

Choices to Make for Your First ATV

For whatever reason, the ATV bug has bitten you. You've seen them on television or maybe you have a couple of friends that already go riding on the trails. Day in and day out, in all kinds of weather and in every season, people are enjoying recreational ATV trail riding.

But when you're new to this activity, where to begin? What needs consideration before making a major purchase of an ATV? Do you need to take a driver's test or a safety course? Do you want the ATV for recreation or for work? Are you thinking about competitive racing?

Finally, how much is this whole venture going to cost?

The first thing you need to do is take a trip down to your local ATV dealership. Not only will you be able to look at and try out different models, but you can talk to the dealer for information as well. Don't be intimidated about asking questions; salespeople are there to help - and also to make a sale. If you don't like the service at one dealership, visit another.

A good idea is to try to rent a particular model before you buy. Renting an ATV for a weekend is a smart thing to do if you plan on having a child as a passenger on your ATV. So many times, a child will want to try a new hobby only to discover they don't like it on the first day. There are some adults like that also, so if you're unsure whether or not an ATV is for you, then do try renting one first for a test run before you sign the final papers to purchase.

Currently, there are two types of ATVs on the market: Sport and utility. Some ATV models claim to be hybrids of the sport and the utility models. The utility ATV will have racks on the front and rear of the vehicle, while a sport model will have no racks. A hybrid model might have a rear rack only. The type of ATV best for a hunting, fishing, or camping trip would be a utility ATV. Those activities involve hauling a lot of stuff in and out of the bush, and you will need front and rear racks. Sport ATVs are for trail riding or racing and will usually have more speed available, as well as bright colors for high visibility on the trails.

Engine type is also another consideration. Two stroke engines have a system where they lubricate themselves by burning fuel. There is a specific gas-to-oil ratio mix used in order for the vehicle to run properly. A few models require that the oil reservoir be refilled every five or six tanks of gas. Noise is also a major drawback, a by-product of higher RPMs. Two-stroke engines are fading from popularity as technology improves, and more people lean towards the clean-burning four-stroke engine. Four stroke engines are quieter and are more fuel efficient than their two-stroke counterparts.

The automatic clutch is another feature that might cause some confusion. An automatic clutch requires putting the ATV into the appropriate gear when the engine hits the corresponding RPM for that gear. An automatic clutch does not mean an automatic transmission. Models with an automatic clutch will not have a foot peg for shifting; instead, there is a shifter for your left thumb on the

handlebar. An ATV with automatic transmission has its drawbacks as well, as in order to have the machine engage the auto transmission, the driver must maintain a certain number of RPMs. This can be a problem when climbing steep, rocky terrain.

Another question is whether you need two-wheel or four-wheel drive, otherwise known as "two by two" or "four by four". A two-wheeled drive vehicle has the rear wheels do all the work and push the vehicle along, whereas a four-wheel drive employs all four wheels to provide better traction. Four-wheel drives do cost more, but are good for extra traction in particularly tough terrain. Newer machines on the market will allow for "on-the-fly" four-wheel drive, where the four-wheel drive is engaged as needed.

Finally, there is the choice of a drive shaft, chain, or belt drive. All three methods of drive are good ones, but an enclosed drive shaft seems to make better sense for various types of terrain. With a chain or a belt drive, there is always the risk of snapping the chain or the belt while out on the trails, and then you might have to do some emergency repairs. In the end, the shaft drive will pay for itself with lower maintenance.

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