
NTDB™ data points

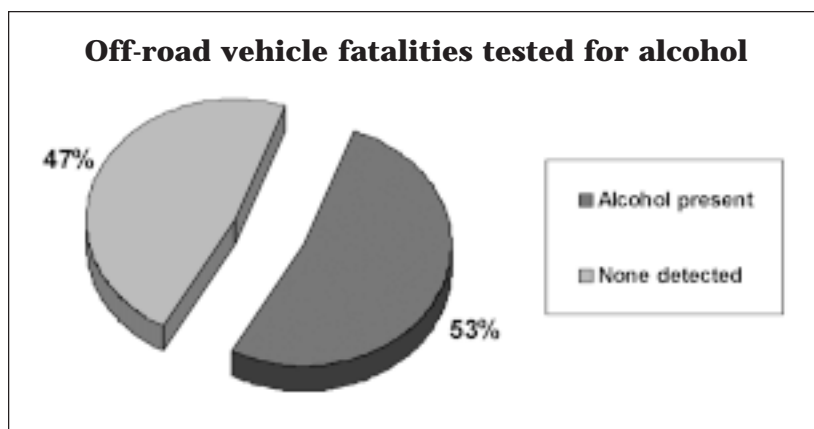
“Head over wheels”

by Richard J. Fantus, MD, FACS, Chicago, IL, and John Fildes, MD, FACS, Las Vegas, NV

As the weather changes and recreational pursuits take us from the beaches to off-road, it is time to look at the alarming increase in all-terrain vehicle (ATV) injuries. That lawn mower-like engine sound emanating from the dirt hill across the way is not a grounds crew working on the lawn, but more likely than not is a youth, often less than 16 years of age, atop an ATV designed for adults. With dirt flying, engines roaring, one unhelmeted youth with no formal training or education in the operation of this potentially dangerous motorized vehicle is just having a great time. A great time, that is, until one of the 37,000 annual injuries sends him or her to the emergency room for treatment.

The National Trauma Data Bank *Annual Report 2003* contains close to 16,000 records relating to off-road vehicles that include ATV injuries. The age group representing less than 16 years of age in the NTDB™ accounts for 30 percent of the injuries and 27 percent of the deaths. These data are similar to what has been reported by the Consumer Product Safety Commission last fall, which found that children under 16 accounted for 37 percent of all injuries and 33 percent of all ATV deaths.

However, this sport is not wasted on our youth. A sector of



the adult population engages in this activity as well. Unfortunately, this sector often ventures out without wearing proper safety equipment, such as a protective helmet, and may add the variable of drinking while off-roading. In fact, when looking at the fatal off-road vehicle injuries contained in the NTDB, more than half of the fatalities that were tested had alcohol present. These data are depicted in the graph on this page.

Readers may have noticed a recurring theme from month to month in this column: exhibit responsible behavior and proper utilization of safety equipment and the risk of injury declines. However, for this type of vehicle, there is also the issue of untrained children riding ATVs that are designed for heavier adults. The center of gravity may not allow for the off-road

experience that they are looking for or expecting. A lightweight youth climbing a steep slope on a heavy machine lends itself to flipping over and often leads to tragedy. Simple preventive measures are needed in order to stop the yearly increase in ATV injuries and fatalities. For more information on ATV injuries and their prevention, visit the Committee on Trauma's Injury Prevention and Control Subcommittee at <http://www.facs.org/trauma/atv.html>.

Throughout the year, we will be highlighting these data through brief monthly reports in the *Bulletin*. For a complete copy of the National Trauma Data Bank *Annual Report 2003*, visit us online at <http://www.ntdb.org>. If you are interested in submitting your trauma center's data, contact Melanie L. Neal, Manager, NTDB, at mneal@facs.org.