

Winching Out

By Charles Plueddeman

Used properly, an ATV which can save hours of work.

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Winch is the antidote for what I call "Four-Wheel-Drive Courage," that misleading feeling of overconfidence that gets you stuck deeper in the mud and farther from the road than you could ever imagine. When trail conditions or your suspect riding skills overmatch your machine, it's time to unspool the cable and yank yourself out. Here are some tips for getting reliable service from an ATV-mounted winch, and for using it safely. **Check the Battery:** The most limiting factor in winch performance is battery power. Make sure your ATV battery is in top condition and that all connections are clean, sealed and secure.

Keep to Capacity: Alternator output of new ATV models ranges from 15 to 25 amps. Older models might have a less powerful charging system. Don't exceed your ATV's charging capacity.

Avoid Long Pulls: The harder and longer you use the winch, the more power it will drain from the battery. Set up your pull to make it as easy and short as possible for the winch. And remember, the more cable you pull off the winch spool, the more pulling power the winch will produce. **Use a Snatch Block:** If it's a short distance to the best anchor point, use a snatch-block pulley to enhance the pulling power while putting less strain on the battery.

Take a Break: On long or difficult pulls, stop occasionally to let the winch motor cool off and the battery recover. When possible, keep the ATV engine running during the pull to allow the alternator to put some charge into the battery. When the pull is complete, continue running the engine so the battery has a chance to recover.

Follow the Leader: One person should be in charge of all aspects of the winching operation. Most accidents occur due to miscommunication, especially when rewinding the cable.

Save Your Hands: With use, winch cables develop burrs that can slice a bare hand. Always wear heavy leather gloves when handling the cable.

Keep Fingers Clear: Never put fingers through the hook at the end of the cable. Use a nylon hook strap or a loop of rope to handle the hook when you're pulling it off the spool or rewinding.

Rig Up Right: Don't rig the hook over the cable. This can damage and weaken the cable. Instead, secure a chain or nylon strap around an anchor point with a shackle and then attach the hook to the shackle. **Use a Handlebar Control:** It's often handy to ride while winching, so the ATV's power can aid the winch, and to steer the ATV on course. In this situation, the driver should also control the winch through a handlebar switch.

Counter Cable Snaps: Place a heavy jacket or blanket over the center point of the cable so that if it snaps it will drop to the ground. If the ATV is in an unstable position or not running, use a remote control for the winch and stay a safe distance from the ATV.