

## **Size It Up!** **Getting Children the Right Fit for an OHV**

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I'm a big boy. Always have been, as long as I can remember. I'm not boasting – it's just a fact. At 6'7" and 230 pounds, I definitely fall into the "large" category for human beings. What's more, I can well remember growing up raiding my father's closet for shoes, shirts, socks – anything that fit – since most of my stuff seemed to be somehow shrinking. I was 11 years old, and often remember hearing, "I don't know whether I'd rather clothe you or feed you." After several of my forays into his closet, my dad began to notice his lack of clothing, and it was then that he and my mother started buying things for me a little too large, adding that "I could grow into them."

Fortunately, there were places where my parents didn't encourage me to "grow into it." My father and I were often roaming the woods hunting and fishing, and I always had a rod or a rifle that was appropriate for my size. When I needed a new bike, we got one that I could control and would accommodate a range of sizes, but still not a full-size adult bike. What my parents understood was that, while I was physically coming close to the size of a grown adult, I still lacked the motor skills, coordination and maturity to handle all the tools and toys of an adult's world.

"I'll have a lot of parents coming in and wanting to buy a vehicle larger than their children need," comments Bob Greene, owner of Desert Cities Honda in Thousand Palms. "A lot of times, I have to tell them that they will not be happy with the vehicle they want to buy, and should choose a smaller, less expensive bike or quad. Of course, when I suggest they spend less money, they think I'm nuts, but I just don't want them buying a vehicle they – or their kids – won't enjoy."

It's tempting to buy a larger vehicle for children, planning on them "growing into it." At first glance, it makes sense: Sure, there might be some awkwardness initially, but they'll get bigger and fit just fine. Unfortunately, this rarely holds true. Nearly 90 percent of ATV-related injuries suffered by children in 2005 were caused by giving riders under age 16 adult-sized vehicles. According to the National Safe Kids Campaign, that same year 44 children in the same age group died as a result of injuries sustained while operating an ATV, and 75% of those deaths were children ages 10-14. Giving a child an oversized vehicle severely limits how much they can manipulate and puts them needlessly at risk.



(An example of incorrect sizing: This child's size makes it difficult for her to reach the handlebars, breaks, and nearly impossible to steer well.)

In addition to physical development, the emotional development of the child also plays a major factor in the way they operate a vehicle. Riding an OHV places unique demands on a child,

and it takes maturity to recognize that uncontrolled riding can lead to injury or death. Though a child may be large for his or her age, it does not mean that they have the mature judgment to safely control a larger, more powerful vehicle, some of which can reach 70 mph and weigh over 800 pounds.

“Just because you buy a vehicle for your daughter who’s six, doesn’t mean she can’t ride it when she’s eight,” continues Bob. “Some of the vehicles out there now are modular; meaning you can adjust or replace components as the child ages. Seats, suspension, handlebars – there’s a bunch of options to get the most mileage out of your child’s vehicle.”

To help determine the appropriate size vehicle for your child, it is important to seek out a reputable and knowledgeable sales staff. They can assist you in determining if the vehicle will be a good fit for the child, and also recommend safety gear to help protect your child if and when a spill occurs. Motorcycles are somewhat self-limiting by their design, and ATV manufacturers have put together a size recommendation table to help guide adults in purchasing a youth ATV. Combined with the experience of a good salesperson, it should be an easy task to find an off-highway vehicle that fits your child well.

Age of Operator	ATV Engine Size
Under 6 years of age	No operation recommended
Age 6 to 11	Under 70cc.
Age 12-15	70-90cc.
16 years or older	Over 90cc.

(Age and size recommendations for ATV operation.)

Another important factor to consider in buying a vehicle of

the proper size is where and when it can be used. There are several vehicles sold in the United States as off-highway vehicles that cannot be legally ridden on public lands in Southern California. That’s not to say that these vehicles themselves are illegal – they can be ridden on privately-owned lands – but riding them in National Forests, Parks, and land managed by the Bureau of Land Management is illegal. Since we adults set the example for our children, we need to be cognizant of how we behave. Sure, we might save some money on a cheaper ATV, but if we take our children riding on the National Forest with an unregistered, illegal vehicle, we’re doing harm by displaying a lack of respect for the law and condoning illegal behavior. It’s hard to justify being a poor role model just to save a few bucks. If unsure about whether or not an OHV can be registered in California, check with the Department of Motor Vehicles before plunking down your hard-earned cash.



(This young rider has a bike correct for his size, is wearing all the proper safety gear, and his bike is green-sticker registered with the California DMV).

With the holidays approaching fast, many of us are going to be out shopping and trying to find that special gift for someone in our lives. ATV and motorcycle sales for young children are often popular choices, and can yield great fun and a family bonding experience. When shopping for an OHV for your young one, however, remember the importance of proper sizing. Proper sizing of a vehicle will improve the child’s safety and safety of others, improve the child’s riding performance, and help them build the skills they will need when it’s time to graduate to riding an adult vehicle. Just be sure to put a lock on your closet door before that happens. . .

"The Off-Highway Vehicle Education Outreach Program is one of six programs managed by the San Bernardino National Forest Association (SBNFA), a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit partnering with land management agencies to support recreation, education and conservation. SBNFA partners primarily with the USDA Forest Service, and is funded by corporate sponsorships, grants and private donations. To find out more about how you can support SBNFA programs, or to become a volunteer go to our website at [www.sbnfa.org](http://www.sbnfa.org), or call Lacy Kelly at (909) 382-2776."