

TOTPL

# Quad & ATV TESTED



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# QUADZILLA 500ES 4X4 LWB

You might think of Quadzilla primarily as an importer of road-legal fun machines. But its new 500ES, which replaces the successful 500e, is a 4x4 workhorse aimed at professionals who work on the land. And it shows that however leisure-orientated its image, the company is much more than a one-trick pony

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## THE MARKET FOR UTILITY QUADS

tends to be dominated by serious players like Honda. But Quadzilla, which is best known for its road-legal buggies and smaller, more fun-orientated quads, has for some time offered an alternative in the shape of its strong-selling 500e – for which the 500ES, tested here, is the replacement.

This is available in standard and long-wheelbase formats, the latter offering two-seater capacity courtesy of additional raised footrests. It's a big, hefty, no-nonsense machine that's built to do a job of work, and it offers a variety of features which make it much more than just a wannabe in this area.

Based on a hefty frame whose build smacks of robustness and certainly looks ready for a long life, the bike has an all-independent suspension set-up with front and rear double wishbones controlled by simple oil-filled coil-overs. A 493cc engine is mated to a CVT gearbox which feeds out to both rear wheels in normal rear-wheel drive trim; for lower traction conditions, four-wheel drive can be engaged via the push of a button.

With a diff-lock button and a choice of high and low-ratio gears to augment this, there are plenty of options to let you get the better of the terrain. A set of AT25x10-12 tyres with a moderately savage directional V-pattern tread promises to bite into pretty much anything, too. But should this all have the opposite effect and encourage you into trying things either you or the bike can't do, a 2500lb winch is supplied as standard, too.

That won't be much use without a strop to swing around a handily placed tree or one of the stouter breeds of fence post, and we can imagine the netted stowage recess in the front right wing getting used for this purpose by a good many owners. There's a 12-volt socket next to it, which you'd expect to see powering a mobile phone in most cases – though you can certainly imagine situations in which it would see sterling service on the juicy end of an iPod or GPS.

Further practicalities of the sort which are likely to be of most interest to the typical user come in the shape of front and rear racks whose labels claim capacities of 20kg and 40kg respectively. There's also a lockable rear box, completing a range of stowage opportunities that makes this a flexible-looking machine for people to whom quad bike riding is part of their job.

If that's you, you'll know the value of longevity (it's why so many farmers think 'Honda quad bike' is all one word). And the 500ES does appear well equipped to live long and prosper, thanks to features like front and rear lower wishbone guards, a full-length underbody skid plate and truly enormous propshafts that look as if they belong on a car, not a bike. It might not come across as the most subtle of machines, but there's no doubting that this is a substantial piece of work that's been built to walk the walk.

The example we tested was brand new, so these particular points of view are based on initial impressions rather than experience, but

there's nothing about the 500ES that suggests it won't last the pace. Its gear selector was rather sticky to start with, though we'd certainly put that down to a lack of running-in in this case, and it did improve as our session went on and the vehicle warmed up.

The very first thing we noticed was that you don't need to wrestle with a ridiculous piece of bent metal to get the handbrake off. So many otherwise intelligently designed quads are let down in this area, but the 500ES simply had a 'park' position on its shifter which does all the work for you. That would indeed be the same shifter we've just accused of being sticky, but we'd sooner need to run something in for a while than spend our whole lives wondering why the designer couldn't be bothered to come up with something better.

This lever also has positions for reverse, neutral, high and low. As we've already mentioned, four-wheel drive is engaged separately – this means you can operate the bike in low range and two-wheel drive, which sounds pointless for off-roading but offers a real advantage if you spend a lot of time manoeuvring trailers around on concrete or tarmac surfaces.

The front transmission is engaged at the push of a button, and it comes in and out very easily. Having selected it, you move a kind of sliding plate to reveal the diff-lock button for the very worst terrain – this too operates easily, though we struggled to find any ground extreme enough to bring out a difference in the bike's tractability with and without it engaged.

That's certainly not the case with two and four-wheel drive, though. The test track where we rode the 500ES was covered in a

slimy, wet top surface that meant traction was always going to be at a premium, and when crawling up hills there were times when we slowed to a halt while the rear wheels continued to churn round and round underneath us.

Momentum is one answer, of course, and for shorter hills or those with a safe run-out area it might be enough. But the more control the better, obviously, so banging in the 4wd button is clearly the way to do it. And the effects are instantaneous: time and again, we let it spin out in 2wd then, engaging 4wd, started up again on a minimal throttle and it simply eased back into motion without a hint of wheelspin.

This is a tribute to the vehicle's four-wheel drive, but with only the back axle engaged we thought the tyres started filling up rather more quickly than their tread would have you expect. We'd say they probably had more air in them than we'd normally choose for muddy work, though of course the bike was unladen throughout, but for a large lump of rider, and were you to be loading up those front and rear racks you might not want to lose much pressure before throwing the world at it.

Not that there's much it won't shrug off, if our session was anything to go by. This is a hefty, weighty bike, but its suspension does an excellent job of controlling its body, proving impressively supple over rough ground and cushioning the impacts masterfully when we launched it over crests. So often you ride a quad with standard shocks and wonder what it would be like with a set of remote-reservoir sports units, but the 500ES doesn't really feel as if it would benefit from such an upgrade –

even if it were relevant to a bike of this kind. Its wheels follow the ground well whether you're hacking it across bumpy terrain or easing it over big axle-twisters, and the level of control is such that even in four-wheel drive, with a locked-in front diff trying to drag you wide, you can steer it round tight corners without any trouble. Bumpy ground and even deep, tramliney ruts don't have any discernible impact on this – close your eyes (well, don't, but you know what we mean) and you could imagine you were on smooth gravel instead.

The bike's grip in corners is as impressive as its composure, even when you've got it set in two-wheel drive. There's no shortage of power on tap, so presumably there will come a point where its back end breaks away and you start having to steer it with your body like a sports quad hero, but within the boundaries of appropriate use, and some way beyond, there's more than enough grip to prevent it getting skittish even on a properly slippery surface.

It's here that the CVT box shows its true colours, of course. It just keeps on putting power to the ground, rather than squirting the rear wheels into a lurid spin they way you all too easily would with a manual. This characteristic is seriously useful on the way up hills, too, where the last thing you want is to toss away all your momentum by changing gear, though on the way back down the lack of engine braking is all too evident. It does exist, but you feel it starting to pick up speed almost from the word go and even on relatively short descents you're soon on to the footbrake to try and stop it from running away. Not necessarily





something you want to be having to mess around with when you're concentrating on standing up on the pegs and keeping your body weight as far back as possible.

This is a fairly minor criticism, however, for a bike whose typical user is more likely to test it with the everyday bump and grind of fields and ditches than push it to its extremes on wooded hillsides. All the same, when not even low box is enough to keep it from running away if you do happen to tackle that sort of terrain as part of your job, you might be forgiven for casting an envious eye in the direction of the bloke on the Honda Fourtrax next to you.

That's a somewhat more expensive quad, though. On the surface, the 500ES only undercuts it a little, at £3999 in standard form or £4299 for the two-seat long-wheelbase. But that's road-ready, with another hundred quid or so completing the paperwork necessary to use it on the Queen's highway. If you don't need the extra qualities of the Fourtrax, with its automated manual box

and farmer-proven indestructibility, it's a price difference that should give you pause for thought – especially when you remember the winch, alloys and so on you get over and above that cherished road-legal status.

High value is one of Quadzilla's clearest aims in presenting its model range, and the 500ES is definitely a machine which gives you loads for your money. It doesn't have the same grin-inducing qualities as a sports bike, but as a general-purpose off-roader it has all the right stuff to do the job – as well as providing plenty of entertainment along the way, if that's what you're into. Comparable alternatives from the most premium marques can cost around twice as much, and as always you get what you pay for. But with its rugged build, usable features and all-round impressive riding characteristics, this is a machine that should make you think carefully about whether you really do need to spend more.



#### QUICK FACTS

##### Quadzilla 500ES 4x4 LWB

Engine	493cc SOHC single
Power	32hp at 7000rpm
Torque	26.5lb.ft at 5500rpm
Transmission	CVT
Four-wheel drive	Part-time, two-speed
Suspension	
Front/rear	Double wishbones
Brakes	Dual front, single rear hydraulic disc
Tyres	AT25x10-12
Weight	337kg
Towing capacity	500kg
Dimensions	2116 x 1175 x 1244mm

## IN DETAIL



**2500LB ELECTRIC WINCH** is included as standard – a seriously useful addition on an off-road quad



**DISPLAY** is logically laid out and well positioned, if a little prone to glare in strong sunlight



**GEAR SELECTOR** operates high, low, neutral, reverse and park functions acceptably smoothly



**REAR TOWBALL** is another accessory that comes as standard – and another user-friendly feature