

Quest for the Triple Crown

Prologue:

Christ, I have to go to the bathroom again.

This was the third time my bowels had gone into a spasm since I started plugging in the 57 bonus locations for the third running of the Rendez-vous 12 hr rally in Quebec. I usually get this problem the night before a rally but this competition was literally scaring the shit out of me a week ahead of time. Mind you I was under a bit of pressure this year due to the fact I had won the Rendez-vous rally for the two previous years.

The first year's win was a pleasant surprise. I had planned a good route and rode it following the directions from a brand new Zumo 550. The second year I cherry picked the top bonuses and ran the rally in three timed segments. If I didn't make a timed leg then I would have to change the route. But all three legs went as planned and no points were lost at the scoring table so that was win number two.

So now its year three and I knew many of the other riders were out to dethrone me. My riding partner Peter Delean was out for redemption after a mechanical DNF in 2008, Pierre Gagnon DNF'd as well after being stuck in traffic last year. Jacques Titolo and Jennyfer Audet were just back from the 2009 IBR, they might be tired but their heads were still in rally mode and the list went on with veteran riders and newbies out to make a name for themselves as winner of the 2009 Rendez-vous Rally.

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Planning:

After getting all the bonuses loaded into map source and colour coded my bowels did another twist, nothing was making sense. The points were just weird, 4 big bonuses way out in QC, ON and VT (no cherry picking this year). A couple of midsize points and a slew of small point bonuses all over the map. A large cluster of low to mid point bonuses were in Vermont but it would take a lot of stops to make anything out of it.

After putting together some routes based on mileage it was time to touch base with Peter to see what his take was.

Peter and I have been travelling together to rallies for the last 10 years. We share rooms, information, help each other out but we have never run together as a team, of course we both think we are right and have secretly figured out the winning

route. Past history at different rallies has proven that we can plan top ten and even winning routes but can we ride them out, that's always the rub.

Pete's take on things was similar to mine, what the "f" is he thinking. A bonus of 1035 pts 12 minutes into the rally then a mishmash of small points all over the place "he wants us to go in a certain way".

Peter was working on low mileage routes with a lot of stops in VT to get his points per mile up; I was looking at similar points, less stops but more miles. It was starting to look like a lot of stops, border crossings and low miles to finish in 11 1/2 hours.

I let Peter know I had pulled the ferry schedules for LK Champlain off the net because a couple of our routes could use the ferry to cut down on mileage.

A couple of fishing e-mails to the rally master revealed no help just more confusion. As well I had google searched every state and province on the bonus list for fall fairs festivals and rodeos. Last year our deviant, sorry devious, Rally Master sent us to a small town in Quebec named St Tite. The town was holding its annual Rodeo, meaning six hundred thousand people over 10 days in a town of four thousand. Traffic was such a nightmare that it still haunts me :-).

After trying out endless combinations of points and miles I settled on 4 different routes of 729 to 870 km's, 5100 to 5400pts and 17 to 23 stops. The final decision would be made after the riders meeting Friday night.

To top things off, my desktop pc died with a "win32/config.sys" failure trashing everything, thank god for memory stick backups. I also had to race to the bike shop Thurs. to pick up the bike before it closed at 5pm. New tires and an oil change. What's the saying about last minute changes to a bike before a rally?

Friday morning I loaded up the ST1300, kissed Elizabeth goodbye, met up with Peter and it was off to the belle province, Quebec.

It was great to see old friends, conversations picked up where they left off from last year, and lots of B/S, good-natured teasing and tales of this year's rally circuit. My answer to the constant jest of where was I going was "Two countries, two provinces and two states".

The riders meeting had the bilingual reminder of "safety", "reading comprehension" and the announcement of one wild card for only 2 points but then two points could win a rally. Rally Packs were handed out and the speed-reading began.

Kevin offers a beginners LD riding 101 class for the newbies, I was going to stick around to hear what he had to say but route planning took precedence.

After seeing the Déjà vu bonus of 500 points plus the 362 points for the two Franklins (VT and QC), my mind was made up which route to choose. Map source

showed it as 798 kms, 10.5 hours, 23 stops, roughly 5400 points. Added were two border crossings, a ferry ride and an extra fuel stop bonus in a narrow time window to get a receipt for over 11 litres.

I set up my cue cards with the bonus capture instructions and the required ETAs to keep me on track, I noted which bonuses that could be dropped if my ETA got too far behind. Peter was going to run a similar route just picking up the Vermont bonuses in a different order. All that was left was to get some sleep and make the 5am riders meeting.

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Rally day:

4am comes early, off to get some breakfast and load up the ST. The mood was a little more sombre and the riders had on their game faces as last minute instructions were mentioned, another wild card is thrown at us "buy a red apple no receipt needed bring it back to scoring table 22pts". Time to seal the drivers licence (975 points) and turn in your "declare your route sheet" to the rally master. I always wonder if the rally master takes a look at them and laughs his ass off at the different routes we take.

First problem of the day, I couldn't get my Camel bac working so I left it with Kevin at the start line.

It's 5:30 and we are released 3 at a time at 2-minute intervals. First stop twelve minutes later is a strip bar in Carignan. Seems Kevin wanted to use up his vintage Polaroid taking our photos. This begs the question of why the Rally Master wants pictures of twenty-one guys and one girl in their riding gear. Thanks to the staff for getting us to think about what the bonus capture instructions asked for. My head wasn't into the game yet at 5:42am... mind you I did remember time/odo/bonus number on the photo.

Back on the bike and Peter and I head east on autoroute 10, I peel off first heading north to St-Damase to find a vintage gas pump. I pass some other riders; we are heading to all points on the compass. I get the 2nd bonus "what is the price per gallon" but two minutes later, a mile down the road, I second-guess myself as to the complete answer "did it say cent or cents after the price"? Back I head not wanting to screw up the answer. Thankfully no change to the 46 9/10 answer. First waste of "Rally time" of the day, one of many to come.

Third bonus at Farnham was a quickie, didn't even get off the bike. Two other riders were there but I was in and out in 2 min no chat time. Next was Glen Sutton, we were warned it was a GS bonus. On my way in the Zumo started kicking on and off of external power. The rough roads at rally speed were mucking up a connection somewhere. I turned the ext. power off figuring I would use the battery life and

rewire it if necessary. The gravel road up to Glen Sutton was not too bad, I had a nice chat with the ladies of the house and headed back down the hill and low and behold, here's Peter babying his RT1150 up the gravel road. I kind of wonder where he's been.

My ETA for the border crossing was 7:30 and it was now 7:37 not bad for leg one. This crossing was nothing like the international bridge crossings in Ont, one lane, one guy, open all the bags and out of there in 5 min.

I changed the GPS to mph, plugged the power back on and it's off to Franklin VT in the drizzle.

Answer to the bonus was easy to find and record but I had to spend a couple of minutes explaining to the owner why motorcycles were trespassing on his property. Rally time well wasted again.

Garmin mucked me around a bunch of concession roads eventually getting me south on hwy 108, doing a u-turn would have been easier and shorter.

Ride to Bakersfield was uneventful except for the drizzle turning into heavier rain. At the tree farm bonus near Bakersfield a reading comprehension mistake almost bit me. I saw the sign saying open NOV. DEC. but the question asked "what date was the tree farm opening?". Looking around I noticed a white sign sitting on a chair by the door to the barn its date was November 1st. I ended up losing this bonus at the scoring table by writing Nov. 1st on the answer sheet. "No short forms allowed".

Pleasant Valley and the Jeffersonville bonuses were quick bonuses; I just did my rally in the rain routine and motored along the route.

Between Jeffersonville and Morrisville I topped up the ST's fuel tank. This was a fun mental calculation I had to get fuel now so I could burn off enough in the next three plus hours in order to meet the fuel receipt bonus requirements of 11 plus litres of fuel between 12:30 and 2:30pm, if that makes any sense.

The routing to the Morrisville bonus was one of those "Garmin is out to get you" moments. It routed me from hwy 15 to 12 then immediately on to Darling road, which happens to be someone's driveway a mile up the hill. The rub is that there is a **no exit** sign at the hwy, which I missed at the turn. I finally get to the bonus, surprise another barn and write down the answer "Welch Farm est. 1916". Again I lose the bonus points at the scoring table for not adding the "est. 1916" to the answer sheet.

On the way out the Zumo again routes me down a gravel road and road conditions get crappier by the yard. So I decide to bail and turn around. So I slowly roll forward, steering to the right to start the turn around to the left and shit the front tire digs into the soft shoulder and just folds the bike over onto it's left side. Down we go in

slow motion. Nothing hurt but my pride. I quickly pick up the fully fuelled bike, feel my left bicep muscle go pop and struggled to get the bike on its side stand.

I stepped back to catch my breath, survey the situation and with disbelief I watch the bike sink into the soft shoulder, fold to the left and fall over again!

Now feeling really stupid and pissed off with a sore arm I use the “back to the bike” method of lifting and get it onto some solid ground.

I get back to hwy 12 and Garmin routes me the long way back around 12 to hwy 14. Why I ask? Why are the Rally Gods out to get me today I keep asking myself? Rain, gravel, tip overs and poor routing... what’s next?

Just down hwy 14, I stop at a roadside market to buy an apple for wild card # 2 and a mental health break. I’ve got to settle down and just run a good rally. A walk around the bike to check, no damage thankfully. I’m back on the road with more “well wasted rally time” but hopefully better luck.

Next stop is Woodbury up in the hills. Garmin again tries to send me up a crappy gravel road so again I go to turn the bike around and this time, well at about 150 degrees into the turn I’m too close to the right shoulder (remember the last time) so I straighten out the turn, now I have the front tire almost against a signpost. So I push/pull the bike backwards from a seated position, now the back tire slips down the wet grassy shoulder into the ditch. I have no choice, I have to let the bike roll backwards into the ditch or drop it into the ditch.

Now as I sit on my bike, in the ditch, I just shake my head. My first impression is I’m screwed. It would just burn my ass to have to call my favourite Rally Master Kevin and tell him I’m out of the running for my triple crown.

I figure it will take four guys doing a vertical lift to get the bike out or “frig it” just drive it out. What’s to lose I’m out of the rally as it stands. Got to save my pride! I cleared away some melon sized rocks out of it’s path, got the bike rolling, a little up the right bank, hard left and twist the throttle like a 4 stroke trail bike and pop I’m on the road. My heart and head were pounding so hard I had to take my helmet off, I had visions of the tires slipping out and wham on the side again but we are upright, okay and back in the rally.

When I finally got on the right road to Woodbury I think I duck walked the ST up the slippery gravel road. Got the bonus YES, got the bike turned around YES and got my ass back on tarmac YES.

NOTE: If a gravel road has lots of water erosion on it and grass on the shoulders its not travelled much, if it has lots of washboards and piles of gravel on the shoulder from being graded its probably a local short cut. Just my opinion.

Again the Zumo backtracks me for miles to route 15 and 215 to Cabot VT. The creamery bonus was an easy find being in the gps database. I find the presentation

room and there is a “please do not enter sign”, Please purchase tour tickets at desk. Great I think, this is like the Bordello bonus in the IBR. Do I have to do the tour? Go to plan “B” chat up the female staff, I don’t know whether it was my blue eyes and charm or the drowned rat look in ATGATT but she let me in to read the Guinness book of record plaque. I carefully copied down the answer about the world’s largest grill cheese sandwich.

It was just around the halfway point at Cabot and a quick check of my ETA showed I was 30 minutes behind. I had to drop East Topsham off the bonus list and I dropped Marshfield upon seeing another wet gravel road. Too much rally time wasted picking up the bike.

Hwy 2 to Montpelier was its usual slow traffic route. I had ridden a lot of it in the 2006 MM1000 and it was just as frustrating. I found the veggie stand in Berlin VT. No problem but had to drive the bike around in a circle on compass mode to find north. Had to get the right answer “what is written on the North side of the barn”. Quick trip out and up Interstate 89, felt great to burn some carbon out of the ST and get back on track.

I blew passed the Camels Hump Alpaca farm bonus at Huntington VT due to not seeing a faded sign on the barn, got the bike turned around “Yes” and bagged the bonus.

Fuelled up at 1:04pm for the fuel bonus, put in 3.16 gallons. Got the receipt, bonus #/Time/Odo, and spent the next four hours wondering what the conversion factor is from American gallons to litres.

Shelburne is a quick 945 pt bonus. Had to get a side stand puck “too FN” funny should have done this bonus first. I took two just in case I needed one later lol.

My planned ETA for the ferry was 1:30 to 2 pm at the latest, I still had South Hero to grab and it was 1:37. Traffic out of town was dicey but kept moving painfully slow. I took a few extra minutes to carefully write down the South Hero bonus answer “KOWALEWITZ” very easy to screw up the spelling on this. Dashed over to Gordon’s Landing for the ferry and after a 5 min wait, I was floating my way over to Plattsburg NY.

I had not eaten or drank anything since the start roughly 9 hours ago and that was different for me. I’m known for eating and drinking my way through rallies. Digging around my side bags I find a Gatorade and some nutri bars probably from the NSM rally in July. I was going to call and rant at the rally master for the twelve-minute crossing but getting some nourishment in me seemed more prudent.

A check of my routing and finish time showed I had to drop Lacolle and head straight to Franklin QC. I still wanted to pick up St-Stanislas-de-Kotska and possibly two more bonuses as I headed to the finish. The Zumo finally did a great job of routing me up to the Canadian border and I arrived in Franklin QC at 3:26pm four minutes ahead of schedule.

I had a beautiful ride up to St-Stanislas-de-Kotska the sun was out and I was finally drying out. I quickly wrote down the bonus and started the run back to St- Jean-sur-Richelieu. Pete and I had timed this route on our way in on Friday. I had seventy minute to go 95 km's with two stops. I picked up the Chateauguay and Napierville bonuses along my route just for insurance. Traffic into St-Jean-sur-Richelieu was heavy and I crossed the finish line just 2 minutes into the penalty window.

It felt great to be in safe, driver's licence still sealed and a fist full of bonuses. Jacques and Jennyfer rolled in behind me and Peter arrived a few minutes later. All drivers made it back safe and sound that day. Bikes may have been abused for the last twelve hours but the riders had ear-to-ear grins.

Now time for the paper work. It's hard to switch modes after a rally and that's where a lot of mistakes are made. I turned in my rally Pac and Jacques Titolo asks me if I surpassed 7000, I mumbled I didn't know.

Scoring by Kevin's mom is always a pleasure, I think she like me more than Kevin because I give her hugs. Final score after mistakes 6678. Jacques comment of 7000 points keeps me quiet.

Time for a cold beer and to compare rally tales till the dinner is called. Shared a table with Jay Whitney, Michael Jordan and Michael Del Brocco the only rider to go into Ontario. Lots of stories, teasing and some wonderful and not so wonderful door prizes were handed out.

Kevin begs the question of whether he has to hand over first place to me or not this year???? After running down the list of ranked finishers as fate would have it, Kevin had to swallow his pride and present me my third First place plaque in as many years.

For after dinner entertainment Jacques and Jennyfer recapped their 2009 IBR experiences. They brought a lot of humility and humour into a serious venture.

In closing I would like to thank Rally Master Kevin Craft, his wife, family, friends and volunteers for all of their hard work.

Peter and I do a lot of rallies in Canada and the US and this is one of the most well run and challenging rallies on the circuit.

We both look forward to next year for the "Fourth Edition of the Rendez-vous Rally".

Cameron Sanders
ST1300
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3X Winner Rendez-vous 12 Hour Rally

PS. Kevin did your mommy make you an apple pie with the wild card bonus?????????