

TONY SANFELIPO IS A CERTIFIED

'IRON BUTT' RIDER

Stephanie Morse

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The open road, nature and a motorcycle: For Tony Sanfelipo, that's the perfect way to relax.

"I love long-distance riding, especially by myself," he said. "It's Zen. Just you and nature."

Sanfelipo is one of Wisconsin's Iron Butt riders, a select group of bikers who have logged a minimum of 1,000 miles of motorcycle riding in 24 hours.

The Iron Butt Association, a loose-knit group of riders that claims to have 60,000-plus members, certifies over 100 long-distance motorcycle rides worldwide. Some rides take a day or two to complete while others require weeks or nearly a month of riding.

Sanfelipo, an accident investigator at law firm Hupy and Abraham, became a SaddleSore certified rider in 1999 for his 1,035-mile ride from Madison to the Sturgis, S.D., area in 16 hours.

He said he has done seven to 10 Iron Butt rides but has completed the paperwork for just one.

"I've done a lot of long rides, but didn't document it," Sanfelipo said. "I do it for the joy of riding, not the award."

For a long-distance trip to become certified, riders must follow the association's guidelines, which includes getting dated receipts at gas stops and having witnesses.

"They review all the the documentation, and they can tell if you cheat because they know you wouldn't be able to get there in that amount of time," Sanfelipo said.

Long-distance rides, especially Iron Butt rides such as the SaddleSore (1,000 or more miles within 24 hours) and the Bun Burner (1,500 miles in 36 hours), take more planning and endurance than shorter rides around town.

"You can't just hop on a bike and go 1,000 miles," Sanfelipo said.

For Iron Butt rides, bikers must plan a route that meets the required miles in



Iron Butt-certified rider Tony Sanfelipo has completed many long-distance rides to Sturgis, S.D., for that city's annual motorcycle festival. TONY SANFELIPO

the allotted time frame.

A motorcycle's gas tank is smaller than a car's tank, so Sanfelipo said it's important to plan gas stops ahead of time. Riders also need the right gear to protect them from bad weather and supplies to keep their energy up when fatigue begins to set in.

For long-distance rides, Sanfelipo brings a tank bag, first aid kit, granola bars, bottled water, electrolyte tablets, sunscreen and rain gear.

"During part of the ride it may be 70 degrees and sunny, then later it will be pouring," Sanfelipo said.

This type of riding is also very physically demanding, he said. A rider's legs have to carry the weight of heavy bikes, and abdomen and back muscles must keep the rider upright in the face of strong winds.

"Riding distance takes a lot of muscles," Sanfelipo said. "Even just sitting in an upright position you're using your stomach muscles, and that's without

tance rides, because either the bike or I couldn't make it," he said.

Sanfelipo has always enjoyed riding vintage motorcycles. He rides a 1948 Panhead for shorter trips. These bikes are generally not designed for comfortable long rides.

In 1993 he bought a new Harley-Davidson Fat Boy and soon started taking long rides to Sturgis, site of the massive motorcycle rally in South Dakota.

"The more I did it, the more I liked it," Sanfelipo said. "Then it just became a passion."

Most of his Iron Butt rides and other long trips since then have been to Sturgis.

"I go out there to ride the canyons and Black Hills," he said. "It's very spiritual riding out there."

The festival has concerts and races in the evening, but Sanfelipo said he usually doesn't make it back in time.

"Once I get started riding, I don't want to stop," he said.

Sanfelipo has done other long rides in the Midwest and around the country with friends and his wife, Vicki, who is also an Iron Butt certified rider.

Even when riding with friends or family, Sanfelipo prefers to just focus on the ride, unlike some other distance riders who prefer the social aspect of riding with friends and stopping at restaurants and bars along the way.

"A lot of people want to stop and smell the roses, but I can smell the roses going 80 miles an hour," he said.

For Sanfelipo the joy comes from riding — just him and his bike.

"I love going 700-800 miles on back roads," he said. "There's no traffic so you have the road to yourself. It's just you and the road and your bike. No distractions."

Despite several back injuries, Sanfelipo, 72, doesn't plan on stopping anytime soon.

"I see myself riding for many more years," Sanfelipo said. "I don't see any problem with me riding when I'm 80 or older — just not the distances I do now."

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Tony Sanfelipo
Iron Butt Rider

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The demanding nature of distance riding means it isn't for everyone. When Sanfelipo first started riding motorcycles in 1964, he didn't do the type of distance riding he does now.

"In those days I didn't do long-dis-