

The Ninety-Nine Percenter

If you've ever been absolutely, positively sure that you'd filled your gas tank, fixed your motorcycle or were looking for a lost rider in the right spot, then you know what this story's all about. By Ed Hertfelder

● AT ONE TIME MOTORCYCLISTS WERE plagued with one percenters: a strange breed of nitwit who submerged in respectability when blue jeans became fashionable. For all we know they're probably running around now in double-knit slacks, turtleneck pullovers and short hair just to be different.

I knew a ninety-nine percenter.

He rode an eight-speed Husky with enough skill to bring tears to your eyes, but when it came to timekeeping he couldn't tell the big hand from the little hand on the best day he ever had; he thought seconds were what you used at a duel. His name was Brad and he'd come up from West Virginia years ago—he goes back every year on his vacation but has never been able to find it again.

When I met Brad he was sharing a house with Ken Lather—a reasonably bad rider who's a tri-sexual. Men, women and sheep are all fair game. Ken had gotten himself in a jam with the SPCA when he had some sheep handcuffs made in a sex shop in Pennsauken. What really bent Ken out of shape was that the complaint was signed "ANIMAL LOVER."

I picked up Brad one morning when I was in a bucks-down frame of wallet towing a homemade three-rail trailer with a 1956 Volkswagen sunroof beetle which had leaking front brake cylinders and smelled like an emergency ward. Brad loaded his bike while I topped up the brake reservoir and Ken stumbled around like he'd spent all night in bed with two girls because he'd spent all night in bed with two girls. Ken's driveway is pitched like a ski jump and I'd given the brake two pumps (it takes three) when I had to cut a sharp left on Clement's Bridge Road. Brad's Husky never made the turn.

"Darn," he said, "I was ninety-nine percent sure I'd tied that thing down." Then he got out and walked back to get his motorcycle up out of the gutter. I should have helped him but my hand-brake was lying in Woody's garage and I didn't want to shut the engine off and park it in gear as the flywheel teeth were in need of some root canal work. The Barrington police car pulled up behind and started its big roof lights flashing to warn the heavy traffic: two cars an hour. Judging by the way the officer was writing on his clipboard, this was the most excitement since the victory parade after the Second World War.

"Brad," I asked as we got under way again, "did you hear about the girl who said she was ninety-nine percent sure she *wasn't* pregnant?"

"No, I don't think so."

"She called him Mandrake." I could tell he didn't understand so I added, "The baby, she called the baby Mandrake." The puzzled look on his face indicated that they don't have a lot of newspapers in West Virginia, so I asked, "That machine going to jump off again boy?"

"Nosir, nosir. Got her tied down like a John Deere on a flatcar." And that, as they say, should be good enough for government work.

When we reached the event, Sandy Lane, and unloaded, Brad made another ninety-nine call. He worried his tank cap off, looked in and said, "I'm ninety-nine percent sure I filled this yesterday," then went ahead and poured half of a five-gallon can of mix into a two-and-a-half-gallon tank. Thankfully, he had his own because I was so broke I was using Burger King ketchup pouches on my fried-egg sandwiches to keep the stale bread from catching in my craw.

It turned out to be one of my "square root" performances—late one minute at the first check, two minutes at the second, four at the third, eight at the fourth and like that until I exploded the rear tire by jumping the Jersey Central tracks and catching a rail right on the crack in the tire carcass I'd been trying not to notice the last two months. In case this has never happened to you, the bubble on the tube will "squawk" its way past the swing arm twice, then let go like a cherry bomb the next time around. It's sort of a neat explosion, but not 44 dollars' worth.

At the next narrow spot on the trail I parked it so as not to impede anyone because they tend to get testy and more than a little homicidal. The last of the "on-time" riders hustled past about the time I was putting the second coat of Chap Stick on my lips, and then Steve Seitz limped by with his bike locked in low. Steve circled around through the brush, stopped, faced me, and just sat there shaking his head. He looked down at my flat tire, shook his head some more, then motored out revving his engine somewhat higher than its design team had intended. Four times in the last year I'd broken down for one reason or another and each time Steve was in sight and broken also. The odds against this

are astronomical; that explains why Steve was struck speechless. No matter, Steve might be speechless right now, but he'd catch up on it later.

After I'd wobbled my way out to the next road crossing, I sponged a lift from two fellows who had been running an observation check, which is the check they give to the stupid fellows. You don't have to write numbers at an observation check—a simple checkmark is all you use. They dropped the tailgate of their station wagon and loaded my bike flat side down while it wept gas out the tank cap. Five minutes later it became obvious that station wagons were not designed to be driven with the tailgate down on a road paved with gravel and talcum powder; what we needed was windshield wipers and squirters on the *inside*. For some reason the driver slowed down, which meant we got slightly less talcum to breathe, but more time to suffer.

Back at the firehouse I offered the two guys some of the melted ice water from the bottom of my cooler and when they looked in and saw that all I had was melted ice water, they disappeared.

I loaded my old bike on the trailer. The machine was the last living matador; still alive due to my—ahem—superb maintenance and just a little help from Billy Dutcher, who replaced everything that turns or goes up and down because it seemed like a good idea at the time. I left my helmet and boots on the trailer fender, then hobbled across the gravel in my bare feet to the shower room, which is just one of the nice things at Sandy Lane. I'm convinced that a hot shower after a woods ride is the most enjoyable thing you can do—alone. Ten minutes later I "mooned" Chatsworth when another early DNF walked in as I was towel-drying off with one of the VW's terry-cloth seat covers. This fellow was mud from the waist down.

"Looks like that first step was a bitch," I said.

"Yeah, I followed four other guys into one of last year's sections. I don't think *they will ever get out*." Then he tightened his collar, put on his helmet and stepped under the shower.

The entire parking area was almost deserted; most of the support vehicles were out supporting. The odd vans and house trailers around probably contained sleeping jokers who'd over-partied and had cracks in their heads from the sound

