

Outfitting Your ATV

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The popularity of ATVs shows no sign of waning among anglers and hunters, and no wonder -- these workhorses can carry or tow an incredible amount. They're easy to operate and, when handled responsibly and driven on established trails, they're totally safe as well.

Some say ATVs have taken the place of the horse. They're being used by hunters to haul gear in and pack meat out. Fishermen use them to access backcountry lakes and streams. They're used for other forms of recreation, too, and many owners use them as part of their jobs -- on family farms, in oil and gas exploration, by local utilities, in search and rescue. In short, about anything you could use a horse, a truck, or a garden tractor for, there's someone doing the job with an ATV.

That being the case, it's not surprising there are a wide variety of ATV accessories available, too. Many add-ons are available to help your machine take on more diverse tasks and make riding your ATV more safe, comfortable and fun. Here are some of them.

Safety Gear

Helmets and other safety gear should be foremost on your list of ATV accessories. When you're riding on top of a vehicle instead of inside, as is the case with ATVs, you need to protect your head, eyes and other body parts in case of accident.

Helmets should be made of lightweight thermoplastic or other materials that meet or exceed Department of Transportation safety standards. Good ones also have vents to prevent the wearer from getting too hot and sweaty, and pads inside to protect the head from chafing and bumps. Be sure the helmet you buy is the proper size, too, so you can wear it properly. A wide variety of styles and colors are available, including camouflage models.

The best goggles are scratch- and fog-resistant types that are optically correct. Those constructed to allow a wide field of vision also will be appreciated, as will goggles with quick-adjust straps and extras such as dust filters.

Also essential for every ATV user is a good loading ramp that allows the owner to quickly and safely drive an ATV onto a trailer or truck. And of course, when you're transporting your vehicle from one location to another, you'll need to use one of the many adjustable tie-down devices that keep your ATV secure during your drive.

Other safety gear to consider includes protective clothing, tire repair kits for the backcountry, ATV bumpers that provide extra protection from trail hazards and heat protectors to cover hot exhaust parts that could cause burns.

Hitches and Receivers

All sorts of hitches are available for the ATV enthusiast -- everything from simple ball models to quad hitches with extra tow loops -- so you can use your ATV to pull everything from a plow to a garden cart. You might want to start with the addition of a multi-receiver with a hitch box that permits quick change-out of different ball sizes. Hitch extenders also are available so you can get clearance for safe turning and operation while pulling equipment behind your ATV.

Winches

Most ATV users wouldn't be caught in the woods without a good winch for getting out of a sticky situation or hauling in a heavy load. The best have plenty of pulling power -- 1800-3000 pounds or more - - plus a good braking system, durable wire rope cable and other quality components. Accessories that increase the utility of a winch include handle-bar-mounted rocker switches, handheld remotes and a good roller fairlead that reduces wear on your cable. Be sure to purchase the proper mounting kit for your winch as well-one that matches the brand of ATV you own.



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Convenience Add-ons

You can maximize your ATV's carrying space with the addition of racks, which come in a wide variety of styles and sizes. Some must be mounted with hardware, while others are easy-on, easy-off models that mount into a receiver hitch. These increase the carrying capacity of your ATV and are ideal for hauling firewood, coolers, hunting gear, camping equipment and more.

Want extra comfort? Add a throttle extender so you can rev up your ATV with your whole palm and not just your thumb, or replace your rough handlebar grips with gel models that relieve shock and fatigue. Put a drink holder where it's handy, or jazz up your lighting with halogen trail lights made in durable off-road designs.

There are products you can add to your exhaust system to reduce excess noise, and others you can attach to your ATV so you can carry extra fuel or water. Mount a spotlight to help you find downed game at night or a special holder to secure your GPS, cell phone or VHS radio. The variety of convenience accessories now available seems almost endless.

Specialty Accessories

Many ATV accessories are manufactured specifically for certain user groups. Take hunters, for example. The list of accessories made especially for this group is impressive indeed, including winches, gun racks, bow racks, cargo/storage bags and organizers, camouflage covers and tree-stand transporters. You can even add a passenger cart that permits you to carry extra friends or family on a single ATV to your hunting blind or other destination.

People who enjoy gardening and those working on wildlife food plots aren't lacking for useful accessories either. There are field-sprayers, miniature brush hogs, plows, discs, harrows, cultivators, planters, spreaders, packers, scrapers, blades, rakes and more.

Tackle the frozen north with sleds, chains, snow blowers, snow blades and enclosures that let you sit or ride out of the weather. For farmers and wood cutters, there are carts, mowers, power loaders, dump buckets, gas-can carriers, chain-saw holders and a variety of other add-ons.

The bottom line is this: almost every accessory imaginable is available for your ATV. And there's almost no end to the ways you can customize your ATV to make it work better for you. Check out what's available. You'll be glad you did.