

CHAPTER V

SAFETY FIRST

Mr. Munro introduced the group to their instructor, the mine's chief safety officer, Johnny Manik. He had operated the skidoos and quads since the mine's inception and knew them inside out.

After the introductions, Mr. Manik presented each of the kids with a hard hat and a certificate certifying them as junior miners. The ceremony impressed the kids and they were made to feel like they really were a part of the mining crew. Mr. Manik advised them of the importance of having their hard hats on at all times to protect their heads. They wore their hard hats with pride and assured him they would wear them whenever they visited the mine buildings or the pit area.

With the introductions and ceremony at an end, the group moved further into the garage where Mr. Manik had two skidoos waiting for the students.

“When are we going to ride the skidoos, Mr. Manik?” Ty wanted to know.

“Have you ever ridden a skidoo before?” he asked Ty.

“Well no, I haven’t, but it can’t be that hard,” Ty replied with a lot of confidence in his voice.

“Well, I want to show you some of the parts of the skidoo and what minor maintenance you should be able to do if you encounter any difficulties on the trail. Our safety course stresses that everyone who operates our equipment should be able to complete minor repairs,” Mr. Manik informed Ty.

“What do you mean? What minor repairs will we have to do?” Amy asked.

“Come over to the skidoos and I’ll show you,” Mr. Manik replied as he walked towards the skidoos sitting in the garage. “Just form a semicircle around this skidoo and I’ll explain what you are expected to know. We keep the skidoos in top working order. Some of the miners like to race them during their down time.”

THE MINE

The kids formed part of the semicircle with their parents and Bill Duncan and gave Mr. Manik their undivided attention. Ty paid particular attention; he hadn't missed the part about racing the skidoos. He pictured himself racing against the miners and was sure he could beat anyone who dared to challenge him.

"I'll point out some of the parts of the skidoo so that you will be familiar with them," Mr. Manik advised the group. "These front runners are called skis. They are controlled by the handlebars and are used to control the direction the skidoo is going to travel. Above the skis is the engine cowling. It's on hinges and can be opened by unhooking these fasteners to expose the engine compartment. The body of the skidoo consists of the seat, which rests on the frame and is suspended above the track. The track is what the frame rides on and it in turn provides the traction that propels the skidoo forward. The seat is also on hinges and can be opened to reveal a small compartment where spare parts such as spark plugs and tools may be stored."

The kids were all eyes and stared intently at the skidoo as Mr. Manik explained the different parts of it.

“Do you have any questions?” Mr. Manik finally asked, looking from one to the other.

“Is this all we have to do with it? Just know the parts?” Ty asked.

“There’s more we have to know, isn’t there, Mr. Manik?” Parker queried.

“Yes, Parker, there is. You are expected to know how to clean and replace a fouled sparkplug and this is how you do it,” Mr. Manik advised as he opened the engine cowling, revealing the engine, and then lifted the seat, exposing the compartment below. “This is a socket set. I’ll need this to remove the sparkplug from the engine. If the sparkplug is fouled, I’ll use this wire brush to dislodge any carbon or debris that is fouling it.”

All eyes were on Mr. Manik as he removed the sparkplug, cleaned it with the wire brush, and then replaced it.

“Are there any questions?” asked Mr. Manik.

Everyone shook their heads in a negative manner.

“Good. Then there shouldn’t be any trouble doing what I just showed you. Let’s start with you, Amy. Everybody will have a turn doing what I just did.” Mr. Manik stepped back to let

THE MINE

Amy at the skidoo for her first stab at maintenance.

Everyone took their turns removing the sparkplug, cleaning it, and then returning it to the motor.

“Boy, I’ll bet that’s the cleanest sparkplug in the world,” remarked Parker as the last of the group completed their turn.

“Good work, everyone,” said Mr. Manik. “Now let’s move on to a plugged gas line and see if we can’t unplug it.”

Mr. Manik showed them how to disconnect the gas line from the carburetor and the gas tank. After showing them how to remove any blockages, he replaced the line and then had each of the group repeat the exercise. He also showed them how to repair and replace a track.

The difference between the quad and the skidoo for propulsion is that the quad has a gearbox and therefore you must change gears to make your quad go faster or slower. The skidoo, on the other hand, has a centrifuge clutch and to go faster or slower you must increase or decrease the throttle. Mr. Manik demonstrated how to start the skidoo and how it moves. He then started a quad and showed the group how to change the gears by working the gear shift with his left foot.

“These quads they’re new, aren’t they?” Max inquired.

“Yes, they are. They just came out last year. They replaced the ATV trike. The trike was very unstable and easily upset. They were going to stop producing them because of all the accidents they had. The manufacturers realized they had a good market for these small ATVs when they found out they were being used on farms and construction sites as well as for recreational purposes. The quads are much more stable. We wouldn’t let the kids operate the trikes if we still had them. They were just too dangerous,” Mr. Manik informed Max.

“I’m looking forward to riding one of the quads. I rode a trike before and as you say, they were very unstable. I’m not sorry to hear they discontinued making them,” Max told Mr. Manik.

“I’m sure you will enjoy the experience, and I’m doubly sure the kids will enjoy them. Just from the expressions on their faces, you’d think they were already living the experience of riding one,” Mr. Manik remarked.

The minor maintenance of the quad was basically the same as the skidoo, that being cleaning the sparkplug and clearing a plugged gas

THE MINE

line. Everyone in the group took turns completing their assigned tasks.

Mr. Manik was satisfied that everyone who took the course was capable of operating and performing the minor maintenance as necessary. The time had come to take the units out for a test drive to show the instructor that they possessed the ability to handle the equipment safely and properly.