

# *Distance Riding with Bruce*

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**July 2011**

## **IRON BUTT RIDE #53** *In the Sand and On the Shoulder*

At 1:28am ET on Tuesday, 1 June 2011, I logged an ATM slip in SoBe marking the successful completion of what should be certified as my 6<sup>th</sup> SaddleSore 2000 and 53<sup>rd</sup> Iron Butt Ride on which I covered a distance of 2,144 miles in 32 hours 12 minutes road time and 43 hours 7 minutes total time. My route for Day 1 was from San Antonio TX west on IH-10 to Fort Stockton TX, then north on FM-1053 through Imperial TX to IH-20, then back east to Shreveport LA and finally south on IH-49 to Alexandria LA for a total of 1,053 miles. My route for Day 2 was from Alexandria south on IH-49 to Lafayette LA, then east on IH-10/IH-12/IH-10 to Jacksonville FL, then finally south on IH-95 to Miami Beach FL for a total of 1,091 miles.

### **Day 1: San Antonio TX to Alexandria LA, the Long Way (1,053 miles)**

A cool and gentle Hill Country breeze was blowing as I logged the pre-dawn start of my Memorial Day ride by pulling a gas receipt at the pumps of a 24-hour Alamo City c-store. Soon after a stop for bad coffee but good jerky in Junction, however, that gentle breeze from the south turned into a wild West Texas wind that was literally howling by the time I exited for gas at a dying truck stop in Ozona. Shortly after I pulled out of there, the incessant buffeting from that wicked chiflon ripped the left-side lacing out of my riding vest and forced me to pull over and make a quick roadside repair with the white string out of a packed tennis shoe. This was much like what happened to me near Road Forks NM on my **100 CCC Insanity** ride a few years ago, but at least this time I didn't lose my favorite bandanna...

An hour or so later I reached Fort Stockton and turned north on FM-1053 towards Imperial, where I planned to stop for a brief inspection of a small patch of mesquite and sage I bought there in better times. Landmarks made it easy to find the turn right onto the unpaved road, but from there I had to rely on a printed Google map, my odometer and a cheap handheld GPS to guide me the 3 miles or so to the tract:

The first two and a half miles of bladed caliche was no picnic but passable, and brought me to an expected fork in the road. I stopped there for water and to get my bearings. The surrounding terrain was pancake flat, so all I could see was an endless span of six-foot tall emerald green mesquite sprouting out of a sea of soft Imperial sand. The GPS readings clearly mandated I take the right fork, however, so I pushed off in that direction. After going a few yards, I noticed that the road's hard caliche surface was rapidly giving way to the almost down pillow soft sand. A few yards more and I stopped, realizing with chagrin that I had passed the point where there was still enough contiguous caliche to turn Hidalgo around.

*Damn!* I had no choice then but to put my fully loaded Harley in neutral, grab hold of the grips, plant my boots in the sand, and start pulling her back. Each exertion bought me a foot or two, so long as I kept the rear wheel in its tracks. And with each error in targeting, I had to gently power forward and start again. *Aim, plant and pull. Aim, plant and pull. Over and over and over.* With a scorching West Texas midday summer sun bearing down on me the whole time...

Finally--after a few minutes that felt like a few hours—I managed to pull Hidalgo back the hundred feet or so necessary to reach a patch of caliche wide enough to turn her around. Then with quivering legs and shaking hands, I brought down the sidestand, eased off the bike, guzzled some water, waited a few minutes for my chest to stop pounding, and openly thanked a merciful God for once again saving me from my own stupidity.

Eight minutes more got me back to asphalt. Eight hours more got me all the way east across the Lone Star State to Louisiana, and safely south to my scheduled stop for the night in Alexandria.

## **Day 2: Alexandria LA to Miami Beach FL, the Hard Way (1,091 miles)**

Despite a good night's rest in a comfortable but costly room at the Alexandria Best Western, the beginnings of a summer cold had me moving a little slowly on Tuesday morning. Nevertheless, I was in the saddle by 8:25am CT and had made it across a flooded Atchafalaya Basin and muddy Mississippi River into Baton Rouge barely two hours after that. From there east on IH-12 then IH-10, I had several hours of summer heat and monotonous mile-eating to endure, but the many holiday weekend speed traps along the way gave me plenty of incentive to stay alert despite my feeling a bit under the weather. And on *this* day, that proved to be a lifesaver:

I was just west of Tallahassee on IH-10 when I topped a rise to see both lanes filled with cages and moving slowly because of a blue-light wolf-pack sitting ready to pounce from their perch on the crest of the next hill. I slowed to about 65mph as well, and eased into the right lane just as an eighteen wheeler came up in the left. And as soon as we cleared the revenue raising gauntlet, the trucker began to accelerate. That was no surprise, as I was about to do the same thing. What WAS a surprise, though, was when I saw the right blinker of his tractor come on as he started turning fast and hard into my lane.

*Damn!* I quickly calculated that wide open I couldn't shoot the gap and clear his tractor, and hitting the brakes wouldn't guarantee I'd miss a swat from his trailer. I had nowhere to go, except off the road. So I did...

Standing on the pegs, I swerved hard to the right, took about a two-inch drop from the road to the shoulder, then leaned back left to straighten her up and keep my front wheel aimed at the middle of the narrow strip of pavement I had to work with. Fortunately, there were no debris or obstructions along that stretch, so despite being run off the road I was still safe and in full control of the bike. I must have recognized that--or been temporarily insane--because my next move was not to hit the brakes but open the throttle. And as soon as I caught up with and passed the negligent bastard who'd almost killed me, I stood on the pegs again, jumped back up on the road right in front of him, and commenced "communicating" my displeasure...

I should have done more. *Much more.* But as the adrenalin of the moment dissipated, so did my rage and cold-reduced energy level. And as reason returned, so did my focus on completing this SaddleSore 2000 within the time allotted.

Until next time, Ride Long, Ride Free!

Bruce ;-)

Bruce Arnold ... record-holding long distance motorcycle rider ... disappointed bikers' rights activist but proud member of The 100 ... disillusioned political agitator targeting social injustice and piercing the veil of our two-puppet system to expose the institutionalized greed of the Kleptocracy pulling all strings Left and Right ... like Thomas Jefferson, an aficionado of ethnic aesthetic and a philosophical anarchist who accepts the State as a necessary evil under which the best government is less government. Follow Bruce at <http://LdrLongDistanceRider.com> and <http://IronBoltBruce.com>