Got back to the bike around 6 am, now a full hour behind schedule. Off to the next stop, Orange County Airport. When I saw this on the list I just had to stop since I am a pilot and no pilot can go by an airport without checking it out.

Got to the airport and noticed what everyone else noticed, the FBO (Operations building) was empty. Walked around the building and saw a sign that said they had moved across the field. I thought, boy I need to use a restroom soon, and resisted the urge to do so. I found out later that I made a wise decision there. Got to the other side of the field and walked around the new FBO. No mailbox. I thought to myself, maybe I should give the rallymaster a call. Then I thought, no, after the trick of making us walk in the woods at Hohn Marshall Park this was just another test they were giving. And if the new guy calls saying he cannot find the mailbox they would be sure to laugh and hang up. So I kept looking. I saw the fuel tank farm next to the building and decided to take a quick look. And there, in front of the fuel tanks, about 2 feet off the ground, with its little flag up in the air signaling "Look at me", was a mailbox. Opened it up, grabbed the stamp, stamped the rally book, and was off to the next stop Knights of the Golden Horseshoe. Found the marker with little difficulty, saw another rallyer (2-up) getting his picture, and got mine after they had cleared the sign. From there it was off to Natural Chimney.

On the way to the Natural Chimney I ended up behind the same 2-up couple I saw at the last stop. Had a good ride through some nice twisties and got to the spot for the picture. There were a few other rallyers there and about 100 dirtbikes. Waited for a clear spot to get my picture and was off for FORE! The ride to the golf course was uneventful, found the sign, and was off for my next stop at Washington & Lee University.

At Washington & Lee University I noticed it was homecoming weekend. Traffic was heavy, and it seemed that regardless of what was going on no one wanted to come near the speed limit. I patiently crept along at 15 mph behind a car that had nothing but open road in front of him. When he turned another took its place. Finally, got to the coordinates, parked, and started hunting for the sign. Saw several, but not the right one. Hiked 100 yards up the street, nothing, Walked towards the campus, nothing. Walked down the street towards the way I came and saw another rider in front of the sign I had driven past without noticing. Got my picture and got back to the bike, now over 75 minutes late. Of on my way to Dino Girl, at a whopping 15 mph behind another car.

Got to Dino Girl and saw a few other rallyers there. Said hello, got my picture, and was off for my next stop, Roaring Run Furnace Gate.

As I was riding towards this stop I started thinking about my finish time and whether the points from the remaining stops would make up for getting in late. I decided to continue to the furnace gate, and then evaluate whether to skip the last stops. I ended up on Route 43 and saw a sign that the road was not recommended for RVs and campers and they should not follow their GPS (or something to that effect). I continued along and watched a 15 passenger van pulling a trailer full of canoes pull out in front of me. Great, here I am doing 30 mph and falling further behind schedule. Finally got passed him and continued on. As I neared the furnace gate I saw several other riders outbound on the gravel road. Crossed a little bridge as I entered the lot and WHAM! I had driven right into a large pothole. I distinctly heard something crack as I hit it. Stopped, got off the bike, made a quick check for damage and saw none. I realized that I was a bit sore, but no significant pain so the crack was not my spine. Shrugged it off, took my picture, looked at the time and the rally book, and made the decision to cut my losses and skip the last two stops and head back to the barn.

On the way back I rode some great roads including Route 43 mentioned above and then 501. Great road 501 was, winding up and then down the mountain. Saw a few other rallyers along the way and pulled into the hotel promptly at 13:45.

Tossed my stuff on the ground in the lobby of the hotel, updated my rally book and verified I had numbers in all the places I needed them, made sure I had my name and number on each page, copied my photos onto my laptop, sealed the envelope up, and turned it in. Time was 13:59! I made it.

Took a shower figuring I needed every advantage at the scoring table I could get. Got my ride scored and ended up with 525 points.

This was my first Rally and I had a blast. I learned a lot from this rally. I need to be more efficient in my stops. Most took way too long. Also, read the requirements for each bonus stop fully. Had I known ahead of time that JMP required a mile round trip walk in the woods I would have skipped it. And last, spend more time planning the route. I went through 10 variations before settling on the route I chose and was honestly shocked when I saw how many more bonus locations those ahead of me were able to get. Next time I will spend more time simply looking at all the bonus locations plotted and try to recognize better patterns for building a route.

I had three goals for the rally: 1) Not get a DNF, 2) Not be last, and 3) Have fun! I succeeded in all three and fully plan to be back!

Chris Comly
Rider #52

PS – As I was unpacking I was pulling my stuff out of my tour pack and found out what the crack was I heard at the furnace. It was the front two bolts being pulled through the bottom of the tour pack