Dr. Ray Hixon, Associate Professor in the Mechanical, Industrial, and Manufacturing Engineering Department, recently competed in the first Cannonball Run motorcycle race, a race cross-country from New York City to Los Angeles, California. Hixon took the grand prize with his pit crew, students Lucas Kizer and Nick Eschhofen, finishing the long ride in 85 hours.

Two senior design teams converted a 50 cc motorcycle for the race; one team, with Kizer, Eschhofen, Aaron Heitbrink, and Mark Rottinger, converted the carbureted engine to a fuel injection system. The other team, with Benjamin Bittore, Steven Giveins, and Burton Johnson, modified the body and rider position on the bike to make it more aerodynamic.

The cross country race was not without drama, and problems began before Hixon crossed the start line. The fuel injection system the Senior Design team installed ran too much current, preventing the motorcycle from running. The team switched out the fuel injector with the carburetor.

Hixon took a northern route across the country, from New York to St. Louis, Missouri, and then through Flagstaff, Arizona, riding half the trip through rain and burning through two and a half engines. Kizer and Eschhofen were there for repairs. “I couldn't have done it without them,” Hixon said.

Hixon entered the race in the smallest motorcycle class, and beat the other five riders with the help of Kizer, Eschhofen, and “a van full of spare parts.” Of the six riders who entered the race, only three finished the grueling ride.

The first ever Cannonball Run looked very different from its first reinstatement. The original was put together by Car & Driver magazine in 1971 in protest against the national 55mph speed limit and any vehicle, not just motorcycles, could compete. The new Cannonball run did use the original start line, at the former Car & Driver headquarters, and finish line.

Hixon and his motorcycle will be featured in an article in Cycle World in October.