



All-terrain Farming: ATVs Working in the Field

Will the ATV hold up while working in the field? Read more to find out.

By Jim Ruen (continued from All-terrain Farming, Page 3 of 5)

The real test of using the ATV as a workhorse came this past fall when I decided to seed an 8-acre field on the farm to trees.

How did Jim's ATV handle weeds?

[Click here](#) Our state forester told me that broadcasting seed in the fall would create more of a true forest situation, with each young seedling fighting it out for light, water and nutrients. Several state and federal conservation programs would cover much of the cost and pay me annual rent. In turn, the trees would serve as a buffer to help protect and stabilize a bordering trout stream.

An area forester would supply and spread the seed. My job would be turning that year's corn stubble into a seedbed with my ATV. I recalled interviewing Matt Kunz of Kunz Engineering about their ATV chisel plows for a Hobby Farms story ("Tools for Your Tractor," March/April 2007). I contacted Kunz to see if he was up for my 8-acre challenge.

A week after the corn was harvested, he showed up with his Arctic Cat ATV, a rough-cut mower and two chisel plows.

The rough-cut mower made quick work of remaining stalks and taller stubble, as well as cleaning up field edges and mowing down brambles and young box elder saplings. Kunz told me the mower was tough, but tough was just a word until I hit a sapling too big to bend over. My Honda jerked to a stop. I backed up, expecting the worst—a bent mower chassis and an irate owner.

Instead, Kunz was smiling with pride as we inspected the mower; not a scratch or a dent in the heavy-duty exterior frame.

The next step was to hook both four-wheelers to the chisel plows.

The Kunz Engineering chisel plows are 4-feet wide, with a lead disk gang to slice through residue followed by two rows of four offset plow shanks each. Wanting to tear up the field yet leave maximum residue in place for erosion control, Kunz suggested dropping the rear four shanks, accomplished simply by pulling a pin.

I quickly appreciated how well-suited the CVT transmission of my Honda was for the job. My ground speed varied from 4 to 8 mph at full throttle as I pulled the chisels at 5- to 6-inch depths. We were plowing at about a 45-degree angle to the rows of corn stubble and the wheel tracks from harvest.

Every time I hit a wheel path, the compacted soil slowed ground speed by 30 to 40 percent. Once I had plowed through the zone, the Honda would leap forward, regaining full speed for another 20 to 30 feet. The 200-pound loader mounted on the front end of the ATV gave me the extra weight I needed to keep the front end on the ground pulling.

Kunz had estimated the job would take about an acre an hour, and he was dead-on. Riding my unit won him over to the efficiency of the CVT transmission and the benefit of the loader as ballast. I had, in turn, been won over by both the rough-cut mower and chisel plows. They were definitely going on my "gotta get one" list.

With the field well prepared, the forestry crew showed up with a fertilizer spreader with a spinner plate on the rear and a small field disk.

Bags of walnuts and acorns were quickly loaded into the spreader and, within a few hours, dispersed across the field. That was followed by a quick disking to cover the large seeds. Small ash seeds were spread by hand.

Soon after winter snows melted, I pulled in with my ATV and a small, rear-mounted spreader to broadcast seed oats at 3 bushels per acre. Using oats as a cover crop when spring seeding clover and alfalfa is a long-standing farm practice, and early oat emergence shades out early weed growth while letting in plenty of light for tree seedlings. It also holds the soil



and shelters tender seedling tips from browsing deer. Oats and tree seedlings began appearing everywhere.

I'm confident that for years to come, my "little tractor" will do the job for me. It's proven to be an excellent investment and one I would make again. It handles most of the work I need done around the home site and on my farmland. Best of all, when the work is finished, I can slip off the loader and take a ride just for fun.

<Next: ATVs Battle Weeds>

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