

UTILITY VEHICLES:

GAINING THE EXTRA YARD



Above: Yamahauler G11.
Below: Smithco Red Rider.



For Joseph Napolski, getting from “point A” to “point B” efficiently makes the difference between coordination and chaos. As service coordinator for athletics at the University of Delaware, he orchestrates as many as four concurrent field events. That can mean getting assistants to scoreboards, or even setting up tents.

“We used to use golf carts to get around, but they just didn’t hold up,” Napolski explains. “I got rid of the last one a couple of years ago, and now I’m using a Kawasaki Mule. I think I’ll always use something like a Kawasaki or a Smithco.”

In one breath, Napolski mentions two utility vehicle manufacturers—two of the many players in a market of wide choices. Models range from pure people movers, to heavy-duty haulers with PTO capability, to sophisticated, computerized spray vehicles.

At their most basic, utility vehicles can be divided into light-, medium-, and heavy-duty categories, says Bill Chestnut, marketing coordinator for the golf and

turf division of the John Deere Company. Light-duty units have a payload capacity of 500 pounds or less, he says. He defines medium-duty as those vehicles with 1,000 pound capacities, and heavy-duty vehicles as those with capacities of 2,000 pounds. While these classifications are not "absolutes," they provide a basic frame of reference.

Other factors to consider include:

- Engine power, reliability, serviceability, and noise.
- Suspension system construction.
- Drive train durability.
- Body and chassis construction.
- Versatility, including implement compatibility.
- Maneuverability.
- Operability
- Safety and stability.
- Flotation tires that won't damage turf.

"There is no utility vehicle to fit all purposes," says Mike Heacock, vice president/maintenance, for American Golf Corporation. "You need to look at your needs, and match the vehicle to its intended use."

Defining Your Needs

Heacock suggests first examining what you want a particular vehicle to do, and making decisions accordingly.

"If you use a light-duty vehicle in heavy-duty conditions, you'll wear it out pretty quickly," he explains. "You have to match the vehicle to actual use in the field"

As a technical resource to American Golf's corporate management, Heacock must pay particularly close attention to utility vehicle maintenance costs. He cites the Daihatsu as the heavy-duty vehicle with the lowest annual maintenance cost in American Golf's experience ("The last time I calculated it, we were spending \$50 a year per vehicle, and we have 90 Daihatsus."), but also maintains several national accounts, which include E-Z-GO/Texton and John Deere.

"The vehicles in those lines provide us with the versatility we need," he says.

Heacock suggests other factors to consider when buying including the terrain of the course and price.

"Price variance is 100 percent," notes the former golf course superintendent. "Certainly, the choices have improved quite a bit since I first got into the business. I think what Toro has done [with the newly introduced 3000 Series heavy-duty model], building a 'world beater' machine from the ground up is indicative of what's going on in the market. But there are so many good choices—the Club Car Carryall is a good vehicle, and we've also had good luck with the five-wheel John Deere machine."

A light-duty vehicle will "burn out" in

short order under heavy-duty use. Conversely, if you pay for a heavy-duty vehicle, then use it only in a light-duty situation, you may be overspending, as Gary Wimberly, superintendent of Dad Miller Golf Course in Anaheim, CA, points out.

"We use Columbia Par Cars to fill our transportation needs—that means getting people from point to point," he explains. "Price is definitely a factor. With a vehicle used for just moving people, there's no need to pay for all the multi-use extras you'd find on a heavy-duty utility vehicle."

As Heacock says, knowing how your field personnel will treat and operate a piece of equipment should play a role in your decision."

Manufacturers and distributors will happily provide you with detailed literature on specific vehicles.

Tom Vogel, superintendent of Portage Country Club in Akron, OH, has been converting many of the course's utility vehicles to "easy to operate" models, such as the Club Car Carryall II. The main reason, he says, is to increase safety.

"Less complicated vehicles that require no gear shifting are easier to operate, so people are less likely to make mistakes," he says. "Of course, you still need heavy-duty vehicles for heavier work."

Evolution Of A Product

What drives a manufacturer to release a new unit? Market competition and end-user demands are the two prime movers.

Such is the case of the Yamahauler G11. New enough not to have any end-user field evaluations outside of those performed by the company, the lightweight, 500-pound payload capacity vehicle was developed in response to dealer demand. The unit uses the same o.h.v. engine and belt-drive Constant-Velocity Transmission in the G8 model. However, Curtis Schmidler, senior product planning manager at Yamaha, emphasizes that it is not a "golf car with a box on the back."

"Our Georgia engineers made more than a few heavy-duty design modifications to create the G11," he notes. "We didn't want to build another 'me too' product, so we asked ourselves, 'Why can't we build a flatbed and box into one unique unit?'"

The result, says Schmidler, is a vehicle that can be converted, without tools, from cargo box to flat bed, or vice versa within 90 seconds."

Application-Specific Selection

"When I bought my fleet of utility vehicles, price was around third or fourth on my list, but dependability was number one," states Alan Andreasen, superintendent of the new, soon-to-open Cypress Golf Club in Cypress, CA.

Andreasen is in an enviable position. Because his course is well-funded, he was able to build a "wish list" of utility vehicles. The fleet includes 12 Jacobsen 810 units, two Cushman Turf Trucksters with the fifth wheel package, three Mitsubishi's, one E-Z-GO gas golf cart, and one Cushman GT America. Still, the thinking behind each selection was the same as it would be for a course or sports field with more limited funds.

"My section men needed something, lightweight, so I went with the Jacobsen 810 models," he explains. "The noise factor was another reason for our selection of the 810s. Their Fuji four-cylinder engines are really quiet."

"The Cushmans are used to tow a GA-60 aerifier and for spraying. They were purchased for our heavier hauling requirements," he continues. "The E-Z-GO golf cart is my transportation vehicle, and the Cushman GT is my assistant's cart."

Andreasen outfitted each of the three Mitsubishi's differently. One has a bed that rises straight up in the air, "like a platform." It is used for tree trimming work.

"I got another one for the gardener to haul plants, tools, and sand," he says. "And I have one with what I call a 'plumbers box' for our irrigation man to carry his repair parts. Two of them also have cabs, so we can drive around in the rain."

Application-specific selection can be narrowed even further. For example, Henry Wetzell, superintendent of St. David's Golf Club outside of Philadelphia, PA, uses his Smithco Red Rider to transport walk-behind mowers from green to green. "The vehicle is low to the ground, which makes loading and unloading easier," he says.

Perhaps the most application-specific units that fall under the utility vehicle umbrella are the dedicated sprayers, such as the Toro Multi-Pro

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1100 and 5200. (Hahn manufactures the units for Toro and they are sold under the Toro name.)

"Having the Raven computer on-board [the sprayer] is a plus," explains Chris Carlson, superintendent of Echo Lake Country Club in Springfield, NJ. "Basically, it allows you to adjust your application rate and volume per square feet."

Final Decisions

Once you've narrowed your decision, take the time to talk with your local distributor or manufacturer. The distributor is your lifeline when it comes to parts and service.

Manufacturers and distributors will happily provide you with detailed literature on specific vehicles. And don't hesitate to contact other superintendents and sport field managers in your area for advice.

"People think that golf courses work against each other, but we really work together," says Mitch Clendenin, superintendent of Walnut Woods Country Club in Greensboro, NC. "Folks in the golf course business will pass along, by word of mouth, what's good and what's not good out there." □

UTILITY VEHICLES: A DAZZLING ARRAY

A machine for every purpose, and a purpose for every machine—that's the bottom-line on utility vehicles. Here's a few manufacturers who may be able to help fill your needs.

American Suzuki Motor Corp.

Brea, CA
(800) 447-4700

Club Car

Augusta, GA
(800) 643-1010

Columbia Par Car

Deerfield, WI
(800) 222-4653

Cushman

Lincoln, NE
(402) 475-9581
Fax (402) 474-8700

Daihatsu America, Inc.

Los Alamitos, CA
(800) 777-7070

Deere & Co.

(800) 544-2122

E-Z-GO Textron

Augusta, GA
(800) 241-5855
(404) 798-4311

Haulmaster

Mendota, IL
(800) 848-4285

Jacobsen

Racine, WI
(414) 637-6711

Kawasaki Motors Corp.

Irvine, CA
(714) 770-0400

Kent Mfg.

Venice, FL
(813) 485-8871

Mitsubishi Motor

Sales Of America

Cypress, CA
(800) 366-6487

Smithco

Wayne, PA
(215) 688-4009

Taylor-Dunn

Anaheim, CA
(800) 688-8680

Fax (714) 956-3130

The Toro Company

Bloomington, MN
(612) 888-8801

Yamaha Golf Cars

Cypress, CA
(800) 447-4700

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