

Valkyrie Moto Rally Riders Report Karen Handley, Rune Holder # 5

This will be lengthy, as my report is different from the average, as someone coming out of a pillion's perspective to a pilot.

Yes, I have experience and the mental and physical endurance to ride rallies but up to this point, have never experienced that as a pilot, but only as a pillion. Pillion is NOT for the weary. It is exhausting in its' own right. You have to learn to succumb to many variables in being a supporter to your pilot, both mentally and emotionally, a navigator, a problem solver and often times, put your own needs to the wayside for the good of the route. You have to lean to your trust in your pilot, find strategic ways to take care of your own body while being held captive in a small space with little ability or option to adjust your positioning for extended hours at a time.

Chris Hopper had introduced his rally specifically for "beginners" last year, within the borders of Texas. If you've never ridden in our home state of Texas, you wouldn't understand that down in these parts, we affiliate distance by time vs. mileage. It's a big'un and you will experience nearly every terrain imaginable from twisty backroads to the hill country, congested metropolitan cities to small towns of 100, depths of hell desert to beautiful shorelines. You will go from 35mph-80mph within a mile stretch of road.

Gail, on the other hand, jumped in with no experience. During Hop's Rally, she got her first experience in learning the rally book and objectives, Basecamp, Spotwalla and all the way down the list to proper gear and its importance. The whole package!

For our first time, we tackled the beast successfully.

When I first heard about this first inaugural All Women's Multi-State Endurance Rally, I placed a call to my sister, Gail. Whereas, I had ridden many rallies to include several NITWITT, Many Heart of Texas, LDX and the 2021 and 2023 IBR, I had always ridden as a pillion. After completing Hop's Rally, last year as beginners, within our State, together, we decided to take on VMR as our first multi-state Rally.

Originally, We planned to dive into basecamp together for reasons of gaining experience but unfortunately, Life got in the way with previous events that Gail needed to attend so she leaned her trust to me to get it done. I'm thankful that she trusts me. ❤️

Receipt of Rally Book:

Read it thoroughly. ✓

Covert to GPX file to upload into basecamp ✓

Read Rally Book again ✓

Route ✓

We were given the opportunity to use a platform for bonus location entry and submission or we could email them in. I wanted to minimize the "busy work" at each of my stops with my layover times. So I decided to utilize the email submission vs. the entry portal with drop down boxes. I came to this decision because it gave me the opportunity to create each email

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submission within my Draft file, with the required info in my subject line, ahead of time and prior to rally start. I did not have to worry about searching for my bonus code, selecting the correct one on site. I could select my pre-filled email up, attach my pic, send and go.

Example:

Rider number-location code-sequence number

I did the same with my combo bonuses, REST, MEAL, SPOT and Charity. It was all sitting in my Drafts waiting to be selected. This served its purpose and minimized my layover times. I do not regret that.

I also pre-filled my claim form minus my time and ODO, knowing it could change, but brought blank copies to re-do if necessary. I took a screenshot if it to keep me in line with my chronological order of combo bonus entry as they were obtained, as this route was slotted to acquire all three combo bonuses available. To minimize having to get in and out of saddlebags to obtain the form to write in ODO and times, which takes away from layover time, we kept notes in our phones as we were walking to and from our bikes. We could fill the claim form in later.

Also, took pictures of our locations from the rally book in our phones so we could easily see the photo example, on our next stop, as we rolled down the road. No need to pull out the book repeatedly.

Through several days of work, I was able to nail down a route that would have provided 58,243 points. However, to complete this, there could not be any extended periods of layover outside of the 10 minute increments I had included. Given many locations and ease of access, I felt that the 10 minutes was, in fact, feasible. For the most part, it was. We had our system at each stop, applied the same strategy each and every time and successfully completed them within a few minutes of the 10 min allowance. Some as low as 2-3 minutes, allowing us to "bank" time within our layovers and while on the road. Banked time is slotted for gas stops, traffic etc, as we all know.

Although this rally was 30 hours in total length, it's important to know that there was a MEAL bonus of 45 minutes off the bike at a sit-down restaurant. This is generally a great offering of points you do NOT want to miss out on. Typically generous in points because our Rallymaster and staff, are cognizant to keeping their riders safe and time off the bike and proper nourishment for our safety is equally important and often times MORE important to them than the rally itself. With that said, a MANDATORY REST bonus of a minimum of 4 hours, max of 8 was included and it was best to utilize a full 8 hours at 25 pts per minute. So, actual road time with those deducted was 21 hours to get your locations.

Traveled to Longview, Texas to position for the 8am start on Friday. Hotel was .2 miles from our first location. We were positioned prior to 8 am, armed and ready to send in our SPOT, Charity, and ODO Start emails as remote starters. (Remote start was an option for this rally also). We sent in our first bonus location successfully and we were off!

We obtained another location and had routed to take use of our MEAL bonus early in the day, for a couple reasons. In my rally experience, I perform better if my body is fueled for the

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day. Also, breakfast is usually a meal that is prepared in a kitchen a lot faster than any other meal, so felt with the 45 minute time allowance, we were guaranteed to hit that mark. AND I don't have to worry about that bonus and it's huge point value for the remainder of my rally with unforeseen potential mishap or distraction. One and done! So after our bonus in Marshall Texas, we obtained our MEAL bonus and all the above, proved true. We headed down to Carthage TX and after that location, we were on our way to Shreveport LA, ahead of schedule, on track and feeling great!

THEN IT HAPPENED

The unforeseen, out of our control issue no one wants.

We pulled curbside, oddly, shut down our bikes when normally we kept them running if just a couple steps away, to take our bonus picture with our draft email pulled up in our phones. Email sent and we mounted back on our bike to leave.

AND MY BIKE WOULDNT START!

I looked at Gail and told her if I couldn't turn this situation around for her to go on ahead and finish her rally but she wouldn't leave me. If that doesn't exemplify a Valkyrie, I don't know what would!

Fortunately, it was in an area that wasn't congested but unfortunately, not many opportunities for assistance either. I could go on about this for days but let me spare you. Bike was disassembled, I had a hulkman jump starter and tool kit in my saddle bag. (Ladies, if you do not have a HULKMAN I highly recommend you get one). It's an independent way to resolve a situation with no assistance needed roadside. Sometimes there are creepy-creeps out there that would gladly take advantage of a stranded woman. These miracle devices are no bigger than a large block of cheese. Got her put back together and hit the road again. I called Nancy to let her know of my extended stay at this location to not cause any alarm at rally headquarters of why we were stopped for that long.

*This incident was the setback that changed our game. *

We ran hard all the way up to our location in Mississippi to try to gain back the time we lost. We knew behind our Mississippi location was three high pointers in downtown Memphis and we were originally supposed to arrive just prior to 5 pm to steer clear of the Friday night festivities there.

Hauled out of Mississippi successfully and flew into Southern Memphis to what we were expecting: light after light after light. Obtained our bonus and was greeted with the Mothers of all mothers. Downtown Memphis in all its glory. Beale St was barricaded off in all directions, block after block. Pedestrians, Party goers, music, lights, party buses, drunks and lighted Cinderella carriages drawn by horses. Zero parking. Might I add that Memphis does NOT diaper their horses? We had to hike the blocks to obtain our bonuses through crowds of people and avoid the parting gifts of equestrian landmines every couple of steps! The smell

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of alcohol, vomit, food trucks and horse poo will never leave my nose. But we got them and got the HELL outta dodge!!

Given the extended battery issue that threw us into the wrath of Memphis we had a tough decision to make. TOUGH.

We were originally scheduled to hit St. Louis ,MO for the remaining VET locations for our COMBO2 and had added a higher point to our route with CAR1. Let me share a tidbit about ST. LOUIS.

When I created this route, St. Louis was the end-all, say-all of victory in this route. It was the location to seal the deal on obtains all three combo bonuses. However, it required a higher strategic approach as the location was a National Cemetery that lists it availability from Dawn to Dusk. Well, dawn to dusk can mean different things to different people. Here in Texas, dawn to our ranchers is the very second there is a smear of light on the horizon. Sometimes the rooster hasn't even sounded off yet. Given the fact that Missouri may see the sun a smidge earlier than Texas I had no clue what to expect. So days prior to rally start, I first google mapped the location to see if they had a gate for entry. Confirmed that they do. I then called the cemetery and spoke with Margo. Margo couldn't confirm a time that the grounds keeper opens the gate of entry and exit. All she could tell me is dawn to dusk but did offer up a hint that when she arrives to work every morning at 7am, it is open. Fair enough. I mean, I'll take it, Margo. This was probably the ONLY time in my life I was hoping for the government to shut down to make this location an "out of our control" approach. But because of my dead battery fiasco which landed us into Memphis smack dab into every ralliers nightmare, we had to make the choice to drop St. Louis. We could not have acquired our REST bonus at capacity and ride that far north to make it back in time. Painful as it was, that decision lost us the COMBO2 and the three high point locations totaling 7496 pts. What we had planned on Day2 and our total REST superseded it. We came to understand there was no Saint in St Louis and we needed to be smart about it.

We still had one more stop in the night in Cairo, Illinois before our pre-plan of St Louis. So would plan to grab it and stay at a hotel there. Oh Cairo, Illinois. How I will NEVER return to that place! Cairo is a town that looks like came straight out of the 1970's. Absolutely no technology there. No gas stations. There is a main road that runs through town and the only signs of life was at the two liquor stores in "town". Upon arrival, I had 20 miles left on my Reserve. But we needed a receipt to start our REST bonus. Could not locate a gas station or business to obtain a receipt. Went into the hotel and was advised by the gentleman, I will refer to as Butch, to NOT return to the liquor stores or to town, for that matter, at 10pm at night. He informed me that there are very bad people "down there". He didn't have an ATM at the hotel either. I called Nancy to ask her suggestion as the closest gas station was 10 miles leading out of town. She advised what to do and we were able to get a computer printed receipt only because they just had a computer installed. However, Butch stated that they lock the doors down tight at 11pm in the lobby and will not reopen them until 6am. This was going to hinder the start of our Day2 as we have to be rolling out at that time or close to it and with the amount of time it took Butch to navigate his new computer system to provide me my start receipt, I was concerned. I asked Butch if there was a pizza place or something

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similar that would deliver us dinner to the hotel. He gave me a blank stare, and said "No, nothing gets delivered here. I can give you 2 apples." We opted to eat the protein of beef jerky and cashews I had in my saddle bag. Then tells me, "I have given you a room on the ground floor so you can watch your bikes....from the window of your room." I feel warm and fuzzy at this point. NOT!

Needless to say, sleep was minimal and the rest of Day2 was not run on rest but on adrenaline.

DAY2

Woke up to dew-covered bikes and freezing temps. Got heated gear on, wiped down our bikes. Rode our bikes over near the lobby for the fastest and most convenient parking lot exit position. Went to the lobby of the hotel, stood outside pressed up against the door for it to open at 6am, as Butch stated. Needless to say, he is not an early riser and it wasn't opened until later than expected. This and the unexpected gas stop outside of town vs. in town prior to start of rest, set us back again.

Today was important. Each location was needed to complete Combo bonus 1 with needing one more stop and Combo 3. Nothing could be missed.

Because we couldn't get up North we headed West to our next expected location in Carthage Missouri. This was a 4.5 hour hike. Certainly, we anticipated that length of time to afford us the ability to make up for lost time again. We did climb a bit and banked back time but not as much as we hoped, due to traffic and the terrain.

We got into Carthage, MO bagged two locations. WOM1 completed our Combo bonus 1 and got that sent in and saw that SOR1 was a few steps away and worth more pts, so for time, snagged that vs. riding over to Joplin, MO for SOR4. We were able to get that submitted at 11:42am.

Our last and final stop to complete our Combo3 was OTH5. We were almost finished! We knew it was a bit of a ride from where we were so saddled up, excited to be on the home stretch, selected our location in POI viewer and didn't exhale. It's 11:44am.

This location is now 2hrs 12 minutes away! Cutoff for DNF is 2pm. We don't know the road, have never ridden it. Didn't know what to expect in Ft Smith as we started this rally remotely.

Do not have aux tank so will definitely need fuel at some point. Panic. Needless to say, we rode more aggressively than we have ever ridden. Calculating distance and time as we headed down the road, a precise travel speed had to remain consistent for the entire 2 hour leg for even a chance to make it back without DNF. I knew our average speed had been calculated properly in basecamp so there was a glimmer of hope combined with banked time on the road.

All I can say is, as rookie pilots in an endurance rally, and at crunch time, we were forced to test our limits in all areas of physical, mental and emotional well being.

We were able to accomplish what seemed downright impossible. We slid into the finish with 1 min and 30 seconds to spare to DNF. In doing that, we also still stopped and obtained OTH5 although not within the time slot allocated in the rally book, by 15 minutes. Therefore, due to the loss of this one location, we were unable to claim our combo3 for a total of 6230 points.

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Straight to the Feels! It was 5 min from the finish and in hindsight it would have been smarter to bypass it and come into the finish without it. But here I sit, looking back on everything and I can affirmatively say, we did not concede defeat. We gave it everything we had even when it would have been easier to drop something or give up.

A warrior wouldn't do that. Nothing worth getting is ever gotten easily. I can look back on the woulda-coulda-shoulda of a rally experience. I can recognize with the route I had planned and the points we would've earned, if all went well, would have earned us a 3rd place finish. I will lean to the promise of the ability to locate this route. I'm proud of that. The great part about it is all the women that executed their routes and earned their standing. I'm so proud for each and every one of them!

I prefer to focus on the WILL-CAN-DID of our experience. Within our 21 hours of riding time, we tackled just under 1,200 miles. Round trip was 1,755 miles for me from start to my driveway. I will attach our original route as reference.

Behind it we are stronger. We are skilled. We are resilient. We are better prepared for our next battle.

I can't thank Nancy Oswald, Chris Hopper, Paul Tong, rally staff and volunteers and my husband Jim enough for all the support.

To my fellow Valkyries, I'm a better person to have met you. I look forward to our lifelong friendship and affiliation to this phenomenal Rally, as the originals. Lastly, to Gail, thank you. Thank you for trusting me from start to finish. Thank you for taking the hits with me and never giving up. You are my person.

We are Valkyrie!

This report was originally posted in the Valkyrie Moto Rally Facebook group and includes several photos. To view the original, please join the private group (women only!) Karen's report is at this link : <http://tiny.cc/hpluwz>