

**Safety First – ATV Spring ATV Safety Checklist**  
by Dan Herman

This column has a regular practice of reviewing a checklist for boat safety items in the month of May. We'll do that again next month. But this month we'll talk about a subject not reviewed here before; inspection of safety aspects of an ATV. This year when you pull your ATV(s) out of hibernation and before starting out on the trail, give the equipment a good inspection.

Start with the lights. If your machine is equipped with lights observe if they are all working. This is especially important for brake lights, they provide the driver behind you with a much earlier warning of your intention to slow or stop. Also, remember to run with your headlights on while on the trail, even though it's daytime. This will help oncoming riders to see you, especially in vegetation surrounded areas.



Next, the tires. Review them for cuts, chunks of missing rubber, exposed cords, and tread depth. Check the inflation pressures. The low-pressure wide profile tires used on ATV's can fool you. They can appear properly inflated when they are not. Inflate to the pressure shown on the sidewall or, better, in the machine operator's manual. There's a relatively new and inexpensive type gage available at your favorite auto parts store. It's a dial gage with a short valve tube that is easier to read and gives more accurate readings than the common telescope gage. The dial gage uses the same type mechanism found in laboratory quality instruments to provide accurate, consistent readings. See the accompanying photo

to help you recognize it.

Inspect the brakes. If they are mechanically operated, be sure the linkage and/or cable(s) is activating all the brakes. If hydraulic, view the level of fluid in the reservoir. Depress the brake pedal to check for firmness. If it's necessary to pump the pedal to get a firm pedal there is air in the hydraulic system that must be bled out and a cause for air entering found and repaired. Review any hydraulic hoses for leakage, abrasions, cracking or other signs of fatigue. Look at the disc brake rotors for signs of scoring or damaged surfaces and the pads for sufficient thickness to provide continued service life. The operator's manual probably provides guidelines on this.

Go over the whole chassis, particularly the suspensions, looking for loose bolts/nuts. Best to test tighten every bolt head you can see. Review the rubber boots that cover the joints in the wheel drive shafts. Look for cracks, openings and oil on the outer surface of the boot. The boots should be flexible (soft), intact and dry. If cracked, or worse, water and dirt will get to the joint and it will soon fail – a very expensive repair.

Look for signs of mice infestation. Mice like to chew on wires and air cleaner elements and nest in the air intake piping and the cleaner canister. Before starting the engine open and inspect the air cleaner for a nest or damaged element. If after starting the engine runs kinda funny, it may have a nest in the exhaust system! Next winter protect your machine with a decoration of clothes dryer softener sheets. Apparently, mice don't like the scent from these sheets. Place them in cavities around the machine, on wiring harnesses and

wad one up in both the engine intake and exhaust piping. Just don't forget to remove them all before starting up for the next season.

Consider the need to change the engine lube oil. Replace the air cleaner element if it's loaded with dirt. Lubricate all moving joints with lubricants as called for in your operator's manual. If the engine is liquid cooled, check the coolant level. Clean the top of the battery and check the terminal connections – are they clean and tight? Good idea to do all these maintenance items at the beginning of every season.

If you have a side-by-side machine check the seatbelts for cuts/tears, loose attachments or mud clogged buckles.

The flag takes a beating. Inspect the pennant itself for fading, tears, etc. and focus on the staff to see if it shows signs of cracking or fraying particularly at the attachment fitting. Is the attachment tight? If your flag needs replacement consider modifying the installation, if necessary, to display the pennant at least eight feet above the ground surface for better visibility on the trail.

Carry a tow rope or tow strap on the machine for emergency towing of your or another's unit. Consider carrying a fire extinguisher. Could be really handy when you're in a remote location on the trail. Install a label or water protected note on the machine bearing the cell phone number of Security (815.493.2599). Always have at least one rider on the machine or in the group carry a cell phone.

I've referred to consulting the operator's manual. If you can't locate yours you may be able to get a new copy from your dealer and often can find a downloadable version on the website of the manufacturer.

Don't limit these inspections to once a year. Items can wear and be damaged in use. Review the machine frequently throughout the season to ensure continued reliability and safety. Set a goal of getting your machine(s) capable of going through the season without a breakdown. Finally, if you find some of these inspections and maintenance functions beyond what you feel capable of doing, consult one of our neighboring dealers for assistance. They have trained technicians who can do a skilled job of making your machine safe and breakdown resistant.

Return to daylight saving time occurred in March. If you didn't use that as a reminder to test the operation of your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and install new batteries use this column to do so.

Remember, April 1 was the deadline for displaying your current 2011 Lake Carroll registration stickers on all vehicles (including, but not limited to, cars, ATV's, golf carts, campers, boats, etc).

Let's be careful out there!