

You like night rides, how about doing the LOE with me?

By Holly Ausbeck

Motorcycle endurance rallies are one of the crazier fads of modern times. They're right up there with long boarding bare headed through the traffic down 1st South, jumping a mountain bike over the cars at the bottom of Bobsled, or rollerblading full speed-no brakes down City Creek. It is clearly not a safe, smart hobby.

I thought of other stupidly unsafe things I've seen kids doing while I listened to Ron, Thane, and Quinn talk about their LOE plans one Saturday evening over dinner. The LOE is the Land Of Enchantment motorcycle rally held in New Mexico every October. The participants ride 1000 miles in 24 hours. I felt like a guy must feel listening to women talk about childbirth. As strange words such as "rally pack", "saddle sore 1000", "bun burner" were tossed around, other words for the acronym popped into my head: Lost Our Equilibrium, Latent Obsessive Escape, Lame-O Excuse for Living On the Edge. It was dark by the time we left the restaurant in Kamas. Ron and I both enjoy a night ride, so we took the long way home over East Canyon.

Riding in the dark clears my mind. The world shrinks to the small area lit by the motorcycle headlight. The bathroom remodel, the homework the kids didn't do, the Lesson On Eccentricity are all out of range. The branches and leaves of each tree leaning over the road against the dark background are all I see and, the way they look, the way my engine sounds, the way the motorcycle feels, is all there is. It was a wonderful ride home and I mentioned this as Ron and I were putting our bikes in the garage. Somehow, my comment percolated around in Ron's head for a couple of hours, and came out as "you like night rides, how about doing the LOE with me?"

That's my only excuse for being in a large room with a bunch of Loco Odd Eclectic people at 8 pm in Albuquerque, New Mexico waiting to get a "rally pack". Once we received the packet, we had until 7 am the next morning to read 20+ pages of bonus points, make a plan, map a route and oh yeah, sleep. Quinn couldn't make it, but Thane and Dave Ganansky were there. Ron, Thane and Dave decided an hour of sleep was a fair trade for a good breakfast, and we were to meet at a restaurant at 6 am.

Ron and I went back to our room with the rally packet. While he read the description of each location, I marked it on the map. A marked up map is necessary to get the big picture. With the map complete, we assessed the situation. This year, there were five 50-point bonus locations, and the rest were worth 10 points each. There was a 50-point sleep bonus that could be collected between 6 and 8 pm by arriving at the rally hotel and leaving at least an

hour later. The other four 50-point locations were in each of the 4 corners of New Mexico. These bonuses had to be collected before 11 am. That ruled out getting more than one 50-point corner bonus.

Ron knew from past years that Shiprock, (the North West corner) was a trap. Shiprock hosts the annual Navajo Fair on the Saturday of the rally. He told me about riding his motorcycle down sidewalks, through yards, under picnic tables, and over floats because there were thousands of people and a parade between him and the gas station from which a gas receipt allowed the owner to claim the Shiprock bonus. We ruled out the North West. The South East and South West corners were fatter than the North East corner, and they involved many miles of boring freeway. The 11:00 time would necessitate a freeway ride to the North East corner, but we could take the scenic route back to Albuquerque through the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. And, there were lots of bonus locations to be had in Taos and Santa Fe. This Latest Outrageous Escapade just glimpsed a chance at redemption. We drew a line along the freeway to Raton in the North East. Then we drew a line back to Albuquerque that intersected the most bonus locations we thought we could get to in 9 hours. If we ran short on time, we could skip the locations in Santa Fe. Our route was set. I fell asleep around midnight while Ron entered the locations in his GPS. Someone had to do it, and Ron's enthusiasm got him through it easily.

Saturday morning at breakfast, Dave and Thane said they were going for a "Bun Burner Gold" (1500 miles in 24 hours). If I say what a Basically Brainless Goal this is, I might end up doing it someday, so I will just mention that our 1000-mile route seemed comfortable, even pleasant. We left the restaurant and got in the end of a long line of large motorcycles in a parking lot. From black leathers to fluorescent yellow, everyone was wearing full motorcycle gear. The sun was just rising. A whistle blew, and one at a time, motorcycles peeled off in different directions. Within a few hours they would be all over the state.

We made the North East corner location with half an hour to spare, and saw several fellow Lunatics On an Excursion at the gas station. We quickly got our receipts, stashed them in the zip lock bags that Ron had labeled RECEIPTS, logged our time and mileage on our rally sheet, and headed South West to the NRA Whittington Center. It claims to be the largest and most complete shooting and hunting complex in the USA. We took a picture of the uninteresting entrance to the building in the desert.

The next stop was the St. James Hotel in Cimarron. We had to collect some information from the historical plaque in front of the Hotel. It was interesting. The St. James Hotel was built in 1872, and it was originally a saloon, restaurant and hotel. Cimarron, the quiet little town we just rode through, had a wild history including Jesse James and Buffalo Bill Cody. There are

still 22 bullet holes in the ceiling of the St. James Hotel main dining room. I noticed a tapping on my shoulder. A double layer of heavy wood prevented anyone sleeping upstairs from being killed. Ron gave my arm a tug toward the street. The bikes were waiting for us to hurry over to them and get on to the next bonus location. I took a last look at the hotel, and noticed a family walking to the front door, apparently to dine in the restaurant. It was a leisurely stroll. They looked clean, comfortably dressed and ready to enjoy a relaxing meal. Why couldn't that be us?

I made another entry on the rally sheet, and we were off to take a picture of the Philmont Scout Ranch sign. It was just up the road a bit. We passed several Philmont Scout Ranch signs on the way to the official sign, and stopped and looked at each of them a while before we ruled them out. By the sign to the Philmont Scout Ranch business offices, there was a herd of very tame deer on a grassy area. One was relaxing on the grass as someone mowed the lawn around it.

Next was the Vietnam War Memorial. We had an amazing ride over Hwy 64 through Cimarron Canyon State Park on the way there. The trees were spectacular shades of red, orange and yellow, and the road was narrow and followed a beautiful twisty creek. We were supposed to take a picture of the Vietnam War Memorial, but it was large and it wasn't clear what part should be in the picture. We walked into the chapel. Photographs of young men who died in the Vietnam War were displayed on the wall above the seats in the Chapel. I read the plaque on the wall by the photographs. When the chapel was being built, it was locked each evening. One morning a message was left written on a piece of scrap plywood that asked, "Why did you lock me out, when I needed to come in?" Since then, the Chapel doors have never been locked. I read how the photographs are rotated every month. I glanced at all the pictures. I heard someone say something. Then more slowly, I began looking at each picture, thinking about each person. The talking got louder and I realized it was Ron. He sounded annoyed. "Holly we're in a motorcycle rally."

We took a picture of the outside of the chapel then continued on 64 over a mountain pass to Taos in search of Kit Carson's grave. On our way down, I saw two Harleys coming up the pass in the opposite direction. The first went by on a straight section, left hand pointing at the ground (Harley wave). When the second rider was within 20 yards, we were both approaching the same corner from opposite sides. It was a left hand corner for me. I was wondering if he could point and lean, when I saw the huge running boards and I knew he was going faster than he had clearance to lean. In fact, his trajectory and my line were going to meet at the same point in time on my side of the road! I looked at his face which was unobscured by his backwards baseball cap, and I could see he knew he was out of control. With the embankment on the right, and the cliff on the left, I had no exit. I realized my life

was in the hands of a dude on a Harley with streamers flowing out of his handlebars. Somehow he managed to turn his bike and only take about 4 feet out of my lane, but while he was staking claim to that four feet, I got way too acquainted with the embankment on the right.

When I finished giving thanks for my narrow escape, I realized my bike was shaking. It was because I was shaking. I slowed down. Even when I feel good, I have to concentrate and work hard to mostly keep up with Ron. He kept waiting for me. We got to the cemetery in Taos, and Ron reminded me that we were in a rally and why wasn't I going rally speed? I told him I had too much adrenalin and I couldn't think. He suggested that maybe a walk through the cemetery would help. It was a nice very old cemetery and a beautiful sunny day. While Ron began systematically reading the names on the 10,000 or so grave stones, I asked someone and they pointed us to Kit Carson's grave. He died May 1868 at the age of 59 years.

We added it to our rally sheet and set off for the Millicent Rogers Museum on the other side of town. Taos was similar to Ron's description of Shiprock. There was so much traffic moving so slowly it was difficult to balance, especially since I was still shaking. Ron squeezed in front of a semi with 3 inches to spare. This wasn't enough room for my GS and me. He pulled over to wait for me and let the truck go by. We finally made it across town to the museum. It is an art museum honoring the arts and cultures of Northern New Mexico. This is all I know about it because we didn't get to go in.

Ron and I have different ways of navigating. I have a little map in my head, and he has a little map displayed on a small screen on his tank bag. Ron's GPS has a female, very British voice. He calls her Emily. She was rotha useless in this situation though, because she kept routing us through Taos, and we didn't want to spend another hour driving through Taos. As we were taking a picture of the museum sign, I talked to a guy in a truck parked nearby. He told us how to get to 68 to the South without going through town. Usually Ron leads, but since I had the directions in my head, I went first. When we had skirted most of Taos on a country road, Emily recalculated. I was still going by the directions from the guy in the truck and started to turn left at an intersection. Ron honked at me when I was in mid turn to tell me Emily said to turn right. Normally this wouldn't have been a big deal, but my brain was overridden by the excess of adrenalin I still had in my system. I tried to change mid turn and dumped the bike. A guy in a truck behind us helped pick it up. He was trying not to laugh. At that point Ron said "let's take a break". We stopped for ice cream and french-fries. I sat there and tried to figure out why Ron, after I told him I had too much adrenalin and couldn't think, honked at me right in the middle of a turn. We both finally figured out that he had too

much testosterone.

After the break, I was almost back to normal. The next stop was a historic mission between Taos and Santa Fe. We'd been through many small New Mexico towns that morning, and the very small towns had some extremely old picturesque buildings. My eyes had done their best all morning to soak them up as they flew by. But now, finally, we got to stop in one of the very small towns and take a picture of an extremely old building.

The next two bonus locations were in Los Alamos. Ron used to live in Los Alamos, so he led us straight to the Bradbury Science Museum. As we walked toward the entrance to take a picture of the sign, someone informed us that the museum was about to close. We explained that we were on a Limited Outing Express stop.

Next was the Bandelier National Monument. Ron knew where this was also. As we pulled up to the sign, we saw a stranger in a black and fluorescent green body suit, on a large motorcycle. He was holding an 8 X 11 laminated sheet of paper at arm's length. A large 2-digit number took up the entire sheet. He had a camera in his other hand, and took a picture of the number. Then, he ran after some papers that blew off his tank bag. He walked over to us, and said he was "headed back for the sleep bonus". The really frightening thing is: I understood him.

We decided there was still time to find a few bonus locations in Santa Fe. The problem with Santa Fe turned out to be parking. The traffic was bad as well, but not as impacted as the parking. When it was looking pretty hopeless, Ron found the only two motorcycle parking spots in downtown and they were empty. We walked a block to the La Fonda – The inn at the end of the trail. It was a beautiful old multiple story 1600's adobe building. I have since heard that Walking into La Fonda's lobby is like stepping back in time. And I was ready to step. However, Ron shoved the rally numbers in my hands and dodging cars, walked out in the middle of the road with the camera. The sight of the cars navigating around him yanked me back to the present and I held the rally numbers up in front of the La Fonda sign while Ron took the picture.

Just another blocks walk was The Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi. It was beautiful, with stately bell towers on each side. We needed both bell towers in the picture. I held the rally numbers above my head at the top of the steps; Ron went down the steps to get the picture looking up at the numbers and the towers. Just then the 5:15 mass let out, and I became our Lady Of Enigma as the many well dressed worshipers walked around me, looking back up the steps to figure out what the strangely dressed nutcase with disheveled hair was doing holding two numbers high in the air. It took Ron laughing, the entire congregation to take a couple of pictures. This time it was my turn to say, "Ron, we're in a

motorcycle rally”.

We walked back to the bikes to ask Emily where the San Miguel Mission is located. It was a shame to give up our coveted parking places, and it would have been a lovely Saturday afternoon stroll. However, it wasn't within rally walking distance. Emily led us straight there, and we parked under a No Parking sign in an ally. I looked at the mission while Ron did something else illegal on a secluded tree. I know this complaint of women traveling with men is so old it makes the circa 1600 adobe building we were stopped at seem like modern construction. So, I'll just mention: while Ron communed with the tree, I was at one with a few thousand generations of women.

The last bonus location in Santa Fe was Museum Hill. We rode up to the top of a hill with four world-class museums presenting the art, history and culture of the Native American Southwest. We arrived just in time to take a picture of the huge statue at the entrance silhouetted against the sunset. Fifteen minutes later it would have been dark and next to impossible to get a picture of the larger than life size statue of settlers pushing a wagon pulled by a full team of horses.

Finally, we just had time to make it back for the sleep bonus. Unfortunately, Hwy 40 through Albuquerque was under construction. Ron turned off, narrowly missing a spot at the end of a line of cars stopped on the freeway. At this point we really needed the sleep, but the bonus was also desirable. We didn't know our way around Albuquerque enough to find the hotel without Emily. And, Emily insisted we continue on the freeway. Luckily another couple in the rally pulled off 40 at the same exit. They had already encountered this particular section of freeway construction and knew how to get to the hotel on the back streets. We followed them and got there in time to claim the 50 bonus points.

I'm sure we had a great nap. But, I don't remember it. I remember waking up and realizing we still needed around 400 miles to finish. We decided to ride east on 40. The speed limit is 75 and the miles could legally add up quickly. On the east end of the state there was a bonus location at Ute Lake State Park.

We got on 40. That night, everyone in Albuquerque was shipping something to Amarillo. We must have passed about a hundred FedEx trucks on our way to Tucumcari. I don't like passing trucks on the freeway. I get sucked into their wake on the approach, and blasted from the side as I pass. The dark makes it worse. When we made it around the first FedEx truck, I took a deep breath, relaxed my grip so the blood could flow back into my knuckles, and reassessed the situation. This was not my idea of a great night ride. I could turn around and live to tell about the rally I didn't finish. Or, I could hang on and try to survive this Lysergic acid Overdose Experience. I decided to stick with it, and surprisingly, a couple of

hours later, I was glad I did. By the time we passed about the 50th FedEx truck, it wasn't a white-knuckle event anymore, just another (yawn) truck at 90 in the dark.

When we were about 30 miles from Tucumcari, we got into road construction. There was nowhere to turn around, because I might have. It was one narrow lane with a cement wall on the left and "Shoulder Drops Off" signs. I couldn't see how far the shoulder dropped. With all the cone reflectors, I wasn't even sure where the road was. I do know the shoulder was trying to suck me over, and the cement wall kept inching over too close. Fortunately, Ron wasn't on the same bad trip as me. His taillight sanely and confidently navigated the chaos. We finally got to Tucumcari and turned northeast on 54 to Ute Lake State Park. I relaxed. Now there was nothing to worry about but deer, and Ron is great at spotting deer.

It was around 2 am when we got to Ute Lake State Park. We had to discover what fish is on the plaque at the visitor center. At this point, Ron was into his twist the throttle approach. He turned off the main road at the sign that said Ute Lake State Park South Entrance. I briefly wondered if we should try the North Entrance since the South Entrance had no buildings. But, Ron was quickly disappearing down the road in front of me and I didn't have time to think about it. We rode a few miles and saw a light to the left. Ron took off down a dirt road heading toward the light. The road ended at a two story square building with three large garage door bays on one side. While Ron pulled out his flashlight and inspected the Fire Station for a visitor center, I turned my motorcycle around. He came back. "It's a Fire Station". We retraced our tracks back down the dirt road, to the main road again and Ron blasted down the next side street. I pulled over and waited under the "Caution: Road Ends in Water" sign. A few minutes later he came back "It's a boat ramp". I followed Ron around a little more until we had exhausted all the side streets. He stopped. I mentioned the sign said South Entrance. We found the North Entrance and the visitor center. The walleyed pike lives in Ute Lake.

We could have picked up 3 more bonus locations on the way back, but the importance of our rally score was waning. We made it back with time to spare. The person who checked us in pointed out that we still had some time to ride around and make sure we had enough miles. We both simultaneously declined. We saw Thane at the check in, and found out he and Dave returned with their 1500 miles and 3 minutes to spare. By the time a rally official checked off our bonus locations and looked at our pictures, we had 4 hours left to shower and sleep before the rally buffet at noon.

I would recommend doing a motorcycle endurance rally just because it makes an ordinary shower and 4 hours sleep into something really fantastic. At the buffet, we sat in the same room with the same Loco Odd Eclectic people. But, now we had something in common. We

all listened to the rally master call off names from last to first place. Number 49 and 48, Dave and Thane were first to be called with only 50 points, but 1521 and 1504 miles. Ron and I placed 17th and 18th with 240 points and the least miles. I had 1001 miles. Ron had a couple more because he investigated the boat ramp.