

# MUD SWEAT AND GEARS



## A PRIMER FOR ADVENTUROUS SOULS LOOKING FOR SOME FILTHY, DIRTY FUN

BY RON SINFELT

**Y**ou're sitting at a stoplight, putting in the weekend errand run. A truck pulls up next to you hauling a trailer loaded with muddy, somehow enticing two- and four-wheeled ORVs (off-road vehicles). You find yourself staring. Your pulse jumps at the thought of climbing onto one and tearing down a dirt road, through the mud, over rocks...total freedom.

No need to dream about it. Do it!

Before the fun can begin you'll need to make a few decisions on what to ride. There are many options available. Your experience level and riding style, as well as where you decide to ride, will dictate most of your choices.

ATVs come in many shapes and sizes. There are the utility and the motocross, or sport, types. The utilities can be either 4x2 or 4x4, and are available with such options as winches, utility racks or luggage devices for carrying coolers, food, gas and other supplies needed in the backcountry. This class of ATVs, while highly functional in terms of trail prowess and touring capability, is not as "high adrenaline" as the sport class ATVs, and thus aren't able to maximize the fun factor (higher speeds and gnarly maneuvers) like the more racing-oriented ATVs. That's why sport ATVs are much lighter, have a greater suspension travel and offer few, if any, amenities.

If you are more comfortable on two wheels, then you need to decide whether to go for a full off-road bike or a dual sport bike. A dual sport bike comes street-legal, but has a compromise in the suspension when compared to a full street bike. It has tires and protective covers to allow for just about anything off-road conditions can throw at you. Dual sport bikes give you the advantage of driving your bike right to your off-road riding location (no need for trailering), as their engines and gearing are designed to handle highway speeds without straining.

Off-road-only bikes are much more capable of handling mud, rocks, steep hills, jumps and all the obstacles you will encounter on the trail or track, but unless you already live close to your riding location, you'll need to haul them. Some off-road-only bikes will have head and tail lights necessary for woods and endurance rides, but lack all the turn signals, mirrors, horn and less aggres-

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**(Above)** John Perry launches his Yamaha YZ-450 quad behind buddy Kevin Hallmark's 525 Outlaw at The Ridge riding park in Alabama. **(Right)** Michael Six grabs air on a track called Area-51, which is known for its large jumps.

sive tires to be street-legal. The benefit is that they offer greater performance in the dirt thanks to their more aggressive tires, sport-oriented suspensions and lower gearing.

We are almost ready to go riding, but one important area needs to be addressed—safety and emergency gear.

The ATVA (All-Terrain Vehicle Association) recommends starting with the minimum basics, which includes a DOT-approved helmet, goggles, gloves, over-the-ankle boots and long sleeved pants and shirt. They do not recommend buying a used helmet, as it might have taken a hard hit and could fail when you need it most. As your skill and desire to ride increases you will probably want to upgrade to a chest protector, knee and ankle guards (worn under the clothes), neck guard and a kidney belt. Flags are also a good idea, and are required in some states.

As for the emergency gear, let's just keep it simple. You will have to tailor this to the types of conditions you will be encountering (see online sidebar for complete list). Basically, you don't want to be 50-plus miles from your truck or help and get a flat tire or become injured without any means to remedy the situation. Always carry water and a basic food bar or calorie source, as well as emergency blanket (the foil type) for any unexpected, overnight stays. Also, never go anywhere in the backcountry without a knife, lighter and compass and the skills needed to use them. Utility ATVs obviously have the advantage in the gear carrying category, but even a small fanny pack, backpack and/or a fender pack can be all you need to carry First Aid and repair kits for the motorcycle enthusiast.

Now, let's go riding.

"Where?" is the obvious question. Luckily for those of us who love to experience the thrill of the wind in our face and the rollercoaster feeling of off-road riding, we have more choices now than ever. Our country's National Forest and grasslands consist of thousands of miles of public access trails and roads. In a 2005 survey by the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, between 11 and 12 million visits were made by OHV (Off Highway Vehicle) users. One reason might be the fact that "OHV use is widely recognized now as one of the fastest growing outdoor activities," according to a report from the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE). The Motorcycle Industry Council (MIC) reports that annual sales of OHVs more than tripled between 1995 and 2003, to more than 1.1 million vehicles sold in 2003. With all the public and private areas available, we will only be able to give an overview of some of the best places to ride. Let's divide the country into four

## HEARTLAND USA



Here's an assortment of items that could come in handy on any ride through the backcountry.

parts: the northeast, southeast, midwest and the west.

### NORTHEAST

**Four Seasons ATV Resort  
West Finley, PA**

[www.campfourseasonsresort.com](http://www.campfourseasonsresort.com)

This place offers 800 acres of off-roading fun. The resort's 16 miles of trails vary from easy to most difficult for both ATVs and motorcycles. They hold special ATV-only events like an ATV rodeo, obstacle courses, mud drags and poker runs. They have some noteworthy rules. For instance, you must have proof of insurance for your ATV or motorcycle, and your muffler must be a quiet 94 decibels.

**Rocky Roost Motocross and ATV Park  
Monterey, NY**

[www.rockyroostmx.com](http://www.rockyroostmx.com)

This small 100-acre facility offers a lot in a small package. They have a motocross and grass track, as well as off-camber and steep trails that have plenty of natural obstacles for a good workout. Accommodations include primitive and RV type camping. Running boards or nerf bars are required on all quad vehicles.

### SOUTHEAST

**Coal Creek Mining & Manufacturing Co.  
Oliver Springs, TN**

[www.coalcreekohv.com](http://www.coalcreekohv.com)

"To cover every area it would take about four days," says Homer Justice of Seiverville, Tennessee. That about sums it up for this 72,000-acre mountain Mecca. There is something for every rider here, in-

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Author Ron Sinfelt negotiates a tight turn at the Highland Park riding area in northern Georgia on his Yamaha TTR 250.

Victoria Sinfelt

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cluding mud bogs, technical trails of varying difficulty and rock climbs for large 4x4s. It is operated by the Windrock ATV club, and is always open for business. Good advice is to find a local that can show you around or you might have an unplanned overnight stay if you can't find your own way out. The hilltop windmills are definitely worth seeing.

**The Ridge  
Springville, AL  
[www.ridgeriding.com](http://www.ridgeriding.com)**

Greg and Susan White turned their 500-acre property into an off-road "ministry," according to Greg. He refers to it as a ministry because of the quality of family life he has witnessed at his park. They have 25 acres of woods trails and three awesome motocross style tracks that have something for everyone. They have showers, cabins and special events. The Ridge rates its trails like a ski resort—green circles for beginners, blue squares for intermediates and black diamond for experts. "We like to ski, but it doesn't snow here, so we thought it would be fun to lay it out like a ski resort," said White.

**Houston Valley ORV Area  
LaFayette, GA  
[www.fs.fed.us/conf/rec/orv\\_info.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/conf/rec/orv_info.htm)**

It is pronounced "Hows-ton Valley" if you decide to visit this 2,600-acre, northern Georgia public ORV area. Houston Valley has 25 miles of well-marked trails from beginner to expert. One nice feature here is the concrete loading ramp. The trails are two-way, so be careful around the corners and when going over any blind hills.

**Durhamtown Plantation  
Union Point, GA  
[www.durhamtown.com](http://www.durhamtown.com)**

No story about ORV riding would be complete without a mention of this do-it-all sportsman's paradise. If the six MX tracks, beginner track, dirt drag strip and over 90 miles of private, one-way trails are not enough, maybe the trophy bass lake with boat rentals, rifle range and quality deer hunting might be just the ticket. Durhamtown Plantation also has a bike wash area, restaurant, pro-shop, repair shop, bike rentals, cabins and plenty of camping available.

**MIDWEST**

**Saint Joe State Park  
Park Hills, MO  
[www.mostateparks.com/stjoe.htm](http://www.mostateparks.com/stjoe.htm)**

What was once a lead-mining concern, Saint Joe Mineral Corporation is now a beautiful, 2,000-acre example of quality land management. "We have both sand flats and upland wooded areas," said Sandy McCain, Park Superintendent. Camping and four lakes for fishing and swimming compliment their unique riding opportunities. They require a 72-inch high, antenna-type flag on all ATVs.

**The Badlands Off-Road Park  
Attica, IN  
[www.badlandsoffroad.com](http://www.badlandsoffroad.com)**

This private facility has 800 acres with a variety of terrain to play in—from deep mud, off-camber woods riding and sand dunes to rock-crawling areas. Owners Troy and Lisa Myers bought an old gravel quarry in 1995 and turned it into a great place to get out and ride.

**WEST**

**Little Sahara State Park  
Waynoka, OK  
[www.touroklahoma.com](http://www.touroklahoma.com)**

If the Pacific Coast beach is out of reach you can get plenty of dune riding on this over 1,600-acre sand box. Little Sahara State Park offers incredible scenery and wildlife viewing. Just don't take in these sights while you're rocketing over the dunes. There is RV camping with showers and bathrooms. The park requires a 10-foot whip with a

red flag measuring 6x10 inches. This is part of the Oklahoma State Parks system.

**Bryce Canyon  
Garfield County, UT  
[www.utah.com](http://www.utah.com)**

Not often can a riding venue claim thousands of miles of backcountry exploring, but this place does just that. There are three National Parks that make up the area, and there are numerous access points. This is one place that extra emergency gear, a cell phone and lots of water are recommended. The ATVA web site has plenty of details.

**Hungry Valley State  
Vehicular Recreation Area  
Gorman, CA  
[www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=405](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=405)**

This area offers 19,000 acres and 130 miles of trails for ATVs, dirt bikes and other 4x4 vehicles. Watch out for rattlesnakes, 200 foot-high cliffs and old barbed wire fences. Trails range from easy to difficult with over 2,000 acres of camping.

As you can see, no matter where you live there's an off-roading adventure within striking distance. Gear up, get out and enjoy this growing recreational pursuit. Just remember to obey all area rules, be safe, respect the environment and Tread Lightly!

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*A motorsport maven who hails from the Atlanta area, Ron Sinfelt's main gig is that of photo editor and videographer for an outdoor publishing company.*



James Holter, associate editor of the AMA publication American Motorcyclist rides down Schnebly Hill in the mountains near Sedona, Arizona.