

## TRUE LIES

(Article submitted to Ironbutt Magazine and published in Spring 2012 edition)

When I look back over the years I realise many paths led me to the sport of long distance rallying. Apart from quarter a century of riding a bike most days, several seasons of road and enduro racing, many years of running orienteering races and mountain marathons, winter and alpine climbing, playing chess and breaking limbs have all contributed to why I ride rallies. Combined they have helped give me the riding skills, navigational nous, mental endurance and strength to be a winner (and the number of metal pins in my leg ensure I cannot take part in any of my former sports anymore!).

I have no particular philosophical reason for why I ride a bike although I am sure I can trace threads back to many things – reading Robert Pirsig and Ted Simon at an impressionable age, having an uncle who had a Vincent Black Shadow. I just stopped outside a bike dealer one day about 26 years ago and had a road to Damascus moment.

I came to long distance riding by chance when around Christmas 2007 I saw a mention on a forum of the first 36 hour Brit Butt rally which was going to take place the following May. I had actually ridden a thousand miles in a day while despatch riding back in the mid-1980s, but that was not an experience I remembered with any fondness or desire to repeat it (those were the days before proper waterproof, never mind heated, gear!). However, I decided this sounded like an interesting, if somewhat scary, challenge and rode a couple of thousand mile days to see if I was up to it – they went well, as did that first rally, and I have been hooked on long distance rallies ever since.

Why rallies rather than simply long distance rides? I spent many years running cross-country before I discovered orienteering. I found orienteering races so much more interesting and mentally challenging that I never ran another race which did not involve navigation. The same has been true of my experience of long distance rides and rallies. I enjoy rallies so much because of the many different aspects and challenges I am faced with, from the organisation and route planning beforehand, to the amount that is going on in my head constantly as I ride. I have always been a solitary rider and the fact that once you start a rally, it is just you and your bike against the rallybook, the road and the weather is massively appealing to me.

It has been exciting to be involved in what is the birth of this sport on this side of the Atlantic. The fact that I have found I am good at it, and been successful has helped maintain my motivation (my record from eight IBA

rallies entered in Britain, Ireland and Norway is five first, two second and one third places), and given me the incentive to keep trying to get better at it. It has also been a challenge to keep the same bike, my 2001 BMW R1150GS, going for all the long distance rides and rallies I have completed to date. Finances, family and work will probably preclude any possibility of me entering the IBR so my aim for myself and the GS is to remain as competitive as possible for as long as possible in Britain, while trying to help develop the sport from which I have gained so much.