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Commentary: A dangerous day at the track

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A day at the local All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Park can be full of fun and excitement or, as one particular day turned out for me, very eye opening.

Summer in Southeast Alabama is hot, humid and the nagging bugs really test your patience. This day was a typical Alabama summer day when the high heat and humidity constantly sip away at your energy. Typically, the ATV track I go to is far off the beaten trail and not many venture out to it but, on this particular day, it was full of motocross bikes and ATVs driven by people of all ages and sizes. The mixture made riding that day a unique challenge for everyone.

I normally begin my day at the track by going out and doing a few laps around the track, getting progressively bolder as I get the feel for conditions and traffic. On this day, a group of four ATV riders were literally eating up the track, washing out all the good turns, plowing up the dust and generally making life miserable for patrons in the parking area who were there to watch their family and friends challenge themselves.

As the day progressed, a pattern evolved out of mutual respect where when the ATV riders were out, the motocross folks waited and then switched once the ATV folks took a break. That program was working out well for everyone involved. One of the ATV guys began to ride wheelies across the parking lot upon his return to his group's tailgate area. What was funny, though, was when "that guy" did his little stunt riding no one cheered or really took notice. I thought to myself "that guy will be the first crash we see out here today."

Eventually, I came to find out that "that guy" is Nick; he is a reasonably good ATV rider on flat ground in a parking lot and not too shabby on the track. What we also all soon came to find out, however, is Nick isn't very good at landing the jumps off of the table tops or while trying jump through the rhythm section of the track.

On Nick's last lap he almost missed the landing on the long table top, two wheels on top and two on the side, it was a bit hairy, but he got back in control. Since all of the dirt bikes were watching the ATVs, we all commented on Nick's quick save. Once Nick cleared that jump, he and the rest of his buddies raced back to the lower section of the track out of our sight.



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During our wait for the track to clear, we were all hanging out in the parking area rehydrating and socializing when someone yelled “call 911” – funny how that statement gets everyone’s attention in an instant.

I hopped off the trailer and ran over to the couple of guys kneeling around the injured rider. Nick was sprawled out in the middle of the track on his back like he was ready to do snow angles. Once I got close I noticed one of Nick’s buddies was going to try and remove Nick’s helmet. The helmet had a large scrape on it and the visor was snapped off where the front of the ATV had impacted it when Nick went over the bars and under the ATV. The friend was not a trained medic, and neither am I, but I do know that removing that helmet could cause serious spinal damage.

While we waited for the paramedics, I noticed a few things: Nick was out cold, breathing very deeply, his eyes were rolled back in his head and he had a generous amount of slobber coming from his mouth and nose. If first impressions are always correct, Nick did not seem to be doing well at all. I finally got Nick’s helmet removing buddy to just hold the helmet still.

While we tended to Nick, a few guys were about 60-70 meters away trying to pull Nick’s ATV out of the wood line. It was a little banged up but started right away and was for the most part still in working order. After a few minutes of calling Nick’s name, his eyes finally popped open. Although the medics encouraged Nick to take a ride to the hospital to get checked out, he refused treatment and stayed to watch his buddies for the rest of the day.

All things considered, Nick was fine after “taking a soil sample.” You hear a lot of talk about “high risk” people like Nick but usually they aren’t wearing a label of some kind so we can pick them out in a crowd and make sure to stay away from them.

This summer, wherever your fun might take you, remember to watch out for risky behaviors, in yourself and in others, and stay away from the hot dogs that push the limits of the safe zone – smart riding is safe riding.