

PRODUCT EVALUATION

3X4 Products ATC 200X Conversion

An Ingenious Idea of Offering a Bolt-On 4-Wheeler Kit for the 3-Wheeling Market

BY DEAN KIRSTEN

There seems to be a movement going on. Our industry is caught in the jaws of a Government study to determine whether or not 3-wheeled ATVs are safe for the masses. There's also a tide of new 4-wheeler followers holding to this feeling that four wheels are safer than three. Suzuki started it two years ago when they released the LT125 Quadrunner, and the rest is now history. Word travels quickly in a market like ours; the incredible handling and performance of the Suzuki QuadRacer and QuadSport has started a whole new way of thinking. For the first time in our market, people are trading in their three wheels, and buying four!

With the apparent shift by the manufacturers to offer more 4-wheelers and phase out 3-wheelers, the resale and used 3-wheeler market has changed

dramatically. People convinced that 4-wheelers are the way to go are selling or trading in their old 3-wheeled machines, coming up with additional money and buying a 4-wheeler. With this in mind, the idea of offering conversion kits to convert a 3-wheeler to a 4-wheeler by the 3X4 Products company came about. Money already invested in the engine and rear suspension can still be enjoyed, and the rider has the ability to not only make a 4-wheeler out of his

or her vehicle, but also convert it back if so desired.

The kit is a 100% bolt-on, amazingly enough. No special tools are required, and the only thing you'll need to perform the installation other than a fair selection of tools is brake fluid. There is one rather large nut found on the



steering stem that does require a large wrench, but you don't have to worry, the wrench is included.

The conversion kits are available for several different models, including the ATC250R ('85), ATC350X, ATC200X, ATC70, Yamaha 225 and Kawasaki Tecate. For our evaluation, we chose the ATC200X kit which retails for \$945 complete. When we say complete, we mean it; the entire front suspension and sub-frame, shocks, tie rods, steering stem, brakes, wheels, body work, tires — the whole enchilada! The installation takes about one to two hours and the most difficult part is bleeding the front brakes.

3X4's kit is actually a completely new front end, or sub-frame. To install it, the stock front end is removed from the bike and the kit is bolted on. The design of the kit is such that the two main lower frame rails bolt onto the footpeg bolt locations, while the upper mount is through the stock steering stem.

Material used in the kit is pipe — not mild steel or chrome moly tubing. The complete new front end weighs 100-pounds, which is considerably heavier than the stock 200X front end assembly, which weighs 47-pounds. Main frame rails are 1-inch, while the A-arms are constructed of 3/4-inch pipe. The new A-arms pivot on polyurethane bushings and use what looks like automotive tie rod ends. Spindles and hubs are all custom-manufactured, as are the calipers and rotors. New wheels supplied in the kit are steel, while the tires are 20x7.00x8-inch Cheng Shin knobbies which are the same size as the FL250 Odyssey fronts.

Suspension is controlled by coil-over shocks with adjustable preload from Progressive Suspension. Wheel travel is about four or five inches depending on the model. Front tread width is 38-inches compared to the rear width of 41.3-inches. Stopping the 200X are a pair of 6-inch drilled rotors and floating calipers, which use the stock 200X master cylinder. A new brake line with a T-fitting is included.

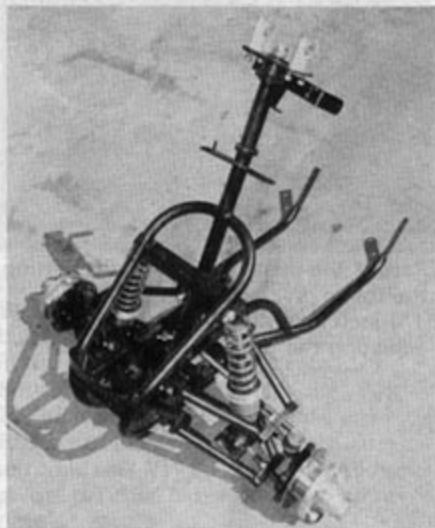
The actual installation wasn't all that tough, but it did require two people to lift the new 3X4 sub-frame into place. What's unusual about the design of this kit is the stock 200X steering stem bearings and races are removed and replaced with a polyurethane bushing. The main steering tube is really a tube within a tube, and a collar locates the outer tube within the stock steering stem bore.

Once everything is bolted in place, the front end requires alignment using a tape measure and a good eye. Toe-in was set at about 1/4-inch, and we made sure that both wheels were pointing perfectly straight with the handlebars in the correct position.

The tricky part was bleeding the front brakes. Each brake caliper must be bled



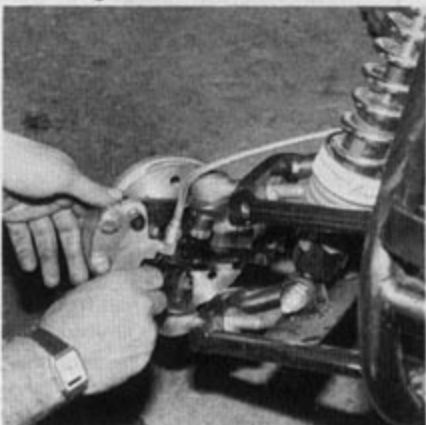
Although the 3X4 kit installs easily and makes the 200X a true 4-wheeler, the front fender looks out of place on the Honda.

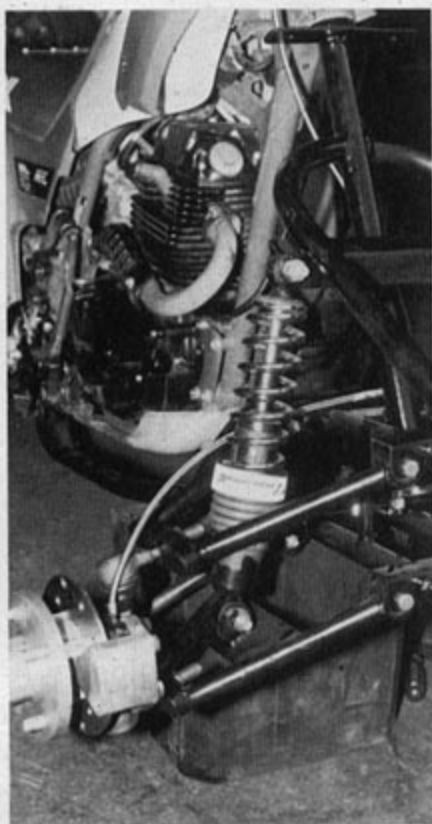


The complete 3X4 assembly bolts on with only a few tools. A special wrench is supplied for the steering head along with a good set of complete instructions.



It takes two people to remove the stock front end and then install the new 4-wheeler front assembly. From there on the work is easy. Floating disc brakes require individual bleeding.





Coil-over shocks are Progressive Suspension units providing about 4- to 5-inches of travel. A-arms pivot on polyurethane bushings.



Part of the installation includes setting the toe in. We set ours at about 1/4-inch using a tape measure and adjusting the tie rods ends.



ABOVE RIGHT, equal length A-arms use car-type tie rod ends and new spindles. ABOVE, with small front tires, ground clearance is limited.



separately and no air bubbles can remain for proper brake action. With the brakes up to snuff, handlebars back in place and everything tight down under, the body work was installed by tightening three nuts and bolts and bolting the stock headlight to a new bracket.

Now we're ready for our test ride, and more than a little anxious to get started. The steering felt smooth and easy to maneuver; we had no problems getting in and out of tight places. We felt just a bit of bump steer over rough terrain but nothing too horrible. Control was excellent over medium bumps and washed-out roads. Braking was more than adequate with four-wheeled brakes, although sometimes one front brake would lock up just moments before the other. Working on bleeding the brakes should take care of this.

What the 3X4 kit did for the ATC 200X was give it that 4-wheel character in sliding and initiating a turn. We found that we used less body English and that it generally gave the 200X a whole new personality. We did notice it still performed good wheelies, unlike many of the production 4-wheelers.

Along with the good there were a few bad points. One thing we noticed while hill climbing was that often the front end felt light. Checking our tape measure we found that by adding the 3X4 kit, the wheelbase was shortened from a stock 47.6-inches to only 44.25-inches. This shortness of wheelbase was quite noticeable, and if anything, we would like to see the kit add wheelbase instead of subtracting it. The other point that was felt was the additional weight. Our test unit weighed 329-pounds and, with a stock engine, the power to weight ratio was reduced. However, you can expect this with most 4-wheel conversions due to the additional equipment being installed. Adding a pipe and carb should take up the slack and put the vehicle back into the ballpark.

Like we mentioned earlier, the kit changed the character of the 200X. With the small front tires, the bike would sometimes nose downwards into a hole or under hard braking, reducing front clearance. Adding shock preload helped, but we feel larger tires would be the best answer.

The opinion from those of us who rode the 3X4 kit was: it does everything it is supposed to, and quite well. It is designed for the recreational rider and not the all-out racer. The performance-oriented rider would be better off installing better front shocks, widening the front tread (and wheelbase) and installing lightweight aluminum wheels — but that all costs more money. As the kit was shown to us, \$945 seems like a lot, and whether or not readers will plop down this kind of money remains to be seen. One thing we must caution you about is that we can't attest to the longevity (as regards strength) of the kit, as our short test ride didn't allow us time for this evaluation.

For more information on the kit along with other models contact 3X4 Products, Inc., 1452 N. Johnson, Dept. 3W, El Cajon, CA 92020 or call (619) 442-0876.