

Highway to Hell (and Back)



1,529 Miles in 22 Hours, 8 Minutes

The weekend ahead looked like perfect weather for a ride! This had been a hot summer and fall temps were starting to get comfortable. Karen had plans for Saturday. What should I do?

In 2023, one of my goals is to ride at least one Iron Butt ride a month. It was September and I've had a streak going since December 2022.

One of the best things about the Iron Butt Association is they have so many different rides to choose from or you can create your own! A few weeks earlier, while looking through the IBA "BIG" list of rides, the "Hell and Back" ride sparked my interest. Well, this was the perfect weekend to do it!

IBA (Iron Butt Association) Requirements: *Hell, Michigan is an unincorporated community about 10 miles northwest of Ann Arbor.*

You must start your ride anywhere, ride to Hell, MI, and return to your starting location.

My strategy for this ride was to start out as a BBG (Bun Burner Gold/ 1,500 miles in 24 hours), but also have the route designed so I could bail out after 1,000 miles if I wanted to—For example, if I wanted to do spend a little extra time in Hell, stop to eat a nice meal somewhere, or do some flower sniffing along the way. Or, if I just got too tired, I would have the flexibility built into to accommodate a random change of plans on my part.

According to the requirements, I had to start and end the ride at the same location. If I started and ended it in my hometown of Hernando, Mississippi, that would be 1,530 miles for a BBG.

If I bailed out of the BBG and did the minimum mileage or a SS1000 (Saddle Sore 1,000 is the minimum ride for the IBA which equals to 1,000 miles in 24 hours), how could I make that work? Playing around in Google maps, I decided that Marion, Illinois would be a start/end location for an SS1000. It was approximately 1,040 miles roundtrip from Marion, IL to Hell, MI and back to Marion, IL. I would just have to make sure to stop there for an official DBR (Dated Business Receipt) on the way and returning as a backup plan.

I didn't want to take the same back and forth route to Hell if I could help it. With that in mind, once I left Marion, Illinois, I would ride north to Chicago, then east to Hell, Michigan. On the return trip, I would leave Hell, Michigan and travel south through Indianapolis and Terre Haute, Indiana on my way back to Marion, Illinois. Perfect! This gave me plenty of options! I had two full days (Saturday and Sunday) if I needed them!

On Saturday, I was up before the alarm went off at 3:00 am. Shortly after that I was on my way to the local Circle K for a start receipt. My official start DBR (for BBG

purposes) was 3:18 am September 9, 2023, in Hernando, Mississippi.

The temperature was 72 degrees with a clear, dark, starry sky above as I headed north. Traffic was very light as I rode through Memphis and crossed over the Mississippi River into Arkansas.

I continued north on I-55 to Sikeston, Missouri where I jumped on I-57 to Marion, Illinois for my backup SS1000 DBR. Official time 6:46 am.

At my next stop in Urbana, Illinois, I grabbed an Egg McMuffin since the McDonalds was conveniently located in the Road Ranger gas station. I ate it as I walked back to the fuel pump. Since this was a last-minute ride, I wasn't prepared with beef jerky or other protein that I normally would've carried with me to save time from stopping to eat.

BBGs are intense rides that don't leave room for delays. Fifteen hundred miles is a long way! Fifty percent farther than the standard SS1000. That says a lot!

I continued on the "Highway to Hell" up to Chicago where I exited onto I-80/94 eastbound. I followed I-94 as it eventually split off in a more northerly route toward Detroit.

In Paw Paw, Michigan, I stopped for more fuel. I assumed Paw Paw pertained to the banana like fruit that grows on trees.

Paw Paw is named for the pawpaw trees which once grew along the Paw Paw River. (Wikipedia)

From there, I continued on I-94 to Waterloo Village where I rode north and east for about 20 miles to Hell. I arrived in Hell (about 40 miles east of Detroit) around 2:30 pm (Central time).

First settled in 1838 by George Reeves, Hell started out as a grist mill and general store on the banks of what is now called Hell Creek. George's habit of paying the local farmers for their grain with home distilled whiskey led many wives to comment "He's gone to Hell again" when questioned about their husband's whereabouts during harvest time. The name stuck and "Hell" became an official town in 1841; the rest is history. (gotohellmi.com)



Hell, Michigan

I stopped at the Hell Saloon to use the restroom. The parking lot was full of bikes! I parked in one of the few empty spots which was right in front of the saloon. There were some guys hanging out on the front patio. They were questioning me as I took a couple of selfies. They were intrigued with the BMW adventure bike.

When they asked where I was from, I told them I just left Mississippi earlier that morning. Wow! Then, I

told them I was riding back to Mississippi and should be home tonight. One said "You must be one of those Iron Butt guys!" I said it would be a 1,500-mile day for me! Wow!

Another guy offered to buy me a beer. I declined and told him that I was headed back to Mississippi immediately. He said he was active on a Harley forum where he follows some crazy Iron Butt guys. He said one guy did 100,000 miles in 100 days! I told him that I know that guy, Chris Hopper! Wow! He said "He was also with another guy trying to do some crazy ride and after 10 days they had to stop due to the snow!" I said that would have been Ken Andrews. I know them both! Now, this guy wanted to take a picture of me to post on the Harley forum. Funny!

After the short visit, I rode to the "Go to Hell" Ice Cream and Souvenir store next door. They sold t-shirts, stickers, ice cream, etc. I bought a small sticker for the bike since I needed a receipt for IBA documentation. After that, I jumped on the bike and headed back to I-94 westbound then onto I-69 southbound.

I stopped for gas in Angola, Indiana around 4:00 pm. From there, I continued south on I-69 through Indiana where Karen and I grew up. As I rode through the Marion, Gas City and Fairmount area, I remembered riding a bicycle on I-69 when it was being built. I must have been 7 or 8 years old. The interstate hadn't opened yet, so we went for a

family bike ride down the unopened road.

Most people don't understand the sport of endurance motorcycle riding. Most think I would take the time to stop and visit family and friends. But, I am on a mission to complete the current challenge. It feeds my competitive hunger pang, even though I'm not competing against anyone but the clock. The endurance challenge is not only physical, but mental too!

Physically, it's a challenge to figure out how to stay comfortable for a long period of time on the bike. This is done with bike ergonomics such as hand, seat and feet position, The gear/apparel I wear also has a big affect on how I control my personal environment. How my body reacts during certain situations plays another major role. Do my muscles tighten up when its cold or rainy or intense traffic? This all factors into body fatigue.

Mentally, it helps to condition my mental fitness and mental health. Mental fitness in building strategies to solve the time/distance equation while staying patient to allow the strategies to succeed. Mental health in that I consider it a form of meditation where I can clear my mind of everything except the task at hand and enjoy the scenery around me.

So, believe it or not, endurance riding is a thing. Riding to visit family and friends is another thing. Typically, the two don't mix, they're two different things.

Back to the ride! Traffic wasn't too bad on this Saturday evening as I rode through Indianapolis. I hit I-465 around the east side of Indy to I-70 westbound. It was 6:30 pm (Central time) as I looked at the clock on my motorcycle display. I thought to myself, if I continued at this pace, I should make it back to Hernando in about 7 hours/1:30 am.

So far the weather had been great! The high temperature was 73 degrees. The low temperature got down to 62 degrees. I was so ready for summer to be over!

In Effingham, Illinois, I hit I-57 south to Marion, Illinois where I stopped for my backup SS1000 DBR. Official time 10:00 pm.

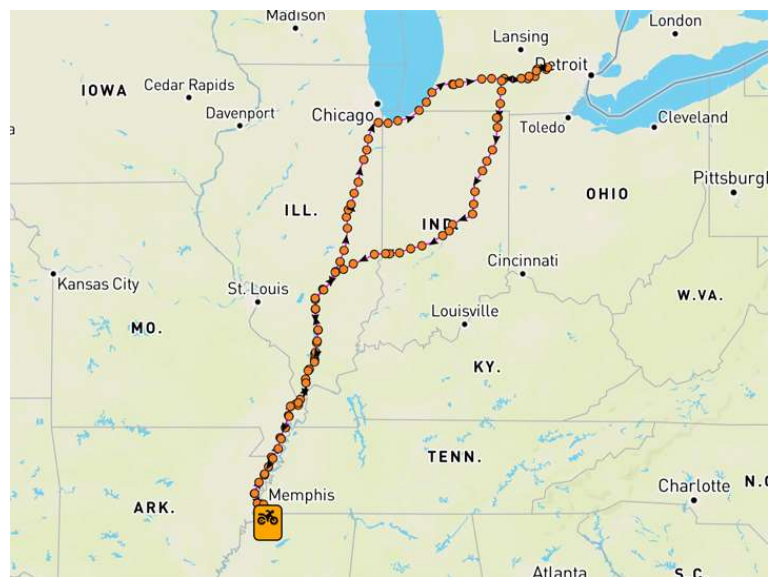
Calculating my start and stop times from Marion and factoring in the mileage, I rode 1,029 miles in 15 hours and 14 minutes. I felt great and knew I wouldn't have a problem finishing my BBG! With only 240 miles to go, I had 5 hours and 18 minutes left on the clock!

In Sikeston, I jumped on I-55 southbound. I made it to West Memphis, Arkansas before I had to stop for gas. I was only 30 miles away from Hernando at 12:48 pm.

Memphis was a breeze to ride through just like it was 22 hours earlier! I ended the ride in Hernando at the Circle K. Official time: 1:26 am, Sunday, September 10, 2023.

My strategy worked as planned! The weather and temperatures were great! It turned out to be one helluva ride to Hell and back!

2019 BMW R1250GSA
Distance: 1,529 miles
Time: 22 hrs, 8 min.
Average Speed: 69 mph
Fuel Used: 48.259 gal
Fuel Mileage: 31 mpg
High Temperature: 73°
Low Temperature: 62°



Hell and Back Route