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King Quad is me

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—I am a bad American. I should be dragged in front of the House Bad-American Committee. I should be found guilty before any evidence is presented. I am naming names: my own.

My subversive activity is...a lack of activity.

I hate to shop, and I hate to buy. I avoid both patriotic duties as much as possible.

I dislike shopping even more than spending—which is saying a lot. Am I now, or have I ever been, a card-carrying member of the I-Hate-To-Shop Party? You bet. Next question.

The one thing I like to buy is land, which, at last report, is no longer being produced in America. I refuse to buy imported land, particularly the cheap, knock-off stuff that China sends over.

So, it took me two decades to get my sorry, Bad-American self around to the possibility of buying an All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV).

Four-wheel-drive, utility-style ATVs have a hundred uses on a farm. They're cheap to operate and will take you almost anywhere, including places where you don't want to end up. In that respect, they're a lot like virtuous intentions in international relations.

An ATV will pull, push, drag, tote and take out the garbage, much like a good husband.

But did I really need one—an ATV, that is?

At 65, I'm still able to trudge hither and hike yon. I can manage the farms with the tractor and The Cheetah, our lissome, 31-year-old, FARM-USE pickup, which may still reach speeds of as much as five mph without shedding any of its remaining pelt.

Was an ATV a need or a want?

After dithering for years and then dragging my feet for good measure, I finally sidled up to buying a used ATV for \$3,500, tops.

I read the for-sale ads in all the usual places and found nothing that wasn't abused, unsuitable or overpriced—and often all three.

I reluctantly drifted into the dangerous zone of buying new. I researched the Internet for models, brands, ratings and rantings.

I started looking in the 400-to-450-cc range—comparable to a mid-size motorcycle. The specs among brands were similar.

The two American products -- Polaris and Arctic Cat -- used Japanese engines. Suzukis are built in Rome, Ga., with Japanese engines. I didn't see much difference, except that the Suzukis were cheaper and bore no complaints. Mechanics I questioned liked them.

Of the ATVs I tested, I, too, liked the Suzukis best. The dealer offered zero-percent financing for 60 months. It's not often that the low-cost product is also better than the alternatives.

Melissa and I put-putted around dealer lots on new models ranging from 400 to 700 ccs. The bigger the engine and the more we might add on -- like power steering -- the higher the cost.

The price for a 2011 400 cc with no extras was \$6,000. Then accessory creep slithered into the calculation almost unnoticed.

It would be useful to have a snow blade. This meant that I would need a 2,500-pound winch, which would also be handy, because you just never know when you have to winch this or winch that, not to mention winch your ATV out of a mud hole into which you've driven it for no good reason. And, of course, a rear-mounted steel basket to carry stuff. And an aluminum ramp to load the ATV into our pickups. And a slow-vehicle sign for the back. And a few other items too numerous to mention.

And then I threw in the towel on power steering, which added \$1,500, because I had to up the engine to 500 ccs. A King Quad.

I'm getting older, I reasoned; I guess it's time to substitute hydraulics for arm and shoulder muscles. I had found a bullet to bite.

It's a tool, not a toy, I reasoned. Bite.

And farmers get a couple of tax breaks. I didn't pay Virginia's five-percent sales tax, and I can write off the cost on federal taxes.

That's how a half-formed idea of spending \$3,500 ended up fully formed at \$9,200.

I was ready to sign papers for a mature, understated, forest-green model when Melissa up and piped: "Can we get it in yellow?"

There sat a King Quad, in all its raucous yellow gory. It was more intensely yellow than a fire engine. If color is sex appeal, this ATV would spring canaries from cages throughout the eastern United States and even into Canada.

"Yes...it does," the salesman admitted, looking helplessly at me. We shared a secret male understanding about arguing with a wife who needs a particular color.

Did I fuss and whine? No, I did not. Did I snarl and spit? No, I did not. Did I even argue? Just the tiniest bit.

I pointed out that adult males, which include semi-adults, pseudo adults and even mid-life-crisis adults, did not buy screaming yellow ATVs.

"It will be safer," Melissa announced, ending the discussion.

"Yellow, it is," I said, exercising the wise spousal judgment that's been sharpened on the stone of a 28-year-old marriage.

And when we picked it up, the salesman gave each of us a free tee-shirt and ballcap.

My hat was a sedate black.

Melissa's was hot pink.

She loves it! It even goes with the yellow ATV...in a manner of speaking. Things that go with each other are very important in maintaining marital bliss.

Now that we've bought a genuine consumer item, I feel that I'm making up for having caused the last four years of economic Recession.

If I were a really good American, I'd buy some gasoline to put in the King.

A purchase of that size, however, requires more thought, some righteous dithering and, these days, a big, fat wallet. I might get around to it, eventually. I

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