

**Kymco MXU 500 IRS**

# Told Ya So!

## ALL THE RULES HAVE JUST CHANGED.

By Mark Lester

I don't want to sound like a smart aleck but what we are about to disclose borders on being earth shattering, particularly if you're a Big Seven OEM or one of its dealers.

Some time ago, we predicted two things: First, in the near future, off-shore "anti-brand" ATVs would achieve quality and functional sophistication capable of rivaling the established mainstream builders and, secondly, we predicted Kymco was most likely to succeed at this charge.

Upon receiving our shiny new Kymco MXU IRS 500 we observed a tangible, high quality aura emanating from it. The seat cover, switchgear, plastic fit and trim level were suspiciously mainstream and very appealing. Anxiously we swung a leg over the MXU and took note of its entirely acceptable ergonomics. In fact, we think riders fit the new 500 IRS in a way similar to the original Polaris Sportsman. Wide and high bars allow for comfortable stand-up riding while a sumptuous, well padded seat is low enough to encourage aggressive trail riding. At this point the unfamiliarity of the dual mirrors, horn and turn signals on our

fresh-off-the-boat Canadian test unit faded from our minds as we saddled up for an initial wringing out of the latest from Kymco.

Keep in mind, not every ATV we review on the pages of All-Terrain Vehicle Magazine is evaluated long term. We have so many new rides to filter info about we can only do long term reports on a select few each season. This review on the Kymco 500 IRS is based on our rigorous hands-on riding for a few hundred miles.

### Immediate Abuse

Having been inundated with so many off-shore copy-cat ATVs in the last year we're just a little cynical about promises and claims. This cynicism led us to throw the new MXU to the lions. With fuel topped-up and the shine and smell of newness still on the bodywork we pointed it into the northern equivalent of Death Valley. We spared no pain, inflicting what we reserve for some of our most coveted rides: gnarly rocks, deep mud, insane water crossings and then an endless WOT rail grade pull.

Here's what we learned. The MXU is an exceptional ATV. Think we've been bought off? Nope. For starters the MXU has one of

the nicest handlebar-to-wheel movement ratios of anything we've ridden. In fact we



The racks are nicely finished with some nifty built-in cargo tie-down areas we usually see on more pricey ATVs.



**TOP & LEFT: The MXU 500 is a well equipped, well executed mid-range ATV that surprised us with its ability to be rated head to head with the established brands.**

**RIGHT: Finally there's a differential lock switch not demanding the annoying movement of a blocking lever to gain access to diff-lock. In fact, you can go from 2x4 directly to 4x4-lock without punching the 4x4 button.**

would compare the turning response to a Honda Rincon. No handlebar whip, no broken fingernails, no trips over the bars in rocks. Predictable, linear turn-in and a near perfect fore and aft weight balance that kept the front meats biting on everything from swale slime to pavement.

Here's a weird trait we came to appreciate. The MXU 500 will pull an indicated 60 mph on pavement. Many mainstream ATVs at this speed are scary; we could drive the MXU with one hand! The ride quality in absolutely gnarly conditions at a crawl, seated or standing was above industry average. We're going to say this now - but it may come up again later - the MXU IRS delivers performance in many important categories as good, and often better than the mainstream brands you all know and love. Gulp!

#### **Critical Calibration**

The most important areas in the development of any ATV are suspension, engine, tranny and braking calibrations. With many full sized offshore ATVs this is where

the wheels fall off, almost literally. A great design (even if it is a copy of a Big Seven ATV) simply will not deliver acceptable performance if the factory calibrations are off. The MXU's front and rear suspensions are surprisingly supple in jigglers and big hits but resist bottoming in craters and square edged bumps at speed. Kymco's engineering team have done an exemplary job of calibrating the rear anti-sway bar, allowing good articulation in gnarly terrain but keeping the chassis level during high speed powerslides on fire roads. Rear suspension response was difficult to fault in any way and, here we go again, there are a few mainstream Big Seven 500s we can think could take a lesson from the MXU. What surprised us most besides the exceptional suspension calibration was the integration of the front and rear suspension with handling, steering and braking response. Many of our staffers prefer single lever braking over dual control braking. The MXU uses dual control but both circuits have handlebar mounted master cylinders,

not a spongy cable link to the rear brake master cylinder at the foot lever and high quality steel braided lines are standard. Braking was among the very best we've experienced on any sport-utility ATV. Good feel, wide and predictable modulation, yet powerful response right to the edge of lock-up.

#### **Power Still Corrupts**

The MXU 500 uses an overhead cam, carbureted 500cc 4-stroke with an electronic choke. The engine feels a little soft on initial engagement but surprisingly, on roll out, builds to produce enough power to break the rear wheels loose. The exhaust note climbs as the well-calibrated (there's that word again) primary clutch holds the engine's revs right at shift RPM while the secondary clutch allows for a strong upshift. There are no flat or dead spots in the MXU's power curve.

Essentially, Kymco has nailed it with this CVT setup. The motor is a middle-of-the-500 class performer but certainly no worse than some notable Big Seven 500s. We need to point out the MXU has what we would consider to be the nicest shifter system for both gear ranges (HLNR) and 4x4 diff-lock. The gear selector is positively automotive in its feel and action. It even emits a satisfying, Lexus-like "snick" as it moves through each detent. Move over, Big Seven, because the MXU's diff-locker and 4WD selector beats everyone. Simply rotate the diff-lock outer dial and the MXU goes straight to diff-lock 4x4. Brilliant.

#### **Sounds Good, Right?**

We are so impressed with the MXU we need to temper our remarks, if ever so slightly. There's no question there are too many offshore brands in the market right now. For sure, there will be a rationalization, however, given the laws of nature, the offshore manufacturer with the best product will survive. We will restate our prediction: Kymco will be among the select few that flourish and grow. However, there is one caveat. A strong dealer network is essential for survival. A good dealer will make the biggest difference in your purchase satisfaction, despite the importance of vehicle performance. Kymco has a good selection of dealers in many North American locales, however it needs to fill gaps in its dealer network to play head-to-head with the Big Seven. With a product like the MXU 500 IRS, it shouldn't be a problem.

Our final warning is this: We didn't test the MXU long term. We don't know exactly how it will stand up to a couple thousand miles of abuse. However, we can let you in on this: So far the MXU hasn't




<b>KYMC0 500 MXU</b>
<b>ENGINE:</b> Liquid cooled, 499cc DOHC 4-valve single. Wet sump lubrication. Single carburetor. Electric start.
<b>DRIVE SYSTEM:</b> Continuously variable belt drive transmission with low range and reverse. Electric locking differential with selectable 4WD. Shaft final drive.
<b>SUSPENSION:</b> Front: Independent double A-arm with hydraulic shocks. 5-position preload adjustability. 6.7 inches travel. Rear: Dual A-arm independent with dual hydraulic shocks. 5-position preload adjustability. 6.7 inches travel.
<b>GROUND CLEARANCE:</b> (no rider) 10.2 inches.
<b>BRAKES:</b> Front: Dual piston drilled hydraulic discs. Rear: Single drilled hydraulic disc. Stainless steel braided brake lines.
<b>FUEL CAPACITY:</b> 4.4 US gallons/17 liters.
<b>RACK CAPACITY F/R:</b> 100/187 lbs.
<b>TOWING CAPACITY:</b> 1000 lbs.
<b>DRY WEIGHT:</b> 634 lbs/312kg.
<b>NOTES:</b> Winch plate, 2-inch receiver hitch included.

so much as coughed after our attempts to pound it into submission. Our tester was a Canadian version and frankly, there are a couple of things that iteration needs to lose. The mirrors, turn signals and horn are

only applicable to Canadian versions of the MXU 500. Kymco Canada chose to release the road legal, European version earlier than the U.S. version that is not equipped with these options, to take advantage of fall

sales this year.

If you're shopping for a mid-size 500 class sport-ute, your job just got tougher. We wouldn't string you along, so here goes our bottom line. The MXU is a solid contender against mainstream 500 class Sport-Utes. Compared to many of the brands you're familiar with, it is most certainly not at the bottom of the heap. The fact is, it's not even at the middle of the pack. This is a serious, high quality, top performing ATV you must include in your next purchase decision. 

[www.kymco.ca](http://www.kymco.ca)

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