

Here is my report from the Void 8 Rally. This was my second rally, with the Void 7 last year being my first. I have learned a lot in the past two rallies and my hope is that I can remember my mistakes so I don't make them too many times in future rallies.

Friday after work I head home, toss my clothes in the Tour pak of my Sportster, and head out in the rain to meet up with the Pottstown crew for dinner. The typical 45 minute ride is taking forever, however I am on schedule to get there by 6:30 when we were meeting. As I near Pottstown I glance down and see this little red light on the speedometer of my normally trusty Sportster. Uh oh, why do I have a low voltage light? I flick off my aux lights and it goes out. Flick them on and it comes on. Not good. Traffic stinks so I elect to join everyone for dinner, and then head home to swap bikes. Not a good way to start, but at least I have a spare bike! Unfortunately, it is a 1996 Heritage Softail which is my "nice" bike and is not set up for touring, so I need to jury rig my tank bag so it fits and find a way to route power for my second GPS. After 45 minutes I am back on the road to Pottstown. At least the sky has cleared so maybe I will have a dry rally. I heard that laugh!

Saturday I wake, head out to the gas station that I picked and wait. Fortunately I had checked it out the night before and found the time stamp on the pump was a minute late, so I waited till my GPS said 8:51 and I started the pump. It stopped and printed a receipt that said 8:50:45. Made my call in and was off to the Pottstown YMCA which was less than a mile away. Grab my photo and I'm off towards a gun shop. Pick that up and the flower store a mile down the road and that bonus is done, still right on schedule. Wait, no I am 10 minutes ahead of schedule since I started at 8:50 but my schedule is for 9:00, sweet! Head towards Philly for the PEN-B bonus at the Tower Theater and when I am almost there I get in the wrong lane so it's around the block I go. Get to the theater and have to park in a place where I cannot get a photo of the sign, so I hop off the bike and cross a street, grab my photo, hop on the bike, and I'm off. I've lost 2 minutes due to getting off the bike, not bad and I expected that would occur at a few stops. However, the flaw in my route planning should have become evident at this point, however I did not realize it yet. I was not on a highway, I was on a secondary road. I get to the next location and have forgotten what I am taking a photo of, so a quick read of the rally book and I realize I am looking for a music note in the sidewalk. I look down and no sh@#, there is one right next to my foot! Photo is taken and I am off to the Motel 6. I have lost a few more minutes. Get to the Motel 6 and a flaw in my flag rig becomes evident since the wind is making my flag blow all over and I cannot get a photo of it. Two binder clips and a convenient stick corrects that, but I have now lost my 10 minute cushion. I'm off to Live at the Queen in Wilmington. Get there and get my photo, but now my route totally falls apart as I am secondary streets to the Buffalo Wild Wings. Why on earth didn't I find one closer to the highway? Get that and back on the secondary roads to a Cracker Barrel in Newark DE. Of all the stupid things, I picked the one Cracker Barrel that is NOT next to an Interstate! Oh, and the University of Delaware had a football game which I was going right past, fortunately I was late enough so everyone was already parked and only had to stop for people crossing the road. Yes, I have now been hit on the head several times by a 2X4 and now have learned my lesson. I will not route over secondary roads during daytime unless I have exhausted all other options! I will not route over secondary roads during daytime unless I have exhausted all other options! ...

I finally find my way to that marvelous parking lot, err highway, called I-95. I head south towards Baltimore for BAL-B to get a picture of a High school sign. My route has me on 895 and getting off at exit 6. Exit 6 comes up and it's closed! I then experienced what I would assume fighter pilots call "Target Fixation" Rather than simply write off the bonus as something beyond my control and except the much needed time I am getting back, I decide to get off at the next exit and continue on for the bonus. Of course I am now backtracking, through secondary roads. I finally get to the bonus location which is a school and get my photo, but the detour has cost me almost 20-30 minutes! Lesson 2 learned! Now I need to make up time and the only way to do so is drop something, so the first casualty is the CAP-MD bonus which once dropped puts me back on schedule(for the moment). Hop on I-95 heading south again and the next stop is the COL bonus. Hmm, where in Columbia am I going? Great, I neglected to identify a location to actually pick up this bonus. Some creative playing with my GPS and I have a location, however it would have been much smarter to identify the location ahead of time. Lesson 3 learned! Plus I end up taking the wrong exit so it's a 15 minute tour of Columbia as travel in big circle until I can find my way towards DC and the WAS-B bonus.

Remember lesson 1 about secondary roads? Well this was the final 2X4 blow as I was heading into the heart of DC on a Saturday afternoon. While I am being beaten senseless by lesson 1 I decide to go for the CAP-DC bonus. Problem is, I did not actually PLAN on a specific location for the receipt or photo I need. It is surprisingly hard to find a gas station or post office in DC when you really want one, so I ended up in quagmire of DC streets trying make my way to a post office. Surprise, there is a gas station on the correct side of the road so I duck in and give a squirt of gas in the tank, but no receipt! Go inside and get one, back on the bike, and I am moving. Fight my way to the location of the bonus and see the object I need to photograph, a sailor. Great, I can grab this one from the bike! Oh wait, it moved, that is a real sailor! Thinking the scorer would recognize the difference and that I would more than likely lose the appeal, I grab my flag and hoof it down to the real statue for a photo. As I got out my camera and held out my flag I started getting dirty looks from the couple taking turns photographing each other next to the statue. I decide to wait for the young lady to move rather than explain to her rather large husband/ significant other why I am wearing a helmet holding a white flag on the end of a stick while taking a picture of his female companion. Back on the bike moving again headed for Springfield VA to complete the Buffalo Springfield bonus. GPS says to get in the HOV lanes but I suspect the northbound traffic that was already there would not appreciate having me there as well so I stay in the normal travel lanes. I see the exit coming up on the GPS and the Garmin lane assist says it's a left exit so I move left only to watch the exit go by on my right side. Fixating on that bonus I am off at the next exit working my way to an undefined location to get a photo. Some creative searching on the GPS reveals a post office not too far away so I grab my photo and am off headed south on 95 which by now is stop and go. I get the JCS bonus and get my photo being sure to get the base and top as stated in the rally book. The rain is starting to come down hard so I quickly put on my raingear. Back on 95 and traffic is a nightmare as it was stop and go all the way down to the Fredericksburg exit where I get off and head towards my next bonus. Make my next stop at BCM and take my photo. Something distracted me and rather than put my camera back in my tank bag I place it on the roll bag on my pillion. Head off

to ORG and am sickened when I reach into my tank bag and no camera. I scratch my head trying to remember where I put it and there it is right where I left it on top of my roll bag! From there I grabbed MUS, DAU, boni and sent my text. By now I was an hour late so I had to drop MIN and its 39 points from my route but I was back on schedule (again!) Grab HWD and then head into Charleston WV for CAP-WV. Again, my failure to plan exactly where I was getting my photo or receipt hit me big time. Approaching the city I checked my location and was told I was in the city limits, so I searched out a gas station and there was one ½ mile away. Perfect, added it as a waypoint to the GPS and I was off at the next exit and see two of them so I pull in. As I am doing so I notice my GPS says I am 10 minutes from my stop. That's odd! I check my location and I am in some other town. I then notice the river next to me and the lights on the other side and realize the gas station I selected was on the other side of the river. Rather than hop on I-64 I elect to follow my GPS on secondary roads which is not too bad at 11pm with no traffic. That is until 5 miles down the road it was closed due to a nasty accident, so I need to backtrack 5 miles to get on the highway with more time lost. Get gas at a 7-11 and the receipt shows I am at store XXXX but no location! While searching for a Post Office for a photo I spy a bank so I finally get my receipt at the ATM. My wanderings have cost me 45 minutes! From there I picked up MAT, KEN-A & B with DLA, TTH, KWS, and LOL. Finally get to my hotel in Pikesville KY and my rest bonus at 4:35, over an hour late. Got the odd look when I said that I would not need a late checkout and headed to my room where I got some much needed rest and went over my paperwork. It was then that I realized that I had no choice but blow off the remaining four locations of my route and head back to the finish another 158 points gone. Got my envelope at 2:50, and turned it in at 2:58.

At scoring things went well and I did not lose any points. Final total was 1441 points, and I skipped 258 points due to my poor route planning. I knew my schedule was aggressive and would be tough. In the end, I am happy with my performance. I planned a route that would have scored enough points to put me in contention and most of my bonus stops were 2 minutes or less. I learned a lot and vow not to make the same mistakes next time. And I had fun doing so!