

Camel Rally 2009

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The Camel Rally was a 24 hour motorcycle rally organised by the Camel Riders Motorcycle Club and takes place in Norway, not North Africa as you might think from the name! In 2009 I took part in the fifth running of the event, which has since been cancelled permanently – partly because of the severe speed limits (80km/h on open roads) and very strict driving laws in Norway.

My Rally Report

After completing the 1345 miles from home in 29 hours, including the ferry from Dover to Dunkerque, I had arrived in Fredrikstad, southern Norway at midday on Friday 31st July. After registering at the motel I had slept for a few hours before getting up in time to ride to the rally meet at 6pm that evening. I met a couple of Norwegian riders outside the motel, on a couple of Africa Twins and a Suzuki Burgman, and set off after them since I decided I had time to fill up with fuel before hand. I had been very efficient on the way to the motel, checking where the nearest garage was, just a few hundred yards around the corner, and even visiting the location for the rally meet and start.

Unfortunately for me, it had changed and it took a while in the middle of a thunderstorm to find the new location and the Rallymaster Per Jensen. After a brief explanation of the rallybook it was handed out with our rally flags (I was number 8) and we were free to leave and start planning our routes. I went back to the motel, set up my laptop and map and read through the rallybook.

There were three ways to gain points on the rally, and other ways to lose them. The book listed eight checkpoints (worth between 100 and 700 points), of which you had to visit at least five of them, with penalties if you did not. Several of these were time-restricted as well so could only be visited between 4pm and 7pm on Saturday or between Midnight and 3am on Sunday. There were then 39 bonuses which you could visit, with other options for gaining points (anything from 100 to 1400 points) also being possible, as well as gain points by taking photographs of certain signs, ferries (200 points), and other points of interest. In addition taking a rest bonus, proved by getting a receipt at the beginning and end of your stop, would gain you 500 points for each hour up to 5 hours.

You could lose points by not visiting enough checkpoints, by getting stopped for speeding (your driving licence was sealed in an envelope at the beginning of the rally and you points equivalent to the speeding fine you got in Krone, if the envelope was unsealed), and you lost 3 points for every km you covered over 85km in total, and 5km for every km you covered over

1250km. If you covered more than 1750km you would be disqualified.

After two hours I had worked out where 30 of the 39 bonuses were. With no Internet connection I had sent texts to my father and to my girlfriend, Stacey, asking them to look for some of the bonuses. I decided to go for quite a safe option, linking the five nearest checkpoints together and then seeing what else I could add to that route. The shortest route still came to around 1100km. This meant that for anything off that route I would be losing 3 points for every km covered. It also gave me four hours resting so I did not want to lose that time since it gave me a potential gain of 2000 points. I tried lots of different possibilities and combinations before ending up with a route I was reasonably happy with and gave me options to collect more points at the end if I got back to Fredrikstad in time. I went to bed about 1 am, but still got up a couple of times to look at the route and try to add some more bonuses.

I had set the alarm on my mobile phone for 6.45am, giving me time to get up, get packed, have the breakfast I had booked at 7.30, get to the start, complete the odometer check I had not had time for the previous evening, and be ready for the start at 9 o'clock. As I got up I was surprised to hear a bike start up and looked outside to see one of the riders leaving, and several others packing up. I realised that the clock on the bike did not say 7am, but 8am - my mobile had not reset itself to the change in time on crossing on to the continent, when I had manually changed the bike's clock. I rushed back inside to collect all my gear, and set off to the rally start. My mind pretty frazzled and my stomach empty! This did not seem to be going as I had planned it!

However, it turned out to be a wonderful rally for me. I covered 1241 kilometres (qualifying for a rare Saddlesore Lite certificate) and was able to "bag" 32 bonuses along the way. I even collected one of those I had not found, when I recognised the name of a bonus village on a signpost. After going through my photographs with the rallymaster, I chatted with a few of the other finishers, including the previous winner Espen Lothe (who was to win again this year) for a while before they all gradually departed. I was then able to get a few hours sleep before collecting Stacey from Torp airport at 6pm. This meant I could not attend the post-rally dinner at 5.30pm so it was a few days (while sheltering in the rain in a hutte in Dalen) before I got on the Internet and found out that I had come third! The following week I managed to meet up with Per when we returned to Fredrikstad on the way home and collected my Bronze medal and certificate - a good end to a great rally. We spent the days in between touring Norway, seeing this beautiful country in a more relaxed manner, before heading for home - a journey across seven countries which turned into Stacey's first (and no doubt only!) Saddlesore 1000 ride, but that is another story!

The full report can be read at <http://www.thegrimrider.com/#/camel-rally-2009/4550844254>

