

# More Than Just a Plaything

James de Havilland revs up as he tackles tough terrain on golf courses with the latest ATVs.

Sales of ATVs in the UK hover between 6,000 and 7,000 units a year. Of these, the majority are working, as opposed to leisure quads, with farmers being by far and away the biggest ATV users. But do these machines have a place on a golf course?



Although Suzuki offers an entry level model, the 250 Ozark, it is the 400 Eiger models that will appeal to those looking to tow a load. Manual transmission models provide most relaxed low speed ride

On its own, an ATV is little more than a motorised pair of legs. Although these machines have the ability to traverse some pretty demanding terrain, they have limited carrying capacity on their integral front and rear racks, can only transport one person and have no means of driving ancillary equipment other than that powered by a 12v DC outlet. To add to its limitations, professional ATV operators complying with risk assessment strictures will need to ensure the operator wears the appropriate safety clothing, this essentially condensing down to a helmet.

Competing on a golf course against a utility vehicle, such as the ubiquitous John Deere Gator and Kawasaki Mule, an ATV will, on

the surface, have little to offer. A Gator or Mule can carry a couple of people, they have a built in load platform and both can be specified with diesel power. Utility vehicle three, ATV nil. It is, of course, difficult to argue the ATV corner when an existing course has the resources to fund a utility vehicle. As the latter can be purchased with a cab and does not require the wearing of protective clothing either, it starts to make even looking at what the ATV world has to offer seem somewhat meaningless.

Canny users, however, know different. An ATV cannot be compared to a different class of machine for starters, and to pigeon hole these machines by what they cannot do overlooks their potential uses. Like a utility vehicle, they can work with a range of accessories. These can include equipment from winches and sprayers through to trailed self-powered mowers and spreaders. The reality, however, is that by far and away the majority of ATVs will be purchased for transport, and to optimise this, a trailer is a simple and low cost addition to any first ATV buying package. Although the amount that can be towed by the ATV will be determined by individual model capacities, a trailer loaded with a brush cutter, fuel and some hand tools will be unlikely to tax even the smallest working ATV.

Putting the cart before the horse, ATV trailers from a specialist like Logic are priced from around £450 (ex. VAT). This buys a fully galvanised 1500 x 1000 x 380mm unit offered with a choice of dropping tailgate. Dedicated ATV trailers are built tough and can be supplied with a range of tyres to suit the given load and ground bearing pressure. They can make an ideal transport platform easily robust enough to move a pedestrian greens mower around an 18 hole course.

The Massey Ferguson 'AgTV' range includes models with nominal capacities from 250 to 500cc, with the MF400 automatic illustrating what to expect in terms of looks



As a trailer should be an integral part of an ATV buying decision, it follows that any ATV considered for work on a golf course should have the capacity to tow a load. Realistically, this can make it better to steer away from entry level utility ATV models. Although experience suggests a model such as the 2WD Honda Fourtrax 250S, at a shade under £3,200 (ex. VAT), will easily pull a load in excess of 250kg it is not really aimed at users who want to tow.

Move up the Honda range to the 2WD Fourtrax 350S, and note that this £4,070 (ex. VAT) model has a 325kg towing capacity. That is fine for most users, and this ATV will pull that sort of load safely over varied terrain. This model, incidentally, has a single range, five speed manual transmission with reverse. Gears are selected via a foot shift, an automatic clutch enabling shifts to be made via the pedal alone. An auto clutch is a common feature of 'foot shift' ATVs, regardless of make of model.

While looking at Honda ATVs, the company offers ES variants of both its TRX250 and TRX350 models. The ES system replaces the foot shift with left hand side mounted up and down shift buttons. These work a solenoid to shift through the gears. Opting for the ES shift carries a respective premium of £100 and £200 and, in the writer's opinion, is worth every extra penny. Honda is the ATV market leader in the UK, but they are by no means the only maker of utility ATVs.

Starting with Kawasaki, the company has a broad ATV offering that includes fully automatic models, starting with the selectable 2 or 4WD KVF360. The CVT transmission used in this model is essentially similar to that employed in the Mule, a belt transmitting power between a pair of expanding pulleys that automatically balance engine speed to load and forward velocity. To drive, the KVF360 is simply put in high or low ratio, the throttle opened and that is it. Kawasaki put the towing capacity of this model at a massive 500kg. The KVF360 has a good specification for the money, this model having a £4,495 (ex. VAT) list price.

Kawasaki also cater for those looking to a manual ATV, its venerable 2WD KLF300 having a respectable 317Kg towing capacity and uniquely a lockable rear differential. ATVs typically have no rear diff, which explains why they can be a handful to steer on hard surfaces and why tight turns on turf can lead to a good deal of scuff. This feature alone makes the KLF300 well worth a look, as does its competitive £3,895 (ex. VAT) price.

Suzuki was the first company to develop a four wheel ATV in the early 1980's, no one can challenge Suzuki's heritage in the ATV sector. Despite becoming market leaders initially, the company did itself no favours by withdrawing temporarily from the UK market in the mid-1990's. On its return, however, it introduced a new range of models, including the 400cc Eiger range.

In terms of capacity, a 2WD LT-F400 Eiger is arguably in a different performance league than the aforementioned Honda and Kawasaki models, but the smaller Ozark 250 is arguably not really right for a professional user. Whatever the case, the five-speed manual 2WD Eiger is one of the best all-round ATVs, with a towing capacity of 450kg. In the writer's experience, this model can safely handle this type of load in good



Kawasaki has a choice of models in its utility range, including the KVF360 and, as pictured, the rear diff lock equipped KLF300. The latter will be less likely to mark turf during a tight turn

going, with the caveat that 4WD offers better stability in adverse conditions.

There are three models in the Eiger range, including a 4WD manual and a 4WD Automatic. The 2WD model retails for £3999 (ex. VAT), with an option for 4WD adding a healthy £800 premium. Going auto is even more costly, these models retailing for a shade under £5000 (ex. VAT). For most courses, a 2WD model will do all that is asked of it.

Moving on to Yamaha, the company again offer a 250cc model, the five speed manual Bruin250AN. It is the automatic larger brother to this model, the 2WD Bruin YFM350AN, however, that will interest many potential buyers. For a start, it is among the lowest priced automatic ATVs in the utility sector, with a retail price of £3,999 (ex. VAT). Although the engine is some 50cc shy of the Suzuki Eiger automatic, the 2WD Bruin 350 is well priced and has a Kawasaki KVF360 matching 500kg towing capacity.

Automatic ATVs, incidentally, are good at towing. The operator cannot really set off in the wrong gear and modern autos are pretty controllable when it comes to automatic engine braking. Automatic ATVs are generally harder to abuse, which makes them a good choice in multi-user applications. What can let them down is the need for relatively high engine revs at low speeds and a liking for petrol. Fuel consumption, incidentally, can be high with ATVs. A manual model of around 350cc will be doing well to exceed 35mpg in light going, with an automatic used to tow a heavy load perhaps liking a drink in the low 20's.

Moving on to Polaris, this US manufacturer has long specialised in automatic ATVs, its 2WD Magnum 330 rating as one of the most comfortable quads in its class. Towing capacity of this model is put at 454kg, the physical size of the Magnum making this a realistic maximum in even pretty tough going. As for price, £3,695 (ex. VAT) represents good value, the 329cc power unit having good power delivery.

Next up is Bombardier. The company's ATVs are not really aimed at the entry level utility market, its lowest priced working machine, the 400cc Outlander weighing in at £5,199 (ex. VAT). That is quite a premium over some of the manual quads already outlined, but this model comes with selectable 4WD and a CVT automatic transmission. The company also offer



Hang a trailer onto the rear of an ATV, and it is immediately more useful. A two-wheel drive ATV is fine in easy going, but if there is steep terrain in the job mix, go for 4WD

a 'platform' model, the Traxter XL. The rear platform will take a 275kg payload, while the chassis design allows a 'step through' design so there is no need to swing a leg over the saddle to get seated. Powered by a 498cc petrol engine, this model is more like a cross between a utility vehicle and an ATV with a price of £6,999 (ex. VAT) to match.

A point to watch with Bombardier, however, is the link the company has with John Deere. These ATVs have already started to appear in Deere colours in the USA. When that happens over here expect interest to really start to pick up. As it is, the Traxter XL is an extremely useful bit of kit.

Last in this round up, but by no means last in terms of product offering, is Massey Ferguson. Massey are a well know brand, and for the past three years have been bringing Arctic Cat ATVs as MF AgTVs. The 'Ag' element is to help remind buyers that these are working machines, Massey having developed its MRP rack attachment system to boost their appeal. MRP accessories simply plug them into small sockets on the racks, with clamps for tools and carrying boxes being listed among the items on offer.

In terms of models, the company offer, like rival makers, an entry level model, the MF250, with the next machine in the range possibly being the one to look at, the MF300. This three range, five speed manual ATV has 4WD and a 386kg towing capacity and has a lot going for it as a working bike, not least due to its versatile manual transmission. Prices around £4,489 (ex. VAT).

So, there are certainly a good number of ATVs to choose from, with a specification and budget range that should suit most golf course needs. Utility vehicle prices kick off at around £7,500 (ex. VAT) for petrol models, with an ATV and trailer combination costing from around £5,000 and up. This is a substantial saving, and one that can make looking into buying an ATV well worth the effort.

Honda ATVs have a good reputation for reliability and residual values. A two-wheel drive ATV will suit most golf courses, these models also offering better economy and lighter steering

