

TRAIL BLAZERS

VERSATILE ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES

All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are more specialized and sportier than ever. Excellent features once limited to premium ATVs, such as electronic fuel injection and independent rear suspension, are now widespread, and power steering—thankfully—has come to the ATV world.



By Bill Lanphier

It's become perfectly acceptable if you associate the "V" in ATV (all-terrain vehicle) with versatility. Whether your particular bent is casual trail riding, hunting, farming, camping, exploring or even racing, there are ATVs (also known as quads) that are up to the task. Better, they have more useful features than ever before.

"Covering many bases is important now," says Glenn Hansen of Suzuki. "Our biggest ATV sellers really aren't that far ahead of our other units. That demonstrates that the market is supporting diversity, and [we think it] will continue in that direction."

Good Sports. If you are shopping for an ATV, the first thing you'll notice is they're more fun to drive than the quads of even 3 years ago. Today's engines generate far more power and therefore speed. For the 2008 model year, the size leader is Arctic Cat's ThunderCat utility model. Its 950cc engine delivers a 150cc boost over the off-road king in 2005. "The market isn't lacking in engine performance now," says Russ Brennan of Kawasaki, which offers two 750cc-powered ATVs at the top of its product list. But manufacturers are also giving consumers more features.

One is electronic fuel injection (EFI), which makes for easier starting and much more consistent and stronger engine performance at different altitudes and temperature ranges. In 2005, EFI was offered on only Polaris' Sportsman 800 Twin EFI and Suzuki's King Quad 700. Now, it's found on at least 20 models. The bad news is you'll find this desirable feature only on models that cost \$7,000 or more.

Independent rear suspension (IRS) is another excellent feature that's becoming more common. IRS means you can have a smoother, faster ride on uneven terrain. On more-performance-oriented machines, this results in easier-to-control jumps if one rear wheel touches down first than on models that have a straight rear axle. Happily, IRS can be found on ATVs that are lower in price than those that have EFI, with the Polaris Sportsman 300 4x4 being the low mark at \$4,899.

A sport ATV is the pinnacle in sporty. These quads are built for

speed. Almost all are two-wheel drive, which helps make them lighter—typically up to 300 pounds lighter—than their four-wheel-drive cousins and thus more maneuverable. So, even with smaller engines, sport ATVs are usually faster. They're also better than ever, because manufacturers have introduced features never before seen in the ATV world. For example, Can-Am's new DS 450 has a lightweight all-aluminum chassis that is fabricated with permanent aircraft-style fasteners instead of welds,



Can-Am DS 450 X

which should make it better absorb the pounding it'll receive versus that of typical ATVs.

In the Comfort Zone. ATVing is not all about going fast, though. Of course, sometimes it's about utility. There have been some noteworthy developments on this side of the ATV equation, too.

Fully automatic, continuously variable transmissions (CVTs) are the norm on most utility ATVs (also known as 4x4s) and allow the rider to concentrate



Best Buys in ATVs

Best Buy Categories:

[P]=Premium selection;
[M]=Midrange selection;
[E]=Economy selection.
See page 72.

Best Buys in ATVs were based on ease of use, features, performance and reliability. All Best Buys have four-stroke engines and electric start. All have hydraulic disc brakes front and rear, with the exception of the Brute Force and Teryx (each has a sealed, multi-disc rear brake) and Ozark (a mechanical drum rear brake).

All utility ATV and UTV Best Buys have a reverse gear and, like on a car, shaft drive, as opposed to a chain. All utility ATV and UTV Best Buys have continuously variable transmissions (CVTs), except our Economy utility ATV.

All sport ATV Best Buys are single-cylinder, two-wheel-drive models and have five-speed transmissions with manual clutches and a chain final drive.

Suspension travel length is the maximum distance each wheel can deflect vertically. Typically, the high-

er the measurement, the more responsive the suspension performance. Ground clearance and weight measurement methods differ among manufacturers, but we list them for illustrative purposes.

Because of the variation in price from dealer to dealer and region to region, *Best Price* is an amalgamation of reports collected by National Automobile Dealers Association at press time and is subject to change.

Utility ATVs

[P] Kawasaki Brute Force 750 4x4i

List: \$7,799; Best Price: \$7,080
This remarkable ATV reaches the perfect balance between comfort and performance. In play here is the comfortable yet responsive independent rear suspension (IRS) and a powerful but smooth V-twin engine. Dual-density seat foam adds to the comfort level. Many updates grace the Brute Force for 2008, including easier throttle action and an enclosed storage box.

Features:

* Engine: 749cc, liquid-cooled, SOHC, 8-valve, 90-degree, V-twin

- * Suspension travel length, front: 6-3/4-in.; rear: 7-7/8-in.
- * Dimensions: 86-3/8 in. (l) x 45-7/8 in. (w) x 48-1/2 in. (h)

- * Ground clearance: 9-3/4 in.
- * Rack capacity: 264 lbs.
- * Dry weight: 605 lbs.
- * Warranty: 1-yr.

[M] Polaris Sportsman 500 HO 4WD

List: \$5,999;
Best Price: \$5,250

This ATV excels at comfort and carrying capabilities. The IRS and almost pillowy seat provide an extremely comfortable ride. The racks are huge, and the largest cargo compartment (1 cubic foot) in its class resides underneath the front rack. The **Sportsman 500 EFI** (\$6,999), with electronic fuel injection, is also a Best Buy.

Features:

- * Engine: 499cc, liquid-cooled, single-cylinder
- * Suspension travel length, front: 8-1/4-in.; rear: 9-1/2-in.
- * Dimensions: 83 in. (l) x 48 in. (w) x 48 in. (h)
- * Ground clearance: 11-1/4 in.
- * Rack capacity: 270 lbs.
- * Dry weight: 696 lbs.
- * Warranty: 6-mo.

[E] Suzuki Ozark 250 2WD

List: \$3,499; Best Price: \$3,100
We like this repeat Best Buy's comfort, predictable handling and air-cooled engine that delivers decent power at a bargain price. Like any small two-wheel-drive ATV, this model struggles in deep mud or over big rocks, but everywhere else, it gets plenty of traction. There's no CVT, but this model's

Arctic Cat DVX 400



five-speed automatic transmission does the job.

Features:

- * Engine: 246cc, air-cooled, SOHC, 2-valve, single-cylinder
- * Suspension travel length, front: 5-1/2-in.; rear: 5-1/2-in.
- * Dimensions: 70-7/8 in. (l) x 41-7/8 in. (w) x 42-1/8 in. (h)
- * Ground clearance: 8-3/8 in.
- * Rack capacity: 198 lbs.
- * Dry weight: 403 lbs.
- * Warranty: 6-mo. limited

Sport ATVs

[P] Can-Am DS 450

List: \$7,499; Best Price: \$6,700
Can-Am succeeded in melding many high-tech performance features into one machine. One example: More mass has been positioned closer to the center of the quad, so the ATV feels much lighter than it is and is thus easier to control during jumps. To get a faster, better handling, lighter sport quad, you'd have to spend over a grand more. And, unless you're highly experienced, you won't notice the difference. The **DS 450 X** (\$8,399),



Polaris Sportsman 500 HO 4WD

on the terrain rather than gear selection. Know that CVTs are a little more vulnerable in deep-water crossings than conventional manual-shift models, and the drive belt can occasionally slip if water gets in there. But, for overall ease of use, we'll take that trade-off.

Another exciting new feature in ATVs—power steering—was released for the 2006 model year by Honda and Yamaha. Experts tell us this will become an option within 3 years on all utility ATVs above 400cc. Power steer-

ing adds around \$500 to the price, but steering ATVs is much easier with it. Just be aware that you will get less “feedback” through the handlebars. One such “message” that might be missed, for example, is that the ATV might be pulling to one side, because a front tire is going flat. This could mean a damaged wheel rim or a long walk home—or both.

Aftermarket accessories (winches, rack extenders, canopies, trailers and d.c. power outlets for lighting and tools,

among others) have been around for some time, but some of these items are now available on production models. We think this is an encouraging trend. For example, Can-Am's Outlander 800 H.O. EFI XT includes a 3,000-pound-rated winch, aggressive-tread radial tires on cast-aluminum wheels, heavy-duty bumpers and handguards. This model costs \$950 more than the base model, but if you bought the same products in the aftermarket, the price would run at least a couple hundred dollars

with even better shocks and different graphics among other items, is also a Best Buy.

Features:

- * Engine: 449cc, liquid-cooled, DOHC, 4-valve
- * Suspension travel length, front: 9-5/8-in.; rear, 10-1/2-in.
- * Dimensions: 72-3/8 in. (l) x 46 in. (w) x 41-7/8 in. (h)
- * Ground clearance: 9 in.
- * Dry weight: 345 lbs.
- * Warranty: 6-mo.

[M] Suzuki QuadSport Z400/Arctic Cat DVX 400

List: \$5,999; Best Price: \$5,300 Suzuki copied Honda's well-received 400EX chassis, installed a faster, liquid-cooled engine and improved the suspension—all for the same price. Arctic Cat's model has different bodywork. Although our clone Best Buys are midsize sport machines, larger riders will not feel cramped. The **Suzuki Z400 LE** (\$6,099), with different graphics, is also a Best Buy.

Features:

- * Engine: 398cc, liquid-cooled, DOHC, 4-valve
- * Suspension travel length, front: 8-1/2-in.; rear, 9-1/8-in.
- * Dimensions: 72 in. (l) x 45-7/8 in. (w) x 45-3/4 in. (h)
- * Ground clearance: 10-3/8 in.
- * Dry weight: 372 lbs.
- * Warranty: 6-mo. limited

[E] Yamaha Raptor 250

List: \$3,999; Best Price: \$3,375 The only thing more surprising than the performance on this new model

is the price. The action of the controls is smooth, the power is snappy and the handling matches that of sport quads twice the price. Riders over 6 feet tall will feel a little cramped on this quad, however.

The **Raptor 250 SE** (\$4,499), with different graphics and other upgrades, is also a Best Buy.

Features:

- * Engine: 249cc, air-cooled, SOHC, 2-valve
- * Suspension travel length, front: 7-1/2-in.; rear, 7-7/8-in.
- * Dimensions: 64 in. (l) x 42-1/8 in. (w) x 40-7/8 in. (h)
- * Ground clearance: 3-7/8 in.
- * Dry weight: 313 lbs.
- * Warranty: 6-mo. limited

UTVs (Utility Vehicles)

[P] Polaris Ranger 700 6x6

List: \$11,199; Best Price: \$9,950

There is lots of good stuff going on on this six-wheeler—awesome power, incredible traction and massive cargo bed capabilities. It has seating for three, easier entry and exit for drivers and passengers than on other comparable UTVs, and a long list of available accessories direct from Polaris. Its on-demand all-wheel-drive setup, exclusive to Polaris, engages the front wheels only when the rear wheels start to slip. This saves fuel and limits wear and tear on the front drive.

Features:

- * Engine: 683cc, liquid-cooled, twin with EFI
- * Suspension travel length, front: 8-in.; center: 5-1/4-in.; rear: 6-1/4-in.



Kawasaki Mule 600 2WD

- * Dimensions: 120 in. (l) x 60 in. (w) x 75 in. (h)
- * Ground clearance: 7-1/4 in.
- * Cargo bed capacity: 1,250 lbs.
- * Dry weight: 1,410 lbs.
- * Warranty: 6-mo.

- * Warranty: 6-mo.

[E] Kawasaki Mule 600 2WD

List: \$5,899; Best Price: \$5,445 Kawasaki's Mule is a bare-bones, durable workhorse. This ATV's rear swing axle can be unlocked, so the tires are less likely to chew up turf. To keep the price low, Kawasaki uses low-tech hydraulic drum brakes, but they provide all the stopping power needed on this pure-utility UTV. The **Mule 610** (\$6,699), with four-wheel drive, is also a Best Buy.

Features:

- * Engine: 401cc, air-cooled, single-cylinder
- * Suspension travel length, front: 3-in.; rear: 3-1/8-in.
- * Dimensions: 107-1/8 in. (l) x 52-5/8 in. (w) x 70-1/8 in. (h)
- * Ground clearance: 6-1/8 in.
- * Cargo bed capacity: 400 lbs.
- * Dry weight: 911 lbs.
- * Warranty: 1-yr.

[M] Kawasaki Teryx 750 4WD

List: \$9,799; Best Price: \$9,660

This newcomer has a powerful engine, precise steering, comfortable ergonomics, the best ride stability in the class, good load carrying capabilities and a plush, responsive suspension. It lacks amenities, such as a tilt cargo bed and cup holders, but the **Teryx 750 LE** (\$10,599), also a Best Buy, includes those and other upgrades.

Features:

- * Engine: 749cc, liquid-cooled, SOHC, 8-valve, 90-degree, V-twin
- * Suspension travel length, front: 7-1/2-in.; rear: 7-1/2-in.
- * Dimensions: 115-3/8 in. (l) x 58-3/4 in. (w) x 75 in. (h)
- * Ground clearance: 11-3/8 in.
- * Cargo bed capacity: 500 lbs.
- * Dry weight: 1,276 lbs.

For more information on the above Best Buys, contact the manufacturers directly. See page 64.

more than that. Plus, you'd have to install them yourself.

The UTV (utility vehicle), also known as a side-by-side, remains the ultimate ATV workhorse, because it can haul passengers as well as cargo. Although power steering has yet to enter the market on UTVs—look for it in the next 3 years—most of the other improvements found on utility ATVs are here, too. But perhaps the biggest buzz in UTVs is sportiness. The 2008 model-year release of Polaris' Ranger Razr marks the debut of the sport UTV. We've found that the Razr's powerful twin-cylinder engine, low center of gravity and lightweight design allow it to hold its own with conventional sport ATVs when it comes to hammering hard around turns and tackling extremely rough terrain. Will there be more to come? Jeff Henson, senior editor of *ATV Illustrated*, thinks so, and it would not surprise us to see more of these cross-over-like brutes in the coming years.

Smooth Terrain Ahead. What else will ATViing look like in a few years? Would you believe street ATVs are being discussed as a possibility? In most states, ATVs—even those that have been outfitted for the street—are not allowed on public roads. But in Europe, ATVs with street kits are common, and a few small manufacturers make street-capable ATVs for that market. Don Brown, a motorcycle industry analyst, sees this development eventually migrating to the United States.

That's all-terrain versatility for you. ●

*Bill Lanphier has been covering ATVs for 18 years for many publications, including *ATV Magazine* and *ATV Sport*.*



POLARIS INDUSTRIES INC.

BEST BUYS—MANUFACTURERS INDEX

ALL-TERRAIN VEHICLES (ATVs): **American Suzuki Motor Corp.**, 800/828-7433, 3251 E. Imperial Hwy., Brea, CA 92821, suzukicycles.com; **Arctic Cat Inc.**, 800/327-2842, 601 Brooks Ave. S., Thief River Falls, MN 56701, arcticcat.com; **Can-Am (BRP Recreational Products Inc.)**, 877/469-7433, 726 Saint-Joseph St., Valcourt, Quebec, Canada, JOE 2L0, can-am.brp.com; **Kawasaki Motor Corp. USA**, 800/661-7433, 9950 Jeronimo Rd., Irvine, CA 92618, kawasaki.com; **Polaris Industries Inc.**, 800/765-2747, 2100 Hwy. 55, Medina, MN 55340, polarisindustries.com; **Yamaha Motor Corp. USA**, 800/962-7929, 6555 Katella Ave., Cypress, CA 90630, yamaha-motor.com.

COMPUTERS/MONITORS/PRINTERS/ALL-IN-ONES: **Apple Inc.**, 800/692-7753, One Infinite Loop, Cupertino, CA 95014, apple.com; **Brother International Corp.**, 877/276-8437, 100 Somerset Corporate Blvd., Bridgewater, NJ 08807, brother.com; **Canon USA Inc.**, 800/652-2666, One Canon Plz., Lake Success, NY 10042, usa.canon.com; **Dell Inc.**, 800/915-3355, One Dell Way, Round Rock, TX 78682, dell.com; **eMachines (Gateway Inc.)**, 408/273-0888, 7565 Irvine Center Dr., Irvine, CA 92618, emachines.com; **Epson America Inc.**, 800/463-7766, 3840 Kilroy Airport Way, Long Beach, CA 90806, epson.com; **Gateway Inc.**, 800/428-3929, 7565 Irvine Center Dr., Irvine, CA 92618, gateway.com; **HP (Hewlett-Packard Co.)**, 800/752-0900, 3000 Hanover St., Palo Alto, CA 94304, hp.com; **Panasonic Corp. of North America**, 800/211-7262, One Panasonic Way, Secaucus, NJ 07094, panasonic.com; **Samsung Electronics America**, 800/726-7864, 3351 Michelson Dr., Ste. 250, Irvine, CA 92612, samsung.com; **Sony Electronics Inc.**, 877/865-7669, 16530 Via Esprillo, San Diego, CA 92127, sonystyle.com; **Velocity Micro Inc.**, 800/303-7866, 7510 Whitepine Rd., Richmond, VA 23237, velocitymicro.com.

RECREATIONAL VEHICLES (RVs): **Airstream Inc.**, 877/596-6111, 419 W. Pike St., Jackson Center, OH 45334, airstream.com; **Double Tree RV Inc.**, 260/562-1075, P.O. Box 2335, Howe, IN 46746, doubletreervsuites.com; **Fleetwood Enterprises Inc.**, 800/322-8216, 3125 Myers St., Riverside, CA 92503, fleetwoodrv.com; **Four Winds International**, 937/596-6849, 701 County Road 15, Elkhart, IN 46515, fourwinds-rv.com; **Georgie Boy (Coachmen Industries Inc.)**, 877/876-9024, 423 N. Main St., Middlebury, IN 46540, georgieboy.com; **Holiday Rambler (Monaco Coach Corp.)**, 877/466-6226, 91320 Coburg Industrial Way, Coburg, OR 97408, holidayrambler.com; **KZ Recreational Vehicles**, 866/472-5460, 985 N 900 W, Shipshewana, IN 46565, kz-rv.com; **Timberlodge (Adventure Manufacturing)**, 765/475-9500, 1482 N. Eel River Cemetery Rd., Peru, IN 46970, adventuremfg.com; **Winnebago Industries Inc.**, 800/537-1885, 605 W. Crystal Lake Rd., Forest City, IA 50436, winnebagoind.com.

UNIVERSAL REMOTES: **Harmony One (Logitech)**, 866/291-1505, 6505 Kaiser Dr., Fremont, CA 94555, logitech.com; **Monster Cable Products Inc.**, 877/800-8989, 455 Valley Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005, monstercable.com; **Philips Electronics North America Corp.**, 800/223-1828, 1251 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020, usa.philips.com; **URC (Universal Remote Control Inc.)**, 914/835-4484, 500 Manaroneck Ave., Harrison, NY 10528, universalremote.com.

VIDEO DISC PLAYERS, RECORDERS & EXTERNAL DRIVES: **LG Electronics**, 800/243-0000, 1000 Sylvan Ave., Englewood Cliffs, NJ 07632, lge.com; **Lite-On (Philips & Lite-On Digital Solutions USA Inc.)**, 510/687-1800, 42000 Christy St., Fremont, CA 94538, www.pldsnet.com; **Panasonic Corp. of North America**, 800/211-7262, One Panasonic Way, Secaucus, NJ 07094, panasonic.com; **Philips Electronics North America Corp.**, 800/223-1828, 1251 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020, usa.philips.com; **Toshiba America Consumer Electronics LLC**, 800/638-3811, 82 Totowa Rd., Wayne, NJ 07470, toshiba.com.

UPDATE

In the January/February 2008 issue, CD published Best Buy recommendations for pillows. Unfortunately, shortly after we went to press, we learned that two of our selections were being discontinued: our Premium memory-foam Best Buy, Select Comfort's Intralux Comfort Foam Pillow, and our Premium down/blend recommendation, Select Comfort's Nature's Preference Pillow. To ensure readers have a Consumers Digest Best Buy recommendation for a memory-foam pillow and a premium down/blend model that will be available for months to come, we revisited our research file. Below are the pillows we now recommend in those two categories.

[P] ComfortPillow by Tempur-Pedic

List: \$125 to \$150

The dense ComfortPillow contains thousands of visco-elastic cushions. It molded gently to the head when we tried it, providing support without feeling hard or rigid.

Features:

- * Sizes: Standard and queen
- * Fill: Visco-elastic material
- * Cover: Cotton
- * Warranty: 3-yr. limited

[P] Monaco Goose Down Pillow by Garnet Hill

List: \$98 to \$138

We found this 100 percent goose down pillow to provide good loft while also molding well to the head. The 226-thread-count cotton cover and nice piping along the edge also impressed us.

Features:

- * Sizes: Standard, queen and king
- * Fill: Goose down
- * Cover: Cotton
- * Warranty: Return for exchange or refund for the life of the product