

A.B.A.T.E. OF NORTH IDAHO
ANNUAL TOY RUN
Pastor Ernie Crocker, Kootenai Chapter ROAD DOGS
SATURDAY NOVEMBER 5, 2005

A Toy Run Perspective from A Female Run Newbie

For about the last 5 years, I've been attending various Kootenai Chapter events so when I was invited to come to a Kootenai County A.B.A.T. E. meeting by Karen, who is the State Secretary/Treasurer, I said, "Sure! It's been a while since I've attended an A.B.A.T.E. meeting."

Meeting night comes and it's pouring down rain so I decide to cage it. The meeting is being held in a restaurant/bar. I'm mildly surprised to find the meeting in a conference room and not the bar. Pastor Ernie calls the meeting to order and goes through the previous meeting's minutes, etc. So far nothing much has changed over the years. Then the State Deputy Coordinator, Tim Herzog, introduces the guest speaker Bob Nonini, Idaho legislator from the Transportation Committee. He tells us a bit of who he is, what he believes in, some personal information, and asks us to keep talking with him about our concerns as motorcyclists. While listening to the speaker, I find myself sort of wishing I live in Idaho instead of Washington. He doesn't 'talk down' to you, comes across as sincere, and sounds fairly honest about how politics work. Then it's down to the Chapter's current business. The Toy Run. Yeah! Karen informs the group members I'm looking for some one to ride with me from Spokane. The guy who is going to be Santa Claus this year just so happens to live in Spokane and will call me. He's going to ride in his Santa suit if it's not raining – cage it if it's raining. They have the drawing for the 50/50 pot. I win! Geez, I never win anything! This is so cool!!! I donate it back for the kids--heck, Christmas is coming and all.

Wake up 7:30 a.m. Saturday and take a peek out the kitchen window. The street is wet. Low clouds. No active rain. Turn on the local weather t.v. channel - currently 35 degrees - expected high for the day, 45 degrees. I think to myself..I can probably deal with 35 degrees for maybe an hour or so. Wait for Santa's phone call...8:20 a.m. Ring!..."Morning! Weather looks good. You gonna ride?" "Well, Santa, if you are, I am!" "Meet you on the corner at 9 a.m.!" Oh my...I'm riding! I've gotta boogie!! Hit the shower, dress, pull on 2 pairs of socks, boots, grab my legal stuff, gloves, run out the back door, dump my purse stuff in my saddle, push the bike out, grab my leathers, close up the shop, lock the gate...*She* doesn't want to start. Finally!! Shuck on my leathers while she's warming up..hit the road...she's not happy but I make her go anyway...make it to the corner...it's a little after 9 a.m. Santa has brought along his wife as a passenger and a male buddy. We top off our gas tanks and head down through town. Uh oh...this means we're taking the freeway to Idaho and not the back roads.

Riding through town I'm thinking the cold isn't as bad as I thought it would be. Hands, feet, rest of me warm. Pull my bandana up a bit more to cover more of my face the closer we get to the freeway. Oh boy--the on ramp--we're off! We cruise at 60 mph for a few miles...then stop dead...road construction...single lane...45 mph...crawl for a

while...break loose of the construction at the speed limit switch up to 70...yeah!!! I'm still thinking this cold weather isn't all that bad. Do a mental check of what is feeling cold on my body so next time I have a better idea of how to dress. I decide to stay behind Santa rather than try to ride next to him. He doesn't know me; has never ridden with me; and he knows where we're going so I'll just follow him. The other rider is way back behind me floating left then floating right of the lane (he tells me later that he enjoys having a lane to himself)...okie dokie...he catches up with us before the turnoff and we're all good.

Everyone is to meet at Lawrence's on Government Way. There's already about 8 bikes there when we arrive about 10:15 a.m. and sign up isn't until 10:30 a.m. The group is to leave at 11 a.m. Lots of milling around waiting time. Ernie's wife Peanut welcomes me to the Run and asks if I'm warm enough and then heads off to welcome others as they arrive. I pass on the free coffee and donuts. I see some familiar faces and give them a cheery frosty hello and ask for tips about riding with a group as I've never done it before. What I basically get told is that it is mostly common sense. When I see an opening, pull in but keep an eye out for other drivers who may cut across the line and things like that. Finally, it's go time! I sit on my bike and watch a bunch of bikes pull off. I think they're patch holders. But I'm guessing. We wait for them to pass. Then the Pastor Ernie and Santa lead off the group. I wait until there is an opening for me to slip in behind someone. Yeah!!! I'm in! I follow the bike in front of me trying to figure out what I'm supposed to be doing. The bike in front of me is more or less doing their own thing compared to the other bikes which are more or less riding side-by-side. At the 1st stop, I break out my position and get into a different group of people. Peanut makes sure I get off my bike and go in to get warm. I walk around a bit, ignore the coffee and cookies, and soon it's time to load up and head to stop 2. More coffee and cookies. Wait! Someone said there are chocolate cookies--ok, I'll cave and have one of those! Time to load up again and head off to stop 3. *They* have hot chili. Oh this is so much better than coffee and cookies in this lady's opinion! By now a few sprinkles of rain have started and we're off to stop 4. Stop 4 has cheese and crackers (where's the wine?). A couple of nibbles and it's off to the last stop--WalMart. WalMart has set up a table with pre-priced, prebagged toys, and they have opened a special checkout lane just for the Toy Run people so all you have to do is grab a bag. Plus, they volunteered food for the \$3 potluck after the Run. There is one retired Marine and some other elderly gentlemen in red suit jackets to assist with collecting the toys all the bikers have gone in and purchased. Only about 30 bikes show up at WalMart. I'm disappointed it's not the 75+ that had started the Run. Even before stop 1, the group lost about 10 bikes. At stop 2, 6 or so dropped off. And at each stop after that, more small groups dropped off. I'm told by someone that this is pretty normal for Runs like these. I ask "why do they even bother to show up if they're just gonna drop out?"

At the potluck, Chapter members brought in enough food to cover 3 pool tables. Participants are asked to donate \$3. I find out later that the \$3 food donation will be matched by Walmart. So while we supped, laughed, and visited, the drawings were held. One fella won about 3 Taco Time gift certificates and that was a good thing cause he has a bunch of kids! There were t-shirts, parts, gift certificates, etc. All were donated by various merchants. I won a helmet!

All the raffle prizes have been given out, tummies have been filled, and it's time to head home. It's now dark and it's raining. I follow Santa and another Spokane rider joins us. He offers to carry my new helmet for me seeing as how I didn't pack any bungie cords (thanks guy!) Off we go. This time we take the back roads. We take the cut from the State Line and cross over to Trent. I miss the 1st posted speed limit but stick to Santa's butt as best as I can. Next speed limit I spy is 35mph. I slow down for it; the other rider speeds up and passes me. I speed up to catch up with him. We cross the railroad tracks just as they light up and the bars come down. Now I know why he did what he did..duh! 55 mph on the back road, in the rain, in the dark; not too bad. I swipe off my face shield from time to time. Hit a warm pocket--nice. Hit a dry pocket--even better. See a sign--5 p.m., 41 degrees--still at least 30 minutes more riding before I get home. We get to the north side of Spokane. We wave bye to Santa and his wife. The other biker and I still have a little ways to go as yet and it's the final stretch for me. My feet are warm but my left hand is stiff and it hurts to pull the clutch in by now. Not driving as well as I should so I pay extra attention to my driving. Home! Yeah!!! I pull in and the other rider walks up to the gate with my new helmet and explains to my daughter that I'd won it. We wish him a safe journey home as he still has a couple of miles to go.

All in all, for my 1st ever group ride, it wasn't as bad or as scary as I had thought it might be.

The Chapter did an excellent job organizing the Run; getting the donations for the raffles; getting volunteers; etc., and raising all the money and gifts to go to the kids. At the meeting they had set up a goal to pass last year's 2,000+ toys that were collected. I hope they make it. They work hard for this annual event.

If you still have time to make your area's A.B.A.T.E. Toy Run...get going! After all, you know how Santa can be with *his* list.

More than likely, I'll renew my membership with A.B.A.T.E. and continue to make some of the local events. I do have some questions that I'd like answered as far as what is biker etiquette these days. Does the brotherhood concept still exist? If so, does it include chicks? Or does it all just boil down to plain good old fashioned manners? Maybe being a lone rider isn't such a bad thing after all.

Ride safe!~LittleSisterWA