

R-E-S-P-E-C-T the ATV

By Reg P. Wydeven
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2010 marks the 30th anniversary of 'Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back.' 'Empire' is my favorite installment of the 'Star Wars' franchise. The second act in the original trilogy explored the story's players in more depth, introduced iconic characters such as Yoda, Lando Calrissian and Boba Fett, and revealed that the evil Darth Vader is actually Luke Skywalker's father.

I was 7 when my parents took me to see 'Empire,' and I was blown away from the get-go. The film opened on the ice planet of Hoth, where the Imperials enacted their revenge on the struggling rebels. One of the most memorable images of the film was the gigantic camel-shaped Imperial Walkers lumbering over the snow to wipe out the rebels' hidden base.

A testament to Imperial ingenuity and efficiency, not to mention their menacing presence, the All-Terrain Armored Transports, or AT-ATs, easily traversed the snow-filled fields of Hoth. Two weeks ago, as I was standing in a six-foot high snow drift in my driveway as a result of winter storm Aiden, I sure wished I had an AT-AT.

My trusty Ariens snow blower carved through the drift, but it was rough going. It took me over an hour to clear it away, and then another hour for the rest of my driveway. While I may not have an AT-AT, I could now use an ATV to clear my driveway.

In June, Wisconsin updated its laws governing All-Terrain Vehicles so that now drivers are permitted to operate their ATVs with a snow-removal device attached on sidewalks or public roads for up to two miles. To plow, however, the ATVs need to have a flashing or rotating yellow light that is visible for 360 degrees and must be operated on roads with a posted speed limit of 45 miles per hour or less. The rules for operating ATVs with snow plows run from October 1 to April 30.

Municipalities are allowed to modify their ordinances to more appropriately incorporate the new rules for their local practices. For example, my hometown of Kimberly adopted the new rules but left out the provision that allowed drivers to operate their ATVs on the road for up to two miles. Fox Valley Metro Police Chief Eric Misselt does not want "ATVs ripping up and down the street." He elaborated by saying, "I think for that sort of thing where they're going to go from their house to dad's house, they can just trailer it and take it there." Thankfully, my dad lives only two doors down from me, so I could stay on the sidewalk.

The new snow plowing law is an exception to the general rule that operating ATVs on public roads is illegal. In Wisconsin, ATVs may only operate on public roadways for agricultural purposes, on officially designated ATV routes, on roads not seasonally maintained for roadway use, or to cross a bridge, culvert or railroad right-of-way when operating on a legal route.

When operating on public roadways, ATV drivers must still obey all traffic laws, including driving on the far right-hand side of the road, activating headlights and taillights, and obeying the posted speed limits and street signs.

I'm thrilled that we will have a white Christmas. And while I loved all six Star Wars movies, I hope winter storm Aiden does not have a sequel.

Merry Christmas and God bless you and your families this holiday season.

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