

Development of ATVs

ATVs (all-terrain vehicles) were first developed during the 1950s. The earliest models had six wheels instead of the four that riders are now familiar with. Honda was the first company to make the 3-wheel ATV in 1970. These were famously displayed in the James Bond film, 'Diamonds Are Forever.' Originally called the US90, the ATV was purely for fun, made with very large balloon tires instead of the mechanical suspension and smaller tires eventually introduced in the early 1980s.

One of the most important versions of the ATV was the 1982 Honda ATC200E Big Red. It was a landmark model in that it featured suspension and racks. This made it the first utility three-wheeled ATV available on the market. It was popular due to its ability to go anywhere on any type of terrain. The fact that it could go over types of terrain that most other vehicles could not eventually made it very popular with hunters in both the US and Canadian. It was also very appealing to those who were looking for nothing more than an exciting ride on the trails.

Soon Honda broke new ground by developing sport models. Honda seemed to have a virtual monopoly on the market, due to its patents on design and engine placement. The 1981 ATC250R was important because it was the first high-performance three-wheeler, featuring full suspension, a 248-cubic-centimetre two-stroke motor, a five-speed transmission with a manual clutch and a front disc brake. For those who enjoyed the sporting trail, the 1983 ATC200X was another in a series of landmark machines. It was developed with an easy-to-handle 192-cubic-centimetre four-stroke. This simple design was seemingly perfect for new participants in the sport.

Honda soon found itself competing with Suzuki. Suzuki led the industry in the development of 4-wheeled ATVs. It sold the first 4-wheeled ATV, the 1983 QuadRunner LT125, used primarily as a recreational machine for those who were just beginning to ride ATVs. In 1985, Suzuki stepped up their game when they introduced the first high-performance 4-wheel ATV, the Suzuki LT250R QuadRacer. This ATV was in production from 1985-1992, during which time it underwent three major engineering makeovers. This vehicle became the ATV known as designed primarily for racing by highly skilled riders.

Honda then responded a year later with the FourTrax TRX250R. This ATV has never been replicated.

Kawasaki joined the battle to develop better ATVs when they introduced their Tecate-4 250. In 1987, Yamaha introduced a different type of high-performance machine - the Banshee 350. The Banshee 350 featured a twin-cylinder two-stroke motor from the RD350LC street motorcycle. This ATV was heavier and more difficult to ride in the dirt than the 250s. It soon became a favorite with riders who preferred the sand dunes. The Banshee is still a hugely popular machine, but 2006 was the last year it was available in the U.S. Riders will be able to pick up a 2007 model in Canada, however.

ATVs were first introduced to the buying public in the 1970s. They immediately

caught on with those who were interested in doing something different outdoors. Original versions featured much larger tires and were offered in both 3-wheeled and 4-wheeled models. Soon, though, the 3-wheeled models of the ATV were prohibited, as they gained a reputation for being too dangerous. ATVs have since undergone a number of cosmetic and mechanical changes. Companies such as Honda, Suzuki, and Yamaha have developed a number of models that serve ATV riders of all tastes and interests.

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