

SaddleSore 3000

September 23-25, 2005

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2000 BMW R1100RT

I had planned on doing a SaddleSore 2000 this weekend, traveling from Austin to Salina, KS on I-35, then to Denver, CO on I-70. The following day I would return home via the same route. During the week leading up to the ride I decided that to make it all the way to Denver and only seeing wheat fields would just be wrong. Something had to balance out the long boring stretches in Oklahoma and Kansas. So I decided that from Denver I would continue west, and complete a SaddleSore 3000. Here is the tale. A Tale of Two Salina's.



Friday, Sept 23

I woke up around 3:00 AM and traveled from my home in Round Rock, TX 8 miles south on I-35 to an Exxon station with reliable pumps, just inside the

Austin city limits. The only worry I had was in running into traffic related to the masses evacuating the south coast from Hurricane Rita. Leaving so early would not only help me to avoid the extra traffic, but it would help in making it to my first day's destination with time left to enjoy a shower, a few beers and a good dinner. It also provided a cushion for the return trip. I planned on beginning each day by 6:00 AM, and I know that on a 1000 mile day, barring mechanical problems, I will absolutely be back before midnight if I leave by 6:00 AM. So with a return target of Midnight Sunday for this 72 hour ride, beginning around 3:00 AM on Friday would allow me 3 full hours to fix whatever could go wrong on the way home.

I fueled up and left Austin heading north on I-35 at 3:45 AM. My witness form was signed the night before, which is allowed with such an early start, so I didn't need to wake anyone up or make friends with the gas station clerk before leaving. It was very humid outside, but was not at all uncomfortable. I made my first gas stop in Fort Worth at 6:20 AM, and made Oklahoma City by 9:20 AM. After buying gas in OKC, I feasted on a McD's sausage biscuit and hash brown (big flat French fry). All the way to OKC I noticed the large number of private cars parked at the rest stops along I-35. At night you can expect to see trucks spending the night at the rest stops, but this morning there were as many cars as there were trucks. No doubt, they were people from the southern coast who evacuated due to the hurricane. An hour or so out of OKC I crossed the Kansas state line. At the line I stopped, rode my RT up onto a grassy embankment and parked next to the "Welcome to Kansas" sign. It was one that I still needed for my sign collection. As I was pulling

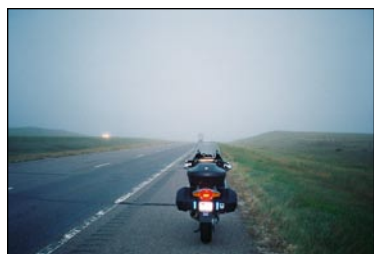
out the camera tripod a white state patrol car parked on the shoulder and an officer walked up to me. It seems you must stay on the pavement when operating a motor vehicle in Kansas. I explained that the sign was so far away from the pavement, that I couldn't get a shot for my collection that included my RT. The officer said okay, told me not to take too long, and to be careful. He then got back in his car and waited to catch a passing speeder. He had to wait about 10 seconds. The only time I am ever given a break, is when a LEO also happens to be a biker himself, but I didn't think to ask this guy if he rode. I quickly took a couple of pictures with the sign and departed. The officer was walking back to his patrol car as I passed, and he waved at me. Not far down the road I entered the Kansas Turnpike and made very good time to Wichita. I continued on to Salina, KS for gas. In Salina I turned west on I-70 and headed for Colorado. The trip across Kansas was uneventful and not terribly exciting. It was clear and beginning to warm up, and there was an annoying side wind coming from the south (though nothing like you find in West Texas). Unlike in states to the west, I-70 in Kansas remains a 70 mph road, and there were many state patrol cars on the road. I kept my speed around 75 mph. I stopped in Oakley, KS for gas at 4:10 PM. I also ate a good club sandwich at the truck stop diner. The last leg of the day was to Denver, CO, and I arrived around 8:00 PM local time. I checked into a Super 8 Motel (which was just a bit short of being super), showered, and walked to the BBQ place a block down the street. Bennett's BBQ is a Colorado chain. It doesn't compare to Texas BBQ (no surprise there), but the food was good, and mine came with 2 pints of Guinness. After a 1083 mile day, I was asleep by 10:00 PM.



Saturday, Sept 24

I woke up at 5:00 AM Colorado time, suited up and was at the gas station near the entrance to I-70 by 5:15 AM. As on the other morning gas ups, I looked over the bike (tire pressure, etc) and cleaned my helmet's visor while drinking a small cup of coffee. Once ready, I gassed up and departed. This would be the most enjoyable day of the trip, with the early morning riding being a top experience. It was very early. The pavement was dry and there was no traffic. None. I stayed warm with my electric vest on under my mesh jacket and a fleece sweater over the jacket. Anything outside the reach of my high beam was black. The highway curved and winded its way out of Denver, and I ran it in the 80s. I have always enjoyed tunnels, and on this morning I enjoyed the contrast that they brought. Racing through I-70s several tunnels it seemed like daytime. I looked down the side of the fairing of the RT and for a moment forgot what hour it was. Then upon exiting the tunnels I strained to readjust to the blackness as quickly as I

traveled. At one point I noticed something new. The sun had cracked just enough that the tops of the mountains to both sides of me were visible. The black peaks rose and met a deep blue sky. My spirits were very high as I continued on to Grand Junction, CO. I made GJ by 8:30 AM, gassed up, and visited a diner that I first stopped at a few years ago. It is a 50's style place physically attached to a Harley Davidson shop. There were a dozen or so leather-clad H-D riders inside eating, their bikes lined up outside. I removed my mesh jacket and electric vest and sat at the counter. The biscuits and gravy and the conversation were both very good. By 9:40 AM I had finished and was back on I-70, heading for Utah. At the state line I stopped for a picture, and then continued on to Salina, UT. On the way I stopped to take a couple of pictures of the awesome canyon scenery. Salina is nothing special (KS or UT). It is simply 460 miles from Denver, making the day just shy of 1000 miles. I made the turn around at 12:40 PM and headed back toward Denver. The ride back over the Rockies was slower than in the morning, but there was a lot to enjoy. Many of the trees had started to turn gold and red, and seeing all the way through the smooth, broad curves on I-70 had its own entertainment value. I gassed up again in Grand Junction just before 4:00 PM, and was back in Denver by 7:00 PM. This night I chose a Motel 6, which was a big step up from the previous night. Through glass, the night desk clerk explained that as long as I didn't start the bike in the morning, I could pull it into the courtyard between the buildings and park right next to my door. I thought it a brilliant plan! I caught a few minutes of hurricane destruction on the Weather channel around getting a shower, and then I walked to the very trendy and upscale Sam's Bar and Grill. Sam's is the kind of place with choppers outside and worn pool tables under dim florescent lighting. The tattooed, braless bartender served me a very cold bottle of Sam Adams (not a place for a Guinness) just as the karaoke machine was getting warmed up. I stayed anyway, and washed a few more Sam Adams down with an 8" pepperoni pizza. I walked back to the Motel 6, covered my RT with its plain black cover, turned off the TV and went to sleep.



Sunday, Sept 25

With one big day left, I woke up and left the motel very early. The drizzle coming down gleamed in the bright lights of the Shell station. I stood

under the yellow roof and enjoyed a cup of coffee. I then gassed up, pulled my rain jacket on over the other layers (fleece top, mesh jacket, electric vest), and headed for the I-70 entrance ramp. It was 4:50 AM. The ride east from Denver was very chilly and wet. Visibility was about a bus-length. I rode around 65 mph, hitting my flashers whenever I passed a slow moving semi. I rode

the 90 miles to Limon, CO promising that if I ever made it onto the Iron Butt Rally, that I will not leave home without some strong PIAA lights to assist my headlight in such conditions. In Limon I exited the highway and stopped at a McD's for a quick breakfast. Despite how warm and dry it was inside the McD's, I gave only 20 minutes to the break, and returned to the highway by 6:45 AM. Conditions were still not great, but visibility had really improved with daybreak. Not far down the road I stopped on the shoulder and pulled the RT onto its center stand. I walked about 10 feet back, turned, and took a "ghost shot" of the RT riding off into the dreariness. This shot, the idea taken from Neal Peart's exceptional book Ghost Rider, is one of my favorite from the trip. Quickly back on the road, I gassed up in Colby, KS at 9:30 AM (back on Central time), and then continued on to Salina, KS. By noon the weather had turned from chilly and wet to sunny and warm. It would become very hot before long. Seeing the billboards for a Chili's in Salina, I allowed myself a real sit down type lunch. Across the isle from my table were two elderly couples having after-church lunch. The men watched me stack my tank bag, helmet, jacket and vest down, and I imagine either thought "A little hot for that jacket and vest, isn't it", or "you didn't go to church, did you". I had removed the fleece top about an hour earlier. While I put a bacon-cheese burger down (with ice water) in just 30 minutes, the break did me a lot of good. I got on I-35 and headed south at 1:10 PM. Back down the Kansas Turnpike, and onto Oklahoma City. I would provide more detail here, if there had been anything for me to comment on. Visually, these are not the most intriguing states to ride through. I reached OKC at 4:55 PM, gassed up and made a move for my next to last stop. It was dark when I reached Fort Worth, TX. The station I stopped at seemed to be in a sketchy part of town, and I made the stop quick. I found a rabbit in a silver Ford pickup, and followed him south on I-35 at around 75 mph, staying far enough back to be able to react to his brake lights before the LEO could see me. There were several signs warning of congestion and gasoline shortages on routes to Houston, due to the hurricane, but traffic remained light. I rolled across the Austin city limit around 10:20 PM, and made my sixteenth and final gas stop of the trip at 10:30 PM. I then



rode back home to Round Rock, unloaded the bike's luggage, enjoyed a cold Guinness with my hot shower, and went to sleep. The trip was a great experience, and I learned several tricks for real long distance riding. I hope this 3000 mile trip will serve as a preview of what's to come for me in 2007 (next IBA Rally). Next up, maybe a 50CC in conjunction with a SS5000 in the spring.