

## The Void 12 Rally

### 10-Hour Edition

My name is John Ludeman, and this was my first-ever rally. This report will give you some insight into how I came to participate in this event, my preparations, planning and execution. I also will share some lessons-learned at the end of this report.

I am an avid reader and participant on the ADVRider forums (LudemJo). I have always been fascinated by the Iron Butt rides and rallies, so when Lance Whittemore started a thread titled “Road Rally nOOB – Now with more rallies & daytrippin”, I had to follow it. This was in 2015 after the IBR that year, which I had also followed on ADVRider and the IBA website. I wanted to enter The Void rally that year, but life sometimes gets in the way, and before I knew it, the entry deadline had passed. Oh well, maybe next year. Well I don’t know what happened, but 2016 passed without a thought of entering The Void rally that year.

Enter 2017, and another IBR year. Naturally, I followed the IBR on ADVRider as well as on the IBR webpage set up by the Iron Butt Association. Following this rally always gets my enthusiasm going, and I spoke to my wife and committed to riding The Void rally this year. Now I have to tell you that my wife thinks I am slightly crazy on some level. I tend to become a bit obsessed about things I get interested in. I have wood-carved birds for several years and traveled to the Ward World Championships in Ocean City, MD to compete, three times if I remember correctly. I bought many specialized tools that I still have to this day. I became quite active in the shot gunning sports for many years, shooting skeet, trap, and sporting clays. I attended several competitions in each discipline, and had a blast. Naturally, I bought high-quality Browning shotguns for each discipline, which I also still proudly own. So with this new interest, my wife is a little worried. Rightfully so, probably – we’ll see. At least I already owned a bike that was perfect for this mission, a 2015 BMW R1200RT.

So, I signed up for the rally and immediately started getting e-mails with stuff to do and paperwork I needed to complete. The instructions were very clear and complete, but things got slightly confused when I used my wife’s PayPal account to pay my entry fee. Somehow correspondence was being sent to her e-mail address. How did I find this out? Well, the Rallymasters had stressed the importance of reading comprehension and how much of a problem it would be if you didn’t have it, so as directed I read the news and updates section of The Void webpage often. One day I saw a posting that they had sent out something-or-another and if you didn’t get it to contact the rally masters. I did so, and found that they were using my wife’s e-mail address (I don’t know if she ever got them, but that is where they were being sent). So I got that all straightened out and all was well. By the way, major tip here, read everything closely. I did not have the levels of liability coverage required by the rules and had to bump up coverage in the weeks before the start. Reading comprehension is critical to your future rally success.

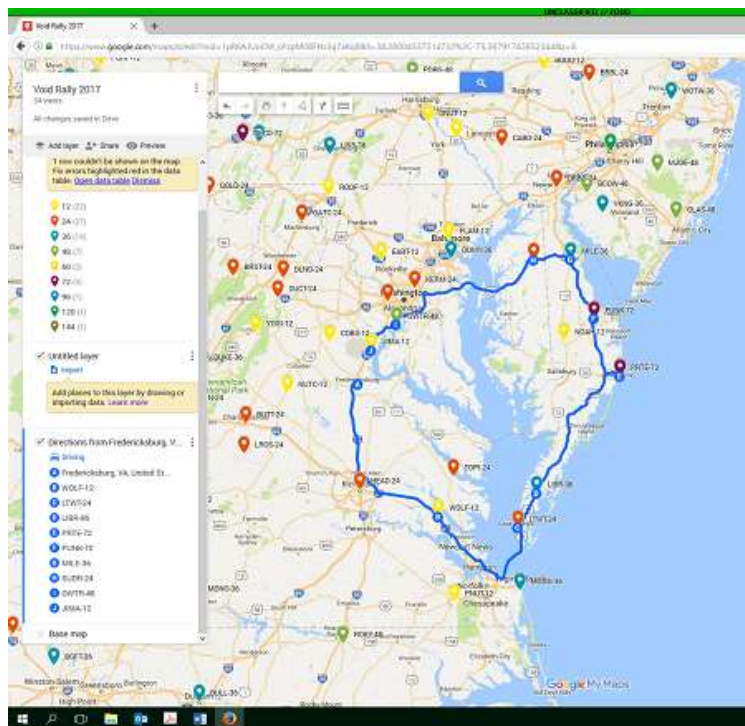
The next big milestone was the e-mail that would contain the bonus locations and point values, but that was a few weeks away, so I spent my time rereading Lance’s Road Rally nOOB thread on ADVRider. This was IMMENSELY helpful, and I really did not experience any surprises during this year’s rally because of Lance’s description. The IBR thread on ADVRider also was very helpful when several inmates there discussed mapping bonus locations using “My Google Maps”. Hearing all the stories about how difficult it was to use Basecamp, I decided I was going to use My Google Maps to determine a route. I did several tests to ensure I understood how to import data into My Google Maps and get points to show up on the map. This did wonders for my confidence.

So, the day finally arrived when the bonus e-mail was received (a day earlier than scheduled because of Hurricane Irma). As it arrived I was on my way to my daughter’s house to watch her two boys and their two dogs while they went away to NYC to celebrate their 5-year anniversary. With a 3-year old and 6-month old, as well as 4 dogs (we brought our two), my wife and I had our hands full, so there was no time to look at rally stuff. Monday morning, I fired up My Google Maps and imported the Excel file which I had added a column that combined the bonus location and point value. I used

this column as my point markers on the map so I could see both at a glance. There was one combo bonus which required visiting 5 bonus locations in order, either in ascending or descending order, without inserting any other bonus between. Each bonus was 36 points individually, with the combo bonus being 144 points, for a total of 324 points. Come to find out, these were points on the Lincoln Highway. I looked at it, but it sure looked like a long way up there in PA and I felt like that may take so much time that you would only be able to get that and would have to turn around a head for the barn. The idea of riding the Washington, D.C. beltway also weighed in to the decision, although that would ultimately be problematic for me as well. So, I decided to go somewhere else.

There were 84 bonus locations scattered from NC in the south, to PA in the north and as far west as Wytheville, VA and to the coast in the eastern direction. There was a big 96-point bonus in Exmore, MD (LIBR) on the Delmarva Peninsula that looked enticing. It was the second highest single bonus point value, with only the CPIN bonus in Philadelphia exceeding it with a value of 120. So I used the LIBR bonus location as the centerpiece of my route. With my lack of experience, I saw that bonus, as well as the two 72-point locations (PRTE and PUNK) on Delmarva as something that may be competitive. So, I built a route that would leave Fredericksburg on I-95 South to I-64 east, cross the Chesapeake Bay bridge/tunnel in Norfolk, north through the Delmarva peninsula to Dover then west across the Bay Bridge to the DC Beltway to Highway 1 in VA then back to the barn in Fredericksburg. I actually had originally designed this to go clockwise, but my worries about a traffic jam at the bay Bridge toll plaza made me rethink the route and go counter-clockwise around the Chesapeake Bay instead.

Ultimately my planned route was: WOLF, LTWT, LIBR, PRTE, PUNK, MILE, SUDR, GWTR, and JIMA. I wasn't 100% sure that this route was even executable in the time available, but I had some possible bail-out options with the counter-clockwise direction that I didn't have going the other way. So I was naively happy with my route and was committed to giving it a go. Note on the map shown below that the route is not a full circle. The reason is that in My Google Maps, you can only use ten points in your driving directions route. So, the return to Fredericksburg is implied. If I had developed a route with more bonus locations, this would have been a significant problem. Another reason to figure out how to use Basecamp before next year's event.



Finally, the rally weekend arrived. I kissed the wife and made my way after work from Leesburg, VA to Fredericksburg. The GPS told me the ride would take less than an hour and a half. Luckily I left early...

Who would of thunk that the traffic on Route 17 just to the west of I-95 would be bumper-to-bumper moving at 0.5 MPH for the 5 miles or so to get to the Interstate? I finally resorted to riding down the right hand turn lanes, making a right, then flipping a U-turn in order to make progress. It was ridiculous! I don't remember exact times, but my plan was to get to the hotel about 3:30 pm, and I got there around 4:30 or so, and a little frazzled. It is amazing how much heat is generated by all the cars sitting in a traffic jam idling. I was hot, and stressed when I showed up at registration.

Registration and check-in went smoothly and I had passed my first reading comprehension test, having everything I needed for the rally staff and well organized. As luck would have it, Lance was in the registration area as well, so we finally got to meet in person. A group of riders were getting ready to go to dinner and Lance asked if I would join them. I accepted, but needed to do a couple things first (like change out of my sweaty riding gear). He would meet me in the lobby shortly. Well, I was still a bit whacked-out from the ride in, so I had to make several trips back and forth between my bike and the room, which as luck would have it, were on the exact opposite sides of the facility from each other. This is probably a good time to mention that this hotel's layout is weird. You can't walk directly from one place to another without going up or down stairs, elevators, secret passageways, and key carded doors. Only a slight exaggeration, but some ladies asked me on my last day there how to get to the lobby from where they were and I told them the easiest way was to go outside and walk around the building. The thing that really messes you up is that most, if not all, of the external entrances to the building deposit you on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, of course my room and all the rally rooms were on the first floor (essentially underground). The place was nice enough, but the layout just took some time to figure out. Next year will be easier.

So, I finally walked around the building and Lance was just walking out of the lobby to go to dinner at Outback. Lots of friendly rally riders there, and we had a great time talking about the rally and motorcycling. I was finally coming down off the ledge from my ride in and was starting to relax a bit more. The next stop was the 7:00 pm Rider's Meeting. Bring your flag to the meeting or you don't get your rally book. Those words echoed in my brain – and no, I didn't forget it. The rider's meeting was short and sweet, with some edits to the rally book, and some instructions and clarifications regarding the non-riding bonuses, then we were sent out to read the book. The rallymasters were available to answer questions until 8:30 pm or so. I went back to my room and read the rally book for all the riding bonuses on my planned route and to be sure I understood the non-riding bonuses, then went and joined Scott for a cigar before bed. Thoroughly enjoyed smoking a cigar and hearing his stories, but soon it was time to get some rest.

Before I headed down to have the cigar I had taken a Melatonin to help me sleep, not that I was feeling any stress because honestly, I wasn't. I had the route planned, nothing else to do but ride it. However, when I laid down and closed my eyes, I was just lying there wide awake with my eyes closed. My mind was not racing with thoughts about the rally, I was not nervous about it, but sleep just would not come. Periodically I would open my eyes to see what time it was, and at 1:00 am I finally decided to just get up and get a shower. After the shower I laid down again and probably got a couple hours of sleep before the alarm clock went off at 4:00 am. I started the coffee-maker in the room and sat in bed and drank a couple cups of coffee before getting my riding gear on.

We had another rider's meeting/odometer check at 5:45 am before the 6:00 am start. Odometer checks were completed outside, then we headed downstairs to the Rally HQ room for a short chat. We were cut loose just a little before 6:00 am.

Finally riding. YES!!! Oh, but how do I get out of this parking lot? Yes, the parking lot is just as confusing as the hotel layout. The whole place is within this giant shopping center complex, and I got lost on the way in because I turned left to fill up with gas on my way in. Once on the left side of that road there was no easy way to cross back to where you were, so I had no idea how to get out of there. I had to ask, and they gave me the general idea. Then I got rolling with

another BMW RT rally bike behind me at the first light and guess what, the light would not recognize the bike and would not trip, so we both ran the light. After that minor issue, I turned south on to I-95.

Did I mention that it is dark at 6:00 am? I was riding down I-95, in the dark, thinking about deer. There was other traffic on the road, but those woodland rats scare me more in the dark than traffic does. Thankfully, by the time I got down to the Richmond area it was getting brighter as the sun came up. I turned onto I-295 around Richmond, and soon was traveling east on I-64. My first bonus location was the Great Wolf Lodge (WOLF) in Williamsburg. My first-ever bonus location, and it went pretty smoothly and I was on my way in less than 5 minutes.



I wanted to keep moving at this stage because I was concerned with traffic in the Norfolk area. 8:00 am on a Saturday is the time to go through there. Traffic was light and progress was interrupted only by the occasional traffic light once turning onto US-13 North. The Chesapeake Bay Bridge/Tunnel was beautiful and thankfully they did not strictly enforce the 55 MPH speed limit as numerous signs advised. One thing I noted in the tunnels was the temperature change. It is quite warm in the bottom of these tunnels, not sure why, but this is a piece of information you could probably ever know by riding a motorcycle through there. All too soon, the bridge was crossed and I was back on dry land.

After crossing the bridge my next bonus was LTWT, which happened to be a water tower in Cape Charles that is painted to look like a light house. As you might imagine, it was quite easy to find on the ride into the area. Stopped, did the paperwork, got my picture, and I am on my way to the anchor of my entire route.



LIBR is the 96-point bonus that was in Exmore, MD. It is a miniature Statue of Liberty outside a Liberty Tax office. This was the only place I ran into another rally rider. Unfortunately, I did not catch his name, but I suspect he was a 24-hour rally rider. Anyway, we chatted for a second or two, and I did my paperwork, took my pictures, and headed out to get gas. When I rode back past there heading further north he was still there. I was very happy with my progress at this point, and knew I was making good time. The next planned stop was PRTE, which was a 72-point bonus in Ocean City, MD.



Now, I need to back up here a minute and talk about the time we were sitting around waiting for the odometer checks. As the riders are standing around killing time and complaining about how little sleep they got (I wasn't the only one), somebody mentioned that Bike Week was going on in Ocean City this weekend. I can't remember exactly who told me first, but that could potentially be a huge problem. So after leaving LIBR, I set the GPS for PRTE and start riding. As I'm riding toward Ocean City I am seeing more-and-more big groups of riders going every which way. Then I ran into construction zones with those signs that warn of photo enforcement of the speed limits. So I am slowed down and thinking about Ocean City. I've been there, so I know there is basically one road through the city. That road was several

miles to the east of the northern route I was on, so there would be some time investment just to get to the main drag of Ocean City to see what it was like. If there was a slow moving parade of bikes clogging the road, I would have to turn around and backtrack, wasting at least 30 minutes. So, I decided to drop it. As I was riding through the construction zone I reached up and cancelled guidance to PRTE and started routing to PUNK. I hated passing up a 72-point bonus, but couldn't afford to waste time when I wasn't sure how close I would be at the end with my planned route. In hindsight, I wish I would have gone in to check it out, but it would not have changed the final results by much. I did see many, many groups of bikes all day on Delmarva, so the Ocean City Bike Week festivities were definitely a big deal.

So, it was a bit of a haul to PUNK from LIBR, 105 miles per Google Maps. Actually the time flew and I was there quickly. This was a welded metal statue of a tree house. It was very impressive and I would

have loved to stay longer to check out the Dogfish Head Craft Brewery and take the tour they were conducting when I was taking my pictures. Since I was parked in a non-parking zone, I quickly took my pictures, and then pulled up to a parking lot to do my paperwork and grab a drink and snack. This was my first drink of water since leaving Fredericksburg at 6:00 am, and I'm not sure how much water I had drank before leaving. I felt fine, but do not believe I was well hydrated or drinking enough. I rarely took my full-face helmet off at bonus stops, which makes it difficult to drink or eat. I will think of something different at least on the hydration front for next year. I ate about half of a protein bar and felt the tug of the clock, so I took off again bound for the MILE bonus in Dover, DE.



I really wanted to get this bonus. I had been stationed at Dover for over 6 years in the Air Force and met my wonderful wife there. Her father still lives there (shh, don't tell him I was in town and didn't stop to see him). I rode on the bypass around Dover and took the next exit after passing the racetrack which is very visible on the left side of the road. I had to go a short distance south on US-13 in traffic to get to the turn to the bonus, but it wasn't too bad. When I got to the track, the statue I needed to take a picture of was behind these vertical post barricades to keep cars out. The bike fit between them easily and I rode right up to the base of the Mile Monster statue. I did my paperwork and took my pictures and was on my way again. Of all the bonus pictures I took this was my favorite one.



My next stop was SUDR, which is a very small town called Sudlersville, MD that has a statue of a baseball player right in the middle of town. I don't recall the story behind it at the moment, but I took my pictures, did the paperwork and decided to fuel up again before heading back to the Washington DC area.



After filling up with gas, I was quickly on US-301 heading south toward the Bay Bridge. I have a Smart Tag on the bike, so tolls were not an issue anywhere on the route, though there is no toll to cross the bridge heading west. The bridge crossing and highway to the Capital Beltway, I-495, was smooth sailing. Turning south on I-495 was my worst nightmare come true. Traffic was crawling. Every lane was just inching along. If ever there was a temptation to lane split, this was the time. However, I have lived in the area to know that some road-rager would either run you over or shoot you, so I tried to be patient.

So about the time I have decided I am going to just forget the GWTR bonus and head straight to Fredericksburg, the traffic magically untangles and we are up to a decent cruising speed in an instant. I have no idea why, it just suddenly opens up and takes off. So, I am now back on my mission of getting to Highway 1 in Virginia and collecting the GWTR bonus for 48 points. Highway 1 is really surface streets, but traffic is moving fine and only hit a few red lights. I manage to find the giant water bucket easily, take pictures and do paperwork, and I am on the home stretch.



Highway 1 dumps you right onto I-95 South which was easy to navigate and traffic was heavy, but moving at a respectable pace. I rolled into The Void Rally HQ hotel at 3:58 pm, with plenty of time to finish up the paperwork and turn it in for scoring. Once I put everything in the envelope and sealed it, I turned it in to scoring. They said there are quite a few in front of you so she said she would call my cell phone when they were getting close to calling for me. This was GREAT! It allowed me to get my riding gear off, take a shower, and get ready for the banquet at 7:00 pm. After getting cleaned up, I grabbed some water and waited for scoring to call my rider number.



They finally called for Rider 82, and I went in to get scored. The scorer was very methodical, and thorough and we agreed on the total score of 432 points. I had not lost anything as a result of paperwork or pictures, so I am happy about that.

The banquet was fun, and I felt fully relaxed and at ease being off the clock. Scott was a great MC, and he deserves a huge amount of credit, along with Gary, for pulling this thing together. It was a pleasure meeting them both.

After the official ceremonies, I was able to get a look at the complete results and found that I had placed 8<sup>th</sup> out of the 11 10-Hour riders competing in this year's Void Rally. As hard as I rode, I was a bit disappointed in the results initially, but I learned some valuable lessons that will make me more competitive next year.

The ride home gave me time to think, and when I got home I contacted Marty Cover to ask if he would share his winning route. He graciously responded with not only his route, but also some additional helpful tips. Looking at his route, and the official standings, gave me some insights that I had not considered when planning my original route.

So, if you are a first time rider entering your first Void Rally and looking for tips like I was, listen up. First and foremost, read all the documents you get from the rallymasters via e-mail and all the information on the webpage. There is a lot of information there in black and white that will make your life easier if you are compliant, like insurance coverage minimums. I had to increase mine from the legal minimum in order to compete. I will leave them at that level now, but if my reading comprehension would have missed that it would have been embarrassing and super stressful. Read everything, then read it again.

Be sure you know how to use your camera, GPS, and routing tools. I downloaded the manual for my camera to be sure I understood setting the delayed shutter because at one point we were told we would need to be able to take a full length picture of ourselves. I also brought a tripod for this purpose, but didn't need it for the bonuses on my route. For some reason, I was unable to build a custom route in my GPS, so my workaround was to program each bonus as a favorite and select them one at a time. This worked well, and I was confident that I was being routed correctly and it wasn't trying to take me back to a bonus location that it thinks I missed. My Google maps worked well except for the limitation on how many points you can route to in a continuous string. Not a huge problem, but it was a frustration at times. I'm sure this is not a problem with something like Basecamp. I may spend the next year trying to figure out how to use that program.

I was pleased with my performance at the bonuses, I had my Rider's Log on a clipboard, and would enter the date, time, and mileage, put the clipboard back in the top box, shoot my picture with the camera that was hanging from my neck, then put the flag back in the top box. Doing this probably took me less than 5 minutes, because I did not take off my helmet, just my gloves. The down side of this is that it is tough to drink water wearing a full face helmet, so I didn't drink as much water as I should have. I need to work out something better next year. A modular helmet is probably the best solution, and keep the water easily accessible. Doing all of this made finishing up my paperwork at Rally HQ before scoring a breeze.

Routing. OK, here is where my biggest mistake was and the biggest revelation I had after looking at Marty's route and the data shown on the official rally results posted elsewhere on this site. I thought the focus of this was time management, and it is, but there is something more. Do you want to be competitive? The name of the game isn't high point bonuses alone, but how many points per mile you are earning. Some will think this is so obvious, which it is, the person with the most points wins. The subtle distinction between going after high point value bonuses and building a plan that MAXIMIZES the points earned for the miles traveled is what separates the winners from the rest of us. My points per mile was 0.87, Marty's was 1.27. Marty rode 42 miles more than I did, but earned 252 more points. I hit 7 bonus locations, Marty hit 14, and not all of them were high point value bonuses, some were 12 points. The name of the game is point density. You are trying to get the most points for the distance you travel. My route had some big point values individually, but too many miles between those bonuses. You need to plan a route where you are stopping

often to collect a bonus, or it had better be a BIG bonus. Don't pass up small bonuses to get to a big one. Take all those bonuses enroute too. The scale may change for next year' rally, and you will need 100 points per mile because the bonus point values are larger, but still the goal is the same, the higher your points per mile planned route is, the more competitive you will be. Tips from a noob, take it for what it's worth.

Many, many thanks to Lance for planting the seed and offering advice and support, and hearty congratulations for his 3<sup>rd</sup> place finish. I am also indebted to Marty for providing me his winning route and some other helpful tips. Congratulations Marty on your win, it was very well-deserved. The Rallymasters and staff were outstanding, and I would like to thank them again for orchestrating this great event. Scott, cigars again next year on Friday night? Lastly, I would like to thank all the other participants that welcomed me to the community and offered their advice and help. It was a great experience, and I very much look forward to competing again next year.

John