



Meeting the Challenge of Mud, Hills and Off-Camber Trails

<http://www.atvaonline.com/ride/offcamber.asp>

It's that time of year, when you can sit back and think about last year's best rides. Did you get stuck, need a pull from a buddy or have to take a second run at a steep hill? Was the cause lack of power, the wrong tires, worn tires or the dreaded operator error?

Let's take a few of the most common trail conditions or situations, and discuss techniques on how to handle each one. The proper riding technique is a lot cheaper than new tires or a larger ATV. And guess what? If you properly tune your technique, you might find out that you've been holding back that old pile of bolts in the garage, and not the other way around.

Mud

Just about every trail we ride will present some mud, from that little puddle that kids invariably find to play in, to that deep, hope-someone-has-a-winch monster pit. When you encounter even a small mud hole on the trail, here's what you need to do: Nothing. Just ride right through the middle of it.

It's perfectly normal to want to aim around the mud, but if you can resist that urge and instead ride through it, and the guy behind you does the same, we're less likely to end up with a big mud hole to replace the little one you started with. Also, keep in mind that in many areas it's illegal to leave a trail to avoid a little liquid dirt.

But not all mud holes are small. So how can you tell how deep the mud is and how hard it will be to reach the other side? It might seem that the easiest way to find out is to convince your buddy to go first. But even better is to send the smallest ATV through first. If it can make it, you can. And if it can't, it'll be the easiest to tow out using the tow rope you never leave home without.

Don't want to send a boy to do a man's job? Help yourself and try it the other way around. But don't blame me when you have problems—lots of problems—trying to pull out your 600-pound monster 4x4 with your buddy's wimpy 250cc 2-wheel drive.

When it's your turn, carrying a little speed is just about always an advantage. Second gear (third in extreme cases) should do. As you approach the mud, stand up.

This will give you the ability to respond to what is happening under the surface. You might have to move your weight to the front or rear to get better traction.

If you start to lose speed and feel a front wheel starting to spin (if you are on a 4x4), try shifting your weight from side to side while turning the handlebar back and forth. This may help you find that little bit of traction you need to reach the other side.

If you do get stuck, lifting a mud covered ATV by yourself can be a lost cause. Here is where riding with a buddy can be a real life saver. Kindly ask your buddy to pass you their winch cable or throw you a tow rope. Don't be surprised if they get out their camera to take a picture of you covered in mud first. If you are riding alone, it's a perfect chance to try out that new winch you received for Christmas.

One other tip: Riding mud on worn-out tires is asking for trouble.

Hills

Safely riding up steep hills is all about skill, technique and experience. If there is ever a time and place for a cool head this is it. And if you are ever faced with a hill that you feel that your ability or your ATVs capabilities can't handle, STOP! Take a break and think it over. If you're at the back of your group, the others

**“STOP if unsure!
Take a break and
think it over before
you climb. Or ask a
member to drive your
ATV up the hill.”**



will discover you are missing soon enough and double back. If you are leading a group, check with all of the other riders, and unless everyone is comfortable with the obstacle ahead, take a different route.

Negative peer pressure is trying to get people to do something that they do not want to do. You don't want to push someone into something that you will both regret later, and flipping an ATV on a hill is seldom looked back on fondly! You always have an alternative. Whether it's taking a different route, having an

“Ask for help if you are unsure of your abilities. Don't take the risk.”

experienced rider ferry machines up for the less experienced or simply turning back, it's better than getting hurt. Even on hills where you're perfectly

comfortable, proper technique is important. Momentum and having the ATV in the proper gear are very important. You don't want to need a burst of throttle or a downshift halfway up to be able to pull a hill.

Now that you are in the correct gear and you have your speed up, stand up and lean forward. Standing gives you the ability to react quickly to changing trail conditions. Standing also allows you better vision up and over the hill so you can better plan for what lies ahead.

Never follow too closely behind another ATV. This is especially critical when negotiating steep hills. Always let the rider ahead of you make it completely up the hill before you start. You don't want to put both riders in danger if the lead ATV starts rolling backwards. If your ATV is not going to make it up the hill, immediately apply all the brakes, set the parking brake and dismount to the uphill side. If the ATV starts rolling backwards and you can't stop it immediately, bail off!

Downhills

Momentum will help you getting up hills, but safely riding down steep hills is just the opposite. Speed is not your friend on a downslope. Before you even start down that steep hill, slow down and shift to a low gear. Let the transmission do most of the work. We have all seen highway signs in the mountains that read “Steep Grade: Truckers Use Low Gear.” The next thing you see is a runaway truck ramp for guys who didn't heed the sign.

If you apply your brakes too much on a long downhill, they can over heat and you'll lose essential stopping power. So call on your transmission to do its share of the work.

Some older ATV's with automatic transmissions actually freewheel when going down hills. In that case, you really have to keep your speed down, because your brakes are your only means of slowing down, and there are no “runaway ATV” ramps!

Off-Camber Trails

In case you aren't familiar with the term, an off-camber trail is also referred to as a side hill. For NASCAR fans, that's banking that goes the wrong way. Off-camber sections make many riders nervous, because they feel like the ATV is going to roll over sideways. Tires aren't as important, because riding off cambers is all about technique.



First of all, slow down! Speed is not your friend here, technique is the key. Now, shift your weight to the uphill side. I don't mean a halfhearted lean of your helmet: Get yourself off the seat and really move your weight to the uphill side.

“Get yourself off the seat and really move your weight to the uphill side.”

Work of off-camber technique before you hit the trails. Build up your confidence with practice on gentle slopes. Focus on getting your weight off the seat and uphill.

In time, you'll develop a feel for the off cambers and learn to enjoy the challenge they present. In most cases the person using the proper techniques will be the one helping their buddies out of a situation. As a rule of thumb, it is better to rescue than to be rescued!