

How to Prepare for an ATV Trail Ride



Trail riding on ATVs can be a lot of fun, but a lack of preparedness can turn an enjoyable outing into a disaster. From equipment malfunctions to possible injuries, the list of what can go wrong is virtually endless. This pre-ride guide can help to prevent many common problems associated with recreational ATV use.

The first step to prepare for a trail ride is to T-CLOC your machine. This will help to ensure that your ATV is trail worthy.



T = Tires and wheels. Check your tires for excessive wear or cuts, and replace if necessary. Adjust the air pressure in the tires to the recommended pressure (usually 3–5 psi). Check the wheels for dents, which could lead to a flat tire later. Check to make sure all lug nuts are tight.



C = Controls and cables. Make sure all controls work smoothly. Ensure the throttle moves smoothly and snaps closed with the handlebars in any turning position. Check that the brakes work smoothly and are adjusted properly. The brakes are one of the most important safety features on the ATV.

L = Lights and electric. Check the condition of the ignition switch and engine stop switch. Make sure both operate properly by switching them on and off while warming up the ATV. If your ATV has headlights and taillights, make sure both work before starting the ride. Even if you don't plan on it, you could be out after dark.

O = Oil and fuel. Check the oil level with a dipstick or sight glass while the engine is off. Start your ride with a full tank of gas, and know the approximate cruising range of the machine. Check for leaks. Check the condition of the air filter. Be sure it is not torn or blocked.



C = Chain (or driveshaft) and chassis. Inspect, adjust, and lubricate the chain regularly. Ensure the slack is within the specifications in the owner's manual. If your ATV has a driveshaft instead, check that the oil supply is adequate and there are no leaks. Make sure nuts and bolts on the chassis are tight. Riding off-road can cause these parts to loosen over time.



Where to Ride

There are many public places to trail ride on ATVs. One great website to find such places is www.recreation.gov. If riding on private lands, make sure to have written permission from the landowner. Always follow the rules of the trail that you ride on; it only takes one person breaking the rules to ruin it for future riders.

What to Pack

Now that the ATV is in trail-worthy condition, pack a few items to ensure that you make it back home! Remember that you can drive farther in 2 hours than you can walk in a day. Here is a checklist of items you should take with you:

- First aid kit
- Tool kit
- Spare parts (spark plugs, extra headlight bulbs, electrical wire and tape)
- A tow rope or chain
- Drinking water and snacks
- A flashlight
- A cell phone (Often you will have service even in remote areas.)
- A map of the area and a compass
- Extra gas
- Trash bags to pack litter out. Always leave an area better than you found it.

By preparing for the unexpected, you can handle just about any problem you encounter on the trails. Remember that the most important part of a trail ride is a safe return home. Now, go out and have some fun!

Source: ATV Safety Institute. *Before You Ride*. <https://atvsafety.org/before-you-ride>

Publication 3325 (POD-05-19)

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Produced by Agricultural Communications.

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Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. GARY B. JACKSON, Director