

Counting Down...or Up?

A FEW YEARS BACK, after someone asked me how many miles I thought I had ridden on motorcycles, I sat down and made an effort to see if I could come up with a realistic total. As it turned out, it wasn't all that difficult. I've always kept pretty good maintenance records on all the bikes I've owned, so I knew pretty closely how many miles a bike had on it when I bought it, and when I sold it. Then, of course, it was a fairly easy matter to look up the records on all the test bikes I'd ridden over the years for *Wing World*, *Road Rider* and, naturally, *MCN*. When I punched up the grand total, it came to a little over 780,000 miles. Of course, I could have been off by several thousand miles either way, but I had made an honest effort to err on the conservative side, so I felt fairly comfortable with that number.

Anyway, this all happened right around the time that my mentor, Bob Carpenter, was getting set to go on a special ride celebrating his one-millionth mile on two wheels, and it got me to dreaming that someday I might actually get the same opportunity. So, I set myself a goal of reaching the million-mile mark by my 55th birthday, and have kept pretty careful track of my mileage since then.

About three weeks from now—or about two weeks before you got this issue—I will pass my 54th birthday. Twelve months to go, and counting. And, as of this writing, my cumulative mileage total is 961,351 miles. That means I have 38,649 miles to go to reach my goal, or about 3220 miles a month (or 743 miles per week, if I want to get really anal about this). That's a little steep, even for me, but I'm determined to try to make it. It's too many miles to rack up just riding on available weekends, so I'm juggling my work schedule to try to get myself two extra days off a month, just for riding. If I can manage that, getting the miles should be a snap. Especially since the good folks at Honda have been kind enough to provide us with a "long-term" test bike—an ST1300. Eating miles on that baby is like eating candy.

Speaking of bikes, it also might be interesting to note that by the time I hit my million-mile mark (if I do), those miles will have been accumulated on over 300 different motorcycles. And though that works out to an average of only about 3300 miles per bike, over a quarter of the total (about 260,000 miles) will have been spent on Honda Gold Wings. That's because from 1982 to 1991, I owned a succession of GLs: An 1100 Interstate, a 1200 Interstate, and a 1500 SE. And then, of course, you have to



take my tenure at *Wing World* magazine into consideration. After that, though, my second-most-ridden bike would be the Honda ST1100, followed by 12 years of two or three different bikes a month. In the past five years or so, the majority have probably been accounted for on various BMWs.

Last week, Dave, Walt and I took the three sport-tourers reported on in this issue on a three-day, 1200-mile trek up to Zion National Park and back, and the following weekend, my wife and I logged another 500 miles running around southern California. So, as of right now, I'm actually almost two weeks ahead of schedule for rolling over that seventh digit.

Non-motorcycling friends (the few I have) think I'm crazy, and even a few of my riding friends agree. Of course, they're the kind of motorcyclists that are into racing. Ever notice that very few racers ever do any street riding? In fact, my friend Walt Fulton is the only ex-racer I've ever met who actually gets into touring. I asked him about it once, and he says racers simply find street riding much too dangerous, and save their saddle time for the track. An interesting phenomenon, when you consider that most street riders, and especially touring riders, tend to believe exactly the opposite.

But all this is really about is setting personal goals. Over the years I've participated in many year-long "tours," with stated goals like spelling out a club's name with the first letters of town names, by photographing your bike at the city limits sign. Some of the more interesting ones were the "Tombstone Tour," where you collected cemeteries, the "Brothel Tour," where you found and photographed legal houses of prostitution (obviously sponsored by a club in Nevada), and Mike Kneebone's dreaded Iron Butt "National Parks Tour Master

Award," where you have to get an official National Parks Passport stamped at 50 different parks and/or historical monuments in at least 25 different states, all within one year's time.

Granted, my "million miles" is a bit loftier goal than some of those I've previously undertaken—more like a lifetime quest. But therein lies the rub. Any mileage or destination-driven goal I've ever set for myself before, I've always known, and sometimes said: "I'd like to do this again sometime." And, on a few occasions, I actually have. Obviously, that is not to be this time. To rack up a second million miles, I'd have to keep riding at the current rate right up until my 90th birthday—and that seems a bit far-fetched.

All of which is by way of explaining that though I look forward to attaining this life goal, part of me is a bit saddened by this reminder that the majority of my riding days are behind me. As they say, "It's all downhill from here."

Bob retired soon after attaining his million miles, and hasn't been on a motorcycle in years. He's found other interests, and seems perfectly happy with that, but I honestly wonder if I could do the same. Quite frankly, I have absolutely no intention of trying to find out. Lately, I've actually begun to accelerate the amount of time I spend in the saddle, and have also started making an effort to improve both my physical and mental riding skills—in hopes of extending my two-wheeled tenure just as far into the distant future as possible. I have several friends who have managed to keep riding (and I mean *seriously* riding, not just weekend putts) well into their 80s, and see no reason I can't do the same. On my side, I have a genetic advantage—both my Mother's and my Father's families are known for their longevity. I have half-a-dozen great aunts and uncles well into their 90s right now, and next month will be my Grandmother's 100th birthday. Fred Rau Senior, my Grandfather (and a motorcyclist), lived to be 95, and both my Great-Grandfathers passed the century mark before succumbing.

So, who knows? Maybe I *will* see that second million-mile mark. I know this much for sure—I'm going to give it one hell of a try.

—Fred Rau
Senior Editor