

The Best ATV Trails: One Man's Trash is Another Man's Treasure

Next time you hear about a great riding spot, you might want to ask a few questions before you pack up to go ride there. Although all ATV's are designed for fun, they aren't all set up for having fun on the same terrain, and a trail that is great for some people might be a complete bore or be impassable for others.

Twenty years ago most ATV's were fairly similar. Three wheels were a lot more common than four, and they all had a utilitarian feel to them. Today there is a huge variety of ATV's that are specifically designed to meet the needs of nearly any rider. Most ATV's have become very specialized and are designed for mud, rocks, work, or just plain speed. However, because ATV's are so specialized, certain trails are much more suited to different types of ATV's. ATV's fall into two categories, sport and utility, and each type of ATV performs extremely well in a certain conditions.

For rock crawling and other extremely rough terrain, a large four wheel drive utility quad is the best, but skid plates are highly recommended. Four wheel drive is crucial for rock crawls since it's not uncommon to get a front or back wheel off the ground in order to get from one rock to another. Although it is possible to prod a two wheel drive sport bike over some crazy rocks, you'd better take the right line through the rocks the first time since most sport bikes don't have a reverse. The suspension setups in sport bikes also make them much more difficult to get across big rocks; this is because the suspension is much more rigid, and many of them lack independent suspension. In many utility quads, it seems like the tires reach down and grab the rocks.

When it comes to mud pits, the utility quads, especially those with four wheel drive are right at home. The extra weight of these monsters, along with locking differentials, let the tires sling anything out of the way that it can't grab onto. Sport bikes can be plenty of fun in the mud, but they are not the first choice for deep mud holes. Anytime you are crossing mud, speed is your friend, especially if you're on a sport bike designed for speed and acceleration, not the low end torque need to push through a wall of mud and water. However, stopping any quad in the middle of a mud pit, four wheel drive or not, can mean getting out the tow cable or winch.

Another unexpected trail obstacle that can mean trouble is sand, especially the type of sand that is found close to creek beds. Typically you can get some decent traction on dunes, but unpacked sand is a problem for most quads, unless handled properly. In loose sand, a sport bike has the advantage over heavy utility quad. A sport bike's light weight allows it to keep moving over sand, while most utility bikes are designed to dig deeper into terrain to get traction. Regardless of what kind of quad you have, speed is the best way to overcome sand without getting stuck.

The biggest issue that comes up when talking about great riding trails is what makes that trail great. Some people will say that mostly level trails with a

few hills and ditches are great riding; they just want to get away from everything and enjoy the great outdoors for a few hours. Although there are many people that enjoy this type of ATV ride, it just won't cut it if you're in the mood to sling some mud, catch some air, or crawl up bluffs. Whatever kind of riding you enjoy, you might be very disappointed if you unload at a spot and find that the terrain brings out your quad's weaknesses instead of its strengths.

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