

THE **ABC**_S OF RUNNING A LONG-DISTANCE RALLY

By David E.B. Smith

Many long-distance rally riders have wondered what it's like to be on the other side of the scoring table, gleefully denying points. Some riders have finished rallies thinking, "I could put on a better rally than that." Some have even expressed that opinion to a rallymaster and been told, "If you think you can put on a better rally, knock yourself out," but in more colorful verbiage. Some riders want to cut back on rally riding for reasons of health, age, accomplishment of personal goals, or real life getting in the way, but don't want to drop out of the long-distance riding community. And some riders have ideas for really cool rallies that they just wish

somebody would do, but nobody has. So how do you make the leap from rally rider to rallymaster?

LEARNING CURVE

First of all, you should ride in every rally you can, but don't just pay attention to coming up with the winning route. Pay attention to what the rallymaster and staff are doing. A painter needs to learn how to hold a brush and mix colors before painting a masterpiece. You need to understand the fundamental mechanics of how a rally works before you can put one together. Notice how many volunteers are working on the rally and what they're doing. Catalog everything that is handed out by the rally

PHOTO BY RICK CORWINE



Because of the potential risks in running a rally, taking the leap from rider to rallymaster is a decision not to be taken lightly.

staff, from T-shirts to route sheets to trophies; consider that it all has to be bought or made or assembled or ordered or sorted; and think about how that happens. View everything around you as if you were watching that TV show “How It’s Made,” because you want to learn how a rally is made. Even if you can’t ride in every rally, volunteer to help out on someone else’s rally, and pay attention to what’s going on behind the curtain.

WEIGHING THE RISKS

When you have a handle on the mechanics of how rallies work, and you still think putting on a rally sounds like fun, give some very serious thought to the responsibility you’ll be taking on. Whether it’s competitive long-distance riding or simply putting around the neighborhood, motorcycling is an inherently dangerous sport. Even though long-distance riders tend to be more experienced, better protected, and generally safer riders than most, bad things can and sometimes do happen when people ride motorcycles. If something bad happens to a rider in your rally, even through no fault of yours or the rider, you will feel morally responsible, and you may find yourself legally responsible. You know that feeling of dread when it’s 2:00 a.m. and the phone rings? Imagine the feeling of dread when it’s 2:00 a.m. the phone rings, and you’ve just sent 100 riders out roaming around in the night.

You’ll have to find your own way to handle the moral questions. The legal questions, on the other hand, have some fairly simple answers. Now at this point I have to provide a disclaimer: I am a lawyer, but I’m not your lawyer. I can’t provide legal advice, but I can strongly suggest that you talk to your own lawyer who can determine the best approach to protecting you in your particular situation.

There are a lot of potential risks involved in putting on a rally. Obviously, if a rider is injured, there can be medical expenses that someone will have to pay for, and you and your rally will

be on the list of potential deep pockets. Less obviously and less likely, but potentially more serious, a rider could injure a third party who’s not connected to the rally at all — Bob Higdon’s nightmare scenario of a rider crashing into a car full of nuns comes to mind. There’s also the risk of rally staff or spectators getting injured (it’s apparently not uncommon for spectators at bicycle races or triathlons to get run over by speeding bicyclists and runners). We all know riders who have been hurt in simple parking lot tip-overs, and we all know how heavy a fully-farked rally bike is. Imagine if it were a curious spectator (or a spectator’s child) who had that behemoth rally bike topple over on them. Then there are risks you’ve never thought about. You could have a dispute with your T-shirt maker over whether you’ll pay for the lousy T-shirts he printed, your riders could get food poisoning at the finishers’ banquet, or some competing organization with a lawyer on retainer could decide your rally’s name sounds too much like their rally’s trademarked name.

MITIGATING THE RISKS

There are a few simple steps you should take (with the help of your own lawyer) to protect yourself against legal risks. First, the rally should be its own legal entity, typically a corporation or limited liability company (LLC). This helps insulate your personal assets from liability for anything you do (or fail to do) in connection with the rally. It’s very important that you treat the rally as a separate company and keep records showing that you’ve done so. For example, you shouldn’t pay your personal credit card bills from the rally bank account. If you have rally expenses that you’ve advanced, document them and write yourself a check on the rally account for reimbursement.

Another important way to mitigate risk is insurance. Most people think of insurance simply as protection against a claim by someone who is injured, which it is. But much more valuable is the insurance company’s duty to defend you against claims. Even



Holding a rider’s meeting is mandatory. It ensures that riders and staff know what’s expected of them and is the last opportunity the rallymasters have to remind riders that their first priority is to return home safe.

PHOTO BY RICK CORWINE



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a completely frivolous claim can cost a lot of money to defend, and your insurance company will pay for lawyers to do just that.

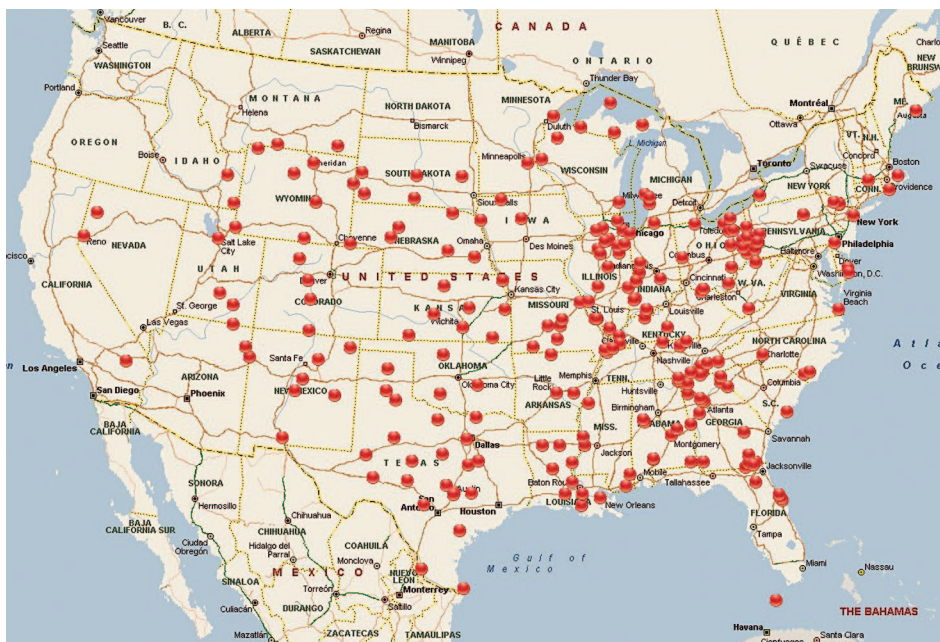
Your rally should have its own insurance coverage. Unfortunately, it's difficult to find a policy in the market that will cover this type of event. The best option right now, and the best-tailored policy you can probably find, is coverage through the American Motorcyclist Association

(AMA). The hitch to this is that it's only available to AMA chartered clubs or organizations. So if you are part of an AMA chartered club, or can affiliate with (or have the event sponsored by) an AMA chartered club, you can get insurance through the AMA. The AMA policy is actually written with motorcycle events in mind, so it covers participants, spectators, bystanders, and even things such as getting sued because you kicked a rider out of your rally. At the time of writing, a \$5 million policy for a one-day event with 50 or fewer riders is only \$84, which is cheap peace of mind.

You should also consider an insurance requirement for riders, to provide even more protection for them and for you. Many 24-hour rallies don't have such a requirement, but Team Strange rallies do and multi-day rallies such as the Iron Butt Rally and Butt Lite have specific requirements for coverage. For example, Butt Lite requires each rider to have a liability policy with \$250,000/\$500,000 or \$300,000 CSL limits (ask your insurance agent what this means), and the policy must cover the rider and the specific motorcycle ridden in the rally for the duration of the rally. Again, it's the insurer's duty to defend that is as important, if not more important, than the coverage — in this case, the duty to defend the rider from any claims based on the rider's acts.

In recent years, the Iron Butt Rally and Butt Lite have also required riders to carry medical evacuation coverage, such as MedJet Assist. Medical evacuation coverage pays to transport a hospitalized injured rider home, often on a private air ambulance. I've seen friends who had this coverage get whisked in an ambulance to the airport, loaded into a private jet and then to a waiting ambulance to their home hospital.

Bonuses for the Butt Lite 7 Rally — it helps to see everything on a map when planning a rally.



And I've seen friends who didn't have this coverage try to ride cross-country in a car or on a commercial flight with surgically-repaired broken limbs and a fistful of Vicodin. Any rider who rides more than 100 miles from home should have this coverage anyway, for their own protection and their family's peace of mind. Requiring rally riders to have it removes a huge weight from the rallymaster's shoulders.

PRE-RALLY PLANNING

After all that doom and gloom, if you still haven't been dissuaded, it's time to start actually working on putting together a rally. The first step is something you can do immediately without any particular idea about dates or locations or a rally theme: start scouting potential bonuses. My Butt Lite co-rallymasters are tired of hearing the mantra ABC, Always Be Collecting. Any time you go for a ride, any time you travel to another part of the country, you should be ready to find, collect and catalog rally bonuses. If you don't get ahead on bonus scouting, you'll find you have an even more daunting task ahead of you once you decide on dates and locations and a theme and have to scout all those bonuses. Consider how hard it is, in a 24-hour rally, to get to 5 or 10 or 15 bonuses. Then consider the task of having to get to *every* bonus in a rally. Which, as the rallymaster, you pretty much have to do at some point. So you're better off giving yourself a head start.

So how can you be *Always Be Collecting*? From your rally riding experience, think about everything you have to do at a bonus. You have to get to the location, find the bonus, and document it. Where is it? What are the GPS coordinates? How do you get to it? What directions will unambiguously get a rider there who's never been there before? What do you have to do to collect the bonus? Can you get a good photo? Is there a question that can be answered at the bonus, or is there a good receipt available? What are the restrictions on the bonus: Is it invisible in the dark or closed at certain times? Keep in mind that you will probably be running all over the country anyway to put together your rally, so if you can collect enough information about potential bonuses so that you don't have to go back there again, you've saved yourself a lot of time and effort (which will

Butt Lite 7 – Leg 2 - Texas to Minnesota

149) Akron, OH 276 points 24 hours WG-AKRON

Whispering Giants are a series of public art sculptures depicting Native Americans and Canadian First People by the Hungarian-born artist Peter Wolf Toth. The artist uses a hammer and a chisel as the basic tools to create his sculptures. Before starting work on a Whispering Giant, Toth confers with local Native American tribes. The sculpture created is the artist's vision of a composite of all the physical characteristics, especially the facial features, of the local tribe or tribes, infused with their stories and histories.

To what chiefs was this Whispering Giant dedicated?

65 N Meadowcroft Dr., north side of Market St., at the Resnik Community Learning Center. 41.11666, -081.58526

150) Bethany Beach, DE 867 points 24 hours WG-BB

Whispering Giant Chief Little Owl.

Get a photo of Whispering Giant Chief Little Owl.

In the median of Garfield Pkwy east of Coastal Hwy (Delaware Ave). 38.53822, -075.05888

151) Buckhead, NC 343 points 24 hours WG-BUCK

This Whispering Giant stands at the Waccamaw Reservation.

Take a photo of the Whispering Giant statue near the day care center.

Old Lake Road. 34.37268, -078.40362

152) Charleston, SC 401 points 9 am - 6 pm WG-CHARL

The Whispering Giant of Charleston is located at the original site of the first permanent English settlement in Carolina in Charles Towne Landing park.

There is a \$10 fee to get in the park which is paid at the Visitor's Center. Follow the signs to the Animal Forest - about a 5 minute walk to "Landing Brave".

Take a photo of Whispering Giant "Landing Brave".

1500 Old Towne Rd. 32.80782, -079.98415

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Verifying the bonuses can be tedious, but is critically important. This is the first of eight pages just for the second leg of the Butt Lite 7 Rally.

become more precious as the rally draws near).

Now you're at the point where you'll want to start nailing down the specifics of your rally: length (8 hours, 24 hours, multi-day?), dates, location (where will you start and finish and where will checkpoints be?), thematic aspects (famous movies, Presidents, strip clubs, dead rock stars?), and rally style (easy for beginners, hard for experts, serious or wacky?), to name just a few. This is a good time to reach out to other rallymasters for input. You'll find that rallymasters are happy to help each other out, and will share their wisdom and answer stupid questions, but also are as fiercely protective of their own rallies as of their children. You don't want your rally to conflict with other rallies, because it won't do anybody any good. The long-distance community, and your potential rally audience, simply isn't big enough to support conflicting rallies.

If you schedule your rally for Memorial Day on the East Coast, or the Summer Solstice in Minnesota, you probably won't draw enough riders away from established rallies to make yours worth doing, and if you do, you'll probably only draw enough to ensure that two rallies fail.

You'll also need to have some flexibility in dates and locations based on the availability of facilities. If you pick gradu-

ation weekend in a small college town, your riders will be sleeping in the town park because there won't be any hotel rooms available. Expect this part of rally planning to be a repetitious process — pick some dates, see what facilities are available, try a different hotel or a different date, and repeat until satisfied.

Once you have dates nailed down, you should build a schedule, working backwards from your rally dates, of your critical preparation deadlines. Talk to your vendors and find out lead times on things such as rallybook printing, T-shirts, trophies, stickers and thumb drives. Set your ordering deadlines accordingly. If you're having a rally banquet, find out when you need to have a head count and when you have to pick the menu. If there's a hotel involved, find out when they'll cut off any group rate, when reservations have to be made, and what your cancellation deadline is. Include your internal rally events in the schedule. If riders are leaving at 6 am Saturday, work backwards and set the times for dinner the night before, for handing out rally packs, for registration, and for volunteers to show up. Include resources in the schedule. If you want to have a room for scoring starting three hours before the finish and a separate room for riders to do their paperwork, call that out.

RALLY EXPENSES

As you're working on scheduling, also work on your budget. At the Rally Master 101 seminar at the 2014 InterNational Meet in Denver, Colorado, one of the questions was, what big rally expenses keep you up at night? The answer was none, because for Butt Lite, we have all the numbers nailed down before we set the rally fee. Again, this is where experience as a rider or worker in rallies is so valuable. Think about everything that was handed out or given away or mailed to you or anything that you participated in. It all cost something.

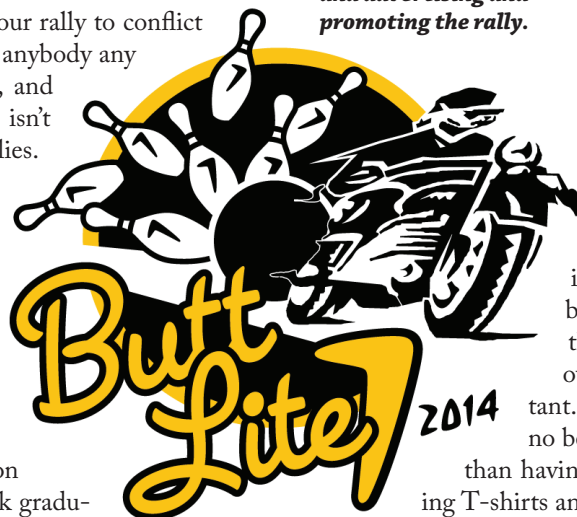
Unless you get really lucky finding sponsorship or unless you're particularly generous in subsidizing riders, your entry fees will be the only income for the rally. So the goal in setting your rally budget is to come up with a cost per rider, which

Part of establishing a rally budget should include planning for swag, trophies, food, travel, accommodations, insurance, and advertising and promoting the rally.

will determine your entry fee. Some expenses (such as rally T-shirts) will be a straight cost-per-rider, and some (such as meeting room rental) will be general expenses that you need to distribute among the expected number of riders. You should figure out the cut-off number at which there aren't enough riders to make the rally viable.

The possible range of rally expenses will vary greatly depending on what exactly you want to do, but here is a list of likely expenses.

Rally swag, including T-shirts, stickers, pins, mugs, hats, pens, playing cards, sunglasses, staplers, toothbrushes, and temporary tattoos are a few things I've brought home from rallies over the years. Good rally swag is important. As Eddie James once observed, there is no better free advertising for your next rally than having riders show up at other rallies wearing T-shirts and other gear promoting your rally. »



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Plan for rally gear such as rally flags or towels (numbered) and thumb drives for data files (allow time for loading the files onto the thumb drives or use a vendor such as CFGear.com who will load the files for you).

Trophies can be shockingly expensive. Will you have them for top finishers, for all finishers, or for all riders? Do you want them personalized with the riders' names (even more shockingly expensive)?

Don't forget rally food such as a start banquet, finish banquet, breakfast at the start of the rally, and snacks for riders. Read the fine print on the food service menu and look closely for extra service fees, added gratuities, and taxes.

Include facilities such as meeting rooms at the rally hotel for registration, scoring, or gear storage. A handy tip is to assume that everything associated with a meeting room will cost you — setup and use of a podium and PA system, pitchers of water and coffee, power strips and extension cords (riders need lots of power strips and outlets).

The rally staff needs accommodations. If you have volunteers or rally staff coming from far away days in advance to help you, they're more likely to be happy about it if you cover their lodging.

You have travel expenses. If you're doing a rally where you have to travel away from rally HQ and back (for example, a multi-day rally with a remote checkpoint) you should figure in travel expenses such as fuel, car rental, food and lodging on the road.

And don't forget insurance, AMA sanctioning fees, website hosting, lawyer's fees, and, if the rally is for charity, your charitable donation.

Obviously you should shop around for the best prices on the best quality products and services you can afford. You may have your mind set on fancy glass trophies or a five-color T-shirt design, until you find out how much they actually cost. This is another area in which it's helpful to reach out to other rallymasters to find out which vendors they use and like or don't like. You can be too extravagant and end up with a rally that's too expensive, you can be too cheap and end up with a rally that looks cheap, or you can hit the proper balance between the two.

The hours leading up the start of the rally can be a nervous time for riders. Being prepared for any foreseeable eventuality helps make things go smoother for everyone involved.



PHOTO LEFT AND RIGHT BY RICK CORWIN

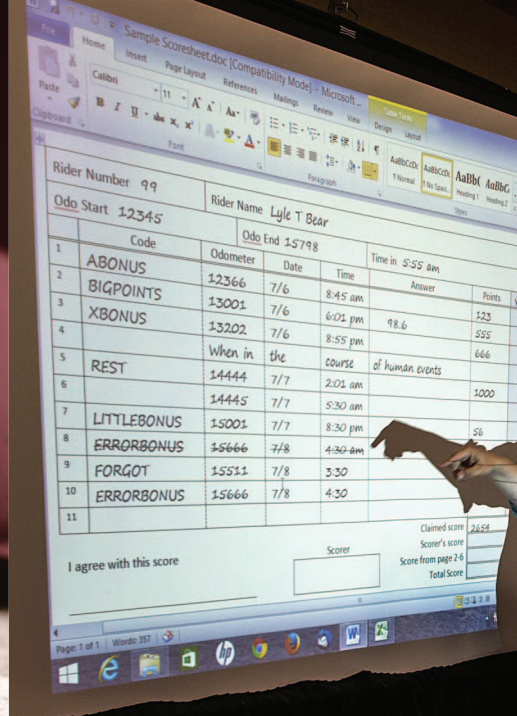


PHOTO LEFT BY DAVID E.B. SMITH, PHOTO BELOW BY JEFF WILSON





Even if both the scorers and riders are prepared, the scoring process can be time consuming. Having a volunteer to manage riders waiting to be scored is something worth considering.
Left: Making certain that volunteers are briefed and knowledgeable about the scoring procedures — well before riders arrive at the finish — will ensure a smooth process.

PHOTO BY RICK CORWINE



FINAL PREPARATION

Once you have the schedule set up, and the locations confirmed, the rally budget calculated, and it all looks doable, you can go public with the rally. Set up a point of contact for a rally. At a minimum, you need some web presence (either a separate rally website or an easily-found web page) and a means of contact such as an email address. You'll need to announce dates, locations, entry deadlines, entry fees, and method of registration (Team Strange uses and highly recommends Jason Jonas' Ride Master.) You should also make available (on the web or via mailed hard copy) rally policies such as cancellation and refund policies and rally rules. Team Strange uses and highly recommends the Team Strange Uniform Rules, which you're welcome to use with proper credit to Team Strange.

At the start of the rally, follow your schedule. Your rally swag should be ready, bonus sheets printed up and ready to hand out. You should have plenty of blank AMA releases (if you're AMA-sanctioned) or whatever other releases and registration forms you're using. You should have rally staff or volunteers to check-in riders, to do tech inspection and odometer checks if you're so inclined, and all of the rally staff should know what their assignments are. Have laptop computers and a printer, because you'll almost certainly need to change something.

The same goes for the finish of the rally. Be ready for riders well in advance of when you expect them to show up, with enough staff and volunteers to handle the crush. Think about the traffic flow of riders coming in and moving through scor-

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ing. Have someone directing riders into scoring or have signage that can found by the most bleary-eyed riders. Have an area set aside for scoring and have an area set aside for riders to do their paperwork. Ensure that all the scorers have properly functioning laptops, if necessary, to view bonus photos and calculate scores. Be available to answer questions and resolve disputes over bonus scoring because you as rallymaster are the final decider.

CONCLUSION

As for the content of the rally itself, that's up to you. It's your opportunity to be creative and artistic and do things that nobody has done in a rally before. But as with any work of art, simple creativity isn't enough unless it's accompanied by hard work and attention to detail. And the measure of your success as a rallymaster isn't the expression of your artistic vision, it's the experience of the riders. Were the riders physically and intellectually challenged without being just simply frustrated? Was there more than one right way of solving the puzzle that the rally presented, so that the riders had an opportunity to be creative? Did you take care to eliminate sloppy mistakes that could adversely affect riders and the final outcome through no fault on their part? Were the instructions and the bonuses clear and correct and unambiguous? Did you verify that the bonuses you sent

them to actually existed and could be obtained? Did the riders go to interesting places that they hadn't seen and that they want to go back to again?

And the best, and most satisfying, measure of success is to have dirty, tired, smelly riders shake your hand at the finish and say, "Damn, that was fun, when can I sign up for your next rally?" 🏍️

David E.B. Smith is a senior attorney for a large midwestern city that shall remain anonymous (but will soon have a Presidential library). Any opinions expressed in this article are those of David and not of his employer. David inexplicably has a B.A. in astronomy and physics from Northwestern University and obtained his J.D. from IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law. He began his LD riding career with a first place finish in the Midwest Fest Rally in 1998. His LD riding experience includes finishing the 2001 and 2003 Iron Butt Rally (he DNF'd in 2005), Butt Lite 1 and 2, the Midwest Fest, the Buckeye 1000, the Feast in the East, the Team Strange Great Lakes Challenge, the Minnesota 1000, Team Lyle Minnesota, and the Meat Lovers 1000. David learned everything he knows about putting on a rally from assisting Eddie James and Adam Wolkoff on Butt Lite 3, 4 and 5, and from working with co-rallymasters Bart Bakker, Rick Miller, and Lisa Erbes on Butt Lite 6 and 7 (and 8 upcoming in 2016).

Satisfaction can take many forms, but it doesn't get any better than to see riders returning safely with huge grins.



PHOTO BY RICK CORWINE