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# About ATV Racing



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Article Rating: ★★★★★ (1 Ratings)



About ATV Racing

ATV racing, also known as Quad racing or sometimes Quadcross, is an exciting and challenging motocross sport. In a short time, ATV racing has gone from being a fairly obscure, lesser-known cousin of traditional motocross racing, to one of the fastest-growing segments of the sport, experiencing a dramatic increase in participation across the U.S. in 2002. While the youth segment has exploded in recent years, racers of all ages and abilities have joined the ranks; it's common to see families of quad racers at tracks on any given day, racing their respective age and ability classes. No matter what type of recreational ATV rider you are, racing your ATV on a track is a whole new ballgame.

## History

All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) were first introduced by Honda in 1970, with a three-wheel US90. Yamaha decided to join the relatively unheard of ATV market with its own three-wheel ATV in 1979, the YT125. Feeling some competition, Honda answered back in 1981 with the first high-performance, two-stroke three-wheel ATV adapted from motocross technology, with Kawasaki introducing its offering, the KTL200-A1 the same year. In 1982, Suzuki joined the race, introducing the first four-wheeled ATV in 1982. Two years later, Honda and Yamaha followed suit, introducing their own versions of four-wheeled ATVs. The following year, Polaris became the first North American company to enter the ATV business, with Kawasaki offering its first four-wheel ATV the same year.

## Government Raises Safety Concerns

In 1988, ATV manufacturers agreed to cease the sale of three-wheel ATVs, after the U.S. government raised safety concerns following an increase in accidents on the OHVs. The major manufacturers dropped their ATV racing support due to the bad publicity associated with ATV safety. The sport of ATV racing was hard hit by the stigma, but survived during the late 1980s and early 1990s, thanks to the support of aftermarket companies.

## ATVs Make a Comeback

In the late 1990s, rules for ATV racing were changed to allow racers to use dirt bike engines in ATV frames, allowing for hybrid machines to compete in a field previously dominated by high-dollar aftermarket machines. ATV manufacturers started paying attention to the increased interest and participation in the sport ATV market, and, in 1999, Honda released a four-stroke 400cc sport machine, the TRX400EX. Suzuki went into development and released in 2003 the LT-Z400, featuring a liquid-cooled four-stroke quad. Late 2003, Yamaha announced its YFZ450 race quad for the 2004 model year, the first high-performance sport ATV specifically developed for racing, and the first with a fully-adjustable front suspension. In 2004, factory supported race teams returned to national competition after going on hiatus in 1986. Suzuki threw down the gauntlet in 2005, with an LT-R450 sport ATV, the most competition-ready ATV ever produced. As of 2009, there are seven major ATV manufacturers producing high-performance 450cc ATV motocross quads: Can-Am, Honda, KTM, Kawasaki, Polaris, Suzuki and Yamaha.

As the sport has taken off in the past few years, so have the availability of smaller quads to accommodate younger riders looking to compete and work up to the larger ATVs. Quad manufacturers have answered the call for the youth ATV segment, providing machines from 50cc up to 450cc and up, with the most notable gap to be filled in between the 250cc and 450cc bracket.

## Perception of ATV Racing in the Motorcross World

Being a relative newcomer in the family of motocross sports, ATV racing is still finding its foothold. The "us versus them" perception is similar to the reception seen by snowboarders hitting the ski slopes. Some bikes feel that ATV riders have it easy, that they're essentially "flying couches" compared with the nimbleness of a MX bike. Some bike riders also fan the stereotype that ATV riders have poor attitudes, no respect for the sport of motocross or are too afraid to ride a "real" bike. Again, the whole "us versus them" perception is still commonly found at any local track that allows both types to ride, but

the majority of ATV racers find that taking the time to be a good ambassador to their sport goes a long ways in dispelling these kinds of attitudes. It's also fairly common for MX tracks not to allow quad racing, for several reasons, but as more and more MX racers turn to racing ATVs, tracks are finding that the interest and participation level allays their reasons and they become more and more receptive to ATV racing.

## ATV Safety Misconceptions Still Remain

Past perception of ATVs from a safety perspective still remain today; for every person you find who are okay with the idea of putting themselves or their family on an ATV, you'll find several firmly against the idea, with the notion the ATVs are overtly too dangerous. ATVs are generally regarded as uncontrollable and completely unsafe, while dirt bikes are considered a much safer alternative. The reality is that the operation of any motorized OHV vehicle presents danger and risk to the rider. The "three-wheeler stigma" still casts a long shadow on current four-wheel ATVs of today; when the reality is that today's four-wheel technology far surpasses the safety limitations of its earlier three-wheel cousin. The majority of ATV-related accidents highlighted in news reports across the country are not due to an increased level of danger associated with ATVs, but rather an increase in people riding ATVs without proper training, safety gear, experience or at an inappropriate age or physical size relative to the machine in question, all of which are personal choices on the part of the rider or the rider's guardians.

## Significance of ATV Sport Racing

Despite a frustrating lack of venues and accommodation, ATV racing has time and again put itself out in the motocross world as a segment to be reckoned with. Gate numbers have shown an explosion in participation in ATV racing, and promoters, track owners and race circuit organizers seem to be coming around in their thinking, realizing the sport is not a flash-in-the-pan fad, but a solid newcomer capable of bringing increased numbers of riders and spectators to their tracks and venues, and translating into a formidable revenue source for the big manufacturers, accessory and aftermarket companies. ATV racing sponsors went from small shops looking for some exposure, to large corporations looking to align themselves to the fast-rising endurance sport.

## Benefits

ATV racing is not only one of the fastest growing segments of motocross, it is also a fast-growing in terms of family participation sports. From small peewee riders to parents (and even grandparents) riding in the vets' class, ATV racing---and motocross in general---lends itself well to families looking to share in a sports experience. The sport teaches several basic values: accountability, self-respect, responsibility, fair play, sportsmanship, healthy competition, perseverance, positive body image, respect and courtesy for others and many more. A motocross environment is generally regarded as a family environment; riders and their families meet regularly with other fellow riders and their families, sharing the racing experience and learning from each other. The sport is also seeing an increase in female rider participation, with many venues supporting lady quads classes to encourage the whole family to come out and enjoy the sport. Motocross is a sport that places many physical demands on a rider. The sport itself offers a fantastic way to get into shape, but generally riders and racers find the need to cross-train in order to be competitive in their field, which leads to a general increase in physical health and fitness. You'd be hard-pressed to find a racer in poor physical shape who races regularly. As with any sport, ATV racing can be dangerous to participants. You are willingly putting yourself out on a motorized vehicle with just your safety gear between you and the ground and/or other riders and their machines. Know that falling and crashing are inherent risks associated with motocross. Please exercise the utmost level of caution when participating in this or any other physically demanding activity. Maintain control over your ATV, ride within your own limits and always keep the safety of yourself, your fellow riders and anyone out on the track first and foremost in your mind.

## References

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- Nor-Cal ATV.com - Sport ATV Manufacturer Links (bottom right column)

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