

Dale Strother

My name is Dale Strother and I was Hoka Hey Challenge rider number 383. I made it to about the 3,000-mile point before a pickup truck turned immediately into my path in a dried up, near ghost town in the West. The bike was totaled. I was able to walk (limp) away.

I have read with interest the comments made by a lot of observers and even a few participants. I want to add mine.

There have been a lot of complaints that the Challenge was unsafe. Well, no shit. The organizers never said it was going to be a cakewalk. In fact, from the first thing I read, they promised to test us. Anyone with any sense knows that if you take 1,000 motorcycles and 1,000 riders over 7,000 miles of back roads with \$500,000 and a lifetime of pride at the end, people are going to push themselves to the limit. When that many people push themselves to the limit over that kind of distance, someone will get hurt. I told my friends before I left Tennessee that some people would die on this ride. That is why I wanted to do the first one. I didn't believe modern society would let them do two. Modern "civilized" society doesn't have the stomach for it.

On the contrary, I think it was as safe as could be expected or asked for. The few rules stated that a speeding violation meant disqualification. You could not use radar detectors, which certainly slowed people down. There was no requirement to ride a certain number of miles in a day. Technically, we were given two weeks to finish 8,000 miles. That is less than 600 miles a day and very doable for most experienced riders. I approached 1,000 a day and made every turn while I was a part of the Challenge. I read nothing that encouraged novice riders to enter the contest. No one was asked to exceed his or her personal limits of endurance. Those who did, did so of their own choosing.

There have been complaints that it was not well organized or that the instructions were inaccurate or vague. The organizers never said it was going to be easy. I was as frustrated as anyone going across Alabama. On Day Two I was suspicious and pissed. However, I circled back and sometimes circled back again to find a road that I missed. I asked locals and looked at maps till I found every darn road. Yup, some small town in Alabama had changed the name of Dean Street halfway through. Folks, the route was 8,250 miles! As a former Marine and someone that spends a lot of time outdoors, I can tell you that the most current topographical map you can get will have errors based on erosion and other natural and man-made events.

The organizers evoked the spirit of the warrior within. The early pioneers and Native Americans used their wits and the signs the land gave them to find their way through the wilderness. We had instructions, road maps and access to locals for help. Still, this may have been as close to that experience as modern men will ever have and I applaud the organizers for their effort.

As the route progressed, I became more and more impressed with their work. They took us around city after city without exposing us to the heavy inner city traffic. Where heavy

traffic was unavoidable, such as crossing the Mississippi, we were in and out of it in a few miles and back on two-lane state and county roads. The routes were often rugged, but always beautiful. Over and over, I found myself marking places on maps that I wanted to return to when I had more time.

I was forced out when a young man turned his full-size pickup into my path and I could not avoid hitting him. My motorcycle was totaled. I was bloodied and bruised. I knew I was out of the money at that point, but I spent the next two days in a dingy hotel trying to work out another motorcycle so I could finish the course. I regretted losing my motorcycle, but I hated not finishing the course more.

There is a saying among Harley riders and motorcycle enthusiasts in general, "***If I have to explain it, you wouldn't understand.***" That is how I feel about Hoka Hey.

I am proud I started. I am proud I got as far as I did. I hate not finishing. To all who finished the course I say, "Well done." For the eventual winner(s), you are the iron man or men of motorcycle riding. To the organizers, if the call ever goes out again, I'll be there.

~ Ride on and drive on,
Dale Strother
Rider #383