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**HOW TO
RIDE ATV'S**

ISSN0364-1546



YAMAHA IT250J: ENDURO WORKHORSE



TROPHEE DES NATIONS



HOW TO RIDE ATCs



YAMAHA IT250

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On the Cover: — Steve Banning shows off the new Maico Alpha, while Broc Glover shows us how to ride a Tri-Moto . . . and live to tell the tale. Maico shot by Rick Sieman, Tri-Moto by Phil Beckman.

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HOW TO SURVIVE ON THREE WHEELS A DAY

*A beginner's guide for
the seasoned motorcyclist*

By Paul Clipper



Four years ago, anyone who voiced the opinion that three-wheeled dirt bikes would be a big thing some day would most likely be laughed out of whatever conversation he was unfortunate enough to open his mouth in. The same statement today would be greeted with a completely different reaction, as three-wheelers (or ATVs, as they've come to be known in the business) have *become* a big thing, both in recreational riding and the hallowed ground of competition. ATVs are no longer the joke of the past.

Many dirt bikers have drifted over to the ATV rage. Some of them got hooked after trying to find out why their kids and wives were having so much fun at it. A few looked to ATVs for a chance to ride in one more class at the Sunday races, and a certain number of uninformed souls picked three-wheelers because they seemed to be more difficult to fall off of than your average DT-1. This last statement is very close to the truth, considering the lack of handling performance in the average DT-1, but most folks soon find out that an ATV is still crashable. The rest find out later.

Nearly every two-wheel enthusiast has a hard time learning how to ride an ATV... that second wheel on the rear end complicates matters quite a bit. But when the bug bites, just as with the first dirt bike ride, it bites deep; and the neophyte ATV rider may find himself frustrated in his attempts to keep up with his more experienced friends. This leads to the Great ATV Rule #1: Many different techniques must be mastered before your First Good Ride.

Of course, the staff of *Dirt Bike*—always pioneers in the total dirt experience—has taken their knocks on three-wheelers and can offer some sound advice on controlling a wild ATV. Why, we've even managed to spin off a new magazine called *Dirt Wheels*, available the end of this month and every other month thereafter, which is right now trying its level best to be the last word on the subject of ATVs—and succeeding very well, thank you.

We strongly suggest buying every copy of *Dirt Wheels* you can find, but if you can't wait until then to learn how to ride—and ride *well*—let us offer a dip in our pool of experience.

What can we say about wheelies? Chances are it's the first thing you learned. Just keep your weight in the middle, your foot on the rear brake, and be ready to go over on your back a few times.

TURNING: THE KEY TO CONTROL

Anyone who jumps off a two-wheeled vehicle onto a three-wheeler and tries to go fast without any previous experience, usually finds out that the ultimate result can be painful. On a dirt bike, the proper way to make a turn is to weight the outside peg and lean into the turn. On an ATV, the basic slow-to-medium-speed turn is accomplished by weighting the outside peg, leaning to the *outside* of the turn, and lifting the inside rear wheel slightly while turning the bars into the turn.

If you think about this for a moment you'll see that turning an ATV is exactly opposite to a dirt bike. On a normal dirt bike turn, the bars are almost always turned to the *outside* of a turn... the classic "correcting for a slide" position. The only time you can use this classic position on an ATV is on a high-speed sweeping turn with both back

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TRIPLE-TIRE TECHNOLOGY



When we say "lift" the inside wheel, we don't mean go crazy. For a smooth turn, the wheel needs to be only slightly off the ground.

wheels breaking traction. For any other *slow-to-medium-speed* turn, steer into the turn and lift the inside wheel.

Now this is fine and good, but at very high speeds the technique changes again. For a high-speed (fourth or fifth gear), wide-open turn where it is not necessary to back off the throttle (such as a long, sweeping turn on a beach), you'll need to steer slightly into the turn, weight the outside peg, and shift all your body weight to the *inside*. Notice that your steering and peg weighting are the same, but now the body weight is moved to the exact opposite as necessary for a slow turn. The reason for this is centrifugal force; the speed of the machine in a fast turn tends to throw the weight of its mass to the outside of the turn, which will automatically lift the inside wheel. You only need to shift your weight to the inside to keep from flipping over.

These two basic maneuvers are the key to controlling an ATV. The exact point at which you'll need to shift from the low-speed to the high-speed technique depends on too many variables to pinpoint here. Once you get a little experience, you'll be able to feel it with no trouble.

Wide, simple turns are the best to learn on, gradually increasing your speed as you gain more confidence. Once wide turns begin to bore you, move on to tighter trails that wind up and down gentle hills. This kind of terrain varies between flat and off-camber, uphill and down; and you'll need to use a mix of both systems to maintain a straight line. Don't get frustrat-



In a high-speed turn, the weighting is reversed—centrifugal force makes this ATV want to stand up on the outside wheels. Body English and a wide-open throttle keep it from doing flips.

ed! Two days of practice and you should be smoking right along!

JUMPING: WATCH THAT WEIGHT

Two things affect the jumping of the average ATV: suspension and weight. When we say suspension, we mean yes or no—if you have an ATC-250 or another type of ATV with a rear suspension, you'll enjoy jumping a whole lot more than with a hardtail frame. Even with just a set of forks on the front (as with the Tri-Moto 175), your ATV will be more controllable—a rigid-framed unit has all the stability of a tennis ball off a high-speed jump. Slow-speed jumps will merely shorten your spine a bit each time through.

If you must fly, practice first on a small jump, shifting your weight to allow the rear wheels to land first, with the front end about six inches high. All three of the major ATVs have a different weight bias, so which way you shift your body weight all depends on the machine you ride. Experiment and practice.

Obviously, if you have some type of suspension, your landings will be much more comfortable. Once you gain more experience, modify your technique. If you just have suspension on the front, for example, you may prefer to land with the front wheel low, to soak up most of the initial impact. Until you reach this point, concentrate on low, flat jumps, holding a steady throttle throughout. Remember: if you chop the throttle suddenly in mid air, you may be risking an endo upon landing; and if you gas it too hard you could roll out when the rear wheels hit.

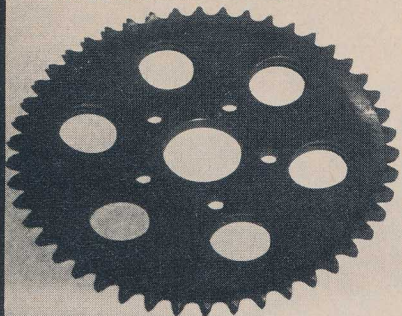
HILLS: UP AND DOWN THE TRAIL

Uphills can be difficult. The first thing to decide about any hill you want to climb is whether or not you have the horsepower to get over the top. This is very important, unless you enjoy doing quick pivot turns three fourths of the way up, followed by a high-speed sprint to the bottom. After horsepower, the key to good hillclimbing is maintaining decent traction and keeping the front end down. Wheelies may be fun on level ground, but a flip on the side of a hill usually results in a 300-pound machine driving you into the ground once it loses its fight with the pull of gravity.

Attack the hill in the highest gear you can manage (get a run at it!) without lugging the engine. When your rpm drops down to the point where you start losing power, downshift and repeat until you get over the top or run out of gears. Most every ATV made has enough low-end grunt to drag you over the top of anything, so don't give up until you stop dead.

All the moves are basically the same as when riding a two-wheeler, except for getting back down once you stall halfway up. At best, an ATV is a bulky, cumbersome thing to move around with a dead engine, and matters worsen on the side of a hill. If you're really brave and good with the brakes and steering, it's possible to let the ATV roll slowly down the hill backwards before taking another shot at it. But we would only recommend this kind of action on a sand dune or a smooth hill with a whole lot of runoff at the bot-

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TRIPLE-TIRE TECHNOLOGY



Here, "Dirty Dirk" is on the verge of being in big trouble; if he lets off the gas, he'll take a headfirst into the bushes.

tom. You may just have to get off to physically turn the dead three-wheeler around, and roll it down nose first. Wrestle it around slowly and carefully—you don't want it to roll over on you, and you *really* don't want it to cartwheel down the hill with no one aboard to work the brakes. The first situation is very painful; the second is merely expensive and a public health hazard.

Riding down hills is a lot easier than most folks make it out to be. Keep your weight back, your feet and hands on the brakes, the engine in a low gear with the clutch out, and your front wheel pointed in a natural downhill line. If you steer in any direction other than straight down, you will turn into the hill and most likely roll to the bottom—both expensive *and* painful.

Upon mastering control over all four of the above functions at once, you'll be able to crawl down the steepest hill with no problem. Once you get used to the feeling, you can up your speed to whatever feels comfortable.

ROUGH GROUND... TENNIS ANYONE?

This is where the "tennis ball" effect was first discovered—whoopdies, rocks, and bumpy ground. The one factor that will ultimately determine whether or not you can cross rough ground quickly is whether or not your machine has a suspension. On a rigid-framed ATV, a set of short, choppy whoopdies will have you seeing double after ten feet. There are two options: either keep the gas on, your weight back, and ride it out... if you can; or, slowly back off the throttle until you can see straight, then motor slowly out of the rough stuff.

On a fully-suspended ATV, success will depend largely on how well the suspension is set up and the type of tires

you use. We're not going to get into a suspension primer in this story. Suffice it to say that an ATV suspension is nearly identical to a normal dirt bike suspension in the tuning it requires: set it up for the whoops and it'll go through the whoops. Flat profile racing tires bounce around less than stock floatation jobs, and if most of the ground you ride on is rough, they may be the best way to go. Either way, the technique is the same—on the gas, weight back, and ride it out.

CRASHING: DOs AND DON'Ts

This is not a section on the most comfortable way to crash—there isn't any, in our opinion. We'd just like to sum up with a few dos and don'ts in an effort to make your three-wheeled experience as enjoyable and as painless as possible.

Do practice on sand when you're starting out, if at all possible. Sand is one of the easiest surfaces to ride an ATV on, and most comfortable after parting with the machine.

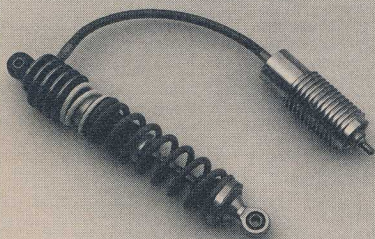
Don't stick a foot out when entering a turn. As a matter of fact, there's never any reason to take your feet off the pegs unless you're getting off after a ride. Running over your own foot is very embarrassing and uncomfortable.

Do wear a helmet, boots and gloves when you ride. No explanation necessary.

Don't let off the gas in the middle of a wide-open power slide. This little trick will put you on your head so hard and so quickly that, chances are, you will never know what hit you.

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