

ATV safety rules: please take them seriously

(Reprinted with permission from the December 2004 issue of the *North Dakota LIVING Magazine*)



All-terrain vehicles (ATVs, also known as three- and four-wheelers) first hit the U.S. marketplace in the 1970s. Today, rural America hums with ATVs.

While many are used by recreational riders and sports enthusiasts, many more have found a niche in agriculture, business, industry and government.

Unfortunately, ATVs have not enjoyed a good safety record. All-terrain vehicles—especially three-wheelers—can pose a serious health and safety risk to their riders.

The Consumer Products Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates up to 90,000 ATV-related injuries are treated in hospitals and emergency rooms per year. Of that number, more than 120 die annually from these injuries.

The following tips can help ensure that your ride on an ATV is a safe one:

- If you're a beginner, get professional instruction and certification.
- Practice, practice, practice—first on a level area, then in a more difficult but controlled environment, before riding in rough or unfamiliar terrain.
- An ATV is not a toy. Children should not be permitted to operate ATVs without specialized training and then only an ATV of appropriate size.
- Always wear an approved helmet and other protective gear. Helmets can often spell the difference between life and death.
- Read the owner's manual and follow the manufacturer's instructions

for use, maintenance and pre-use checks.

- Never ride double. Instead, travel with a buddy (on a second ATV), never alone. An accident far from help can result in a minor injury becoming serious or even fatal.
- Adjust your speed to the conditions. Excess speed is a factor in many ATV accidents.
- Do not operate your ATV on streets, highways or paved roads.
- Never ride an ATV where prohibited or where it can damage the environment. Ask permission of owners before riding on their property.
- Never ride the ATV with alcohol or drugs in your bloodstream.
- Use lights, reflectors and flags to improve visibility.
- Use proper posture for riding. (For correct posture information, check your owner's manual.)

- Avoid sharp turns.
- Pay attention to roads, terrain, slopes, canals, ditches, blind intersections, trees, shrubs and other vehicles that might cause accidents.
- Stop at all blind intersections, at corners of buildings and while coming out from between rows of trees or shrubs onto a headland or field road.
- Avoid side-hills. If unavoidable, lean into the hill.
- As a last resort to avoid a collision, roll off the ATV and kick yourself free of it.

Sources:
National Safety Council,
Cooperative Extension Service, ATV Safety Institute and Consumer Products Safety Commission.

