

Roads to Heavy-Duty Utility Vehicle Selection

Correctly matching equipment to work demands can be a challenging task. Choosing the most productive, time- and cost-efficient equipment is a must. You may even be considering a utility vehicle for transporting equipment and personnel in and around a sports complex.

Stop right there — today's utility vehicles offer much more than basic transportation. They also can be an integral element of your overall turf maintenance program. With the range of choices in the turf utility vehicle market, adding a heavy-duty model to your equipment arsenal can boost your crew's productivity.

Heavy Benefits

Light- and medium-duty utility vehicles certainly have their applications. However, heavy-duty models offer unmatched versatility and durability. In fact, thanks to a variety of attachments, today's heavy-duty units can be modified to perform tasks from spraying to baseball diamond infield grooming.

Productivity and versatility aren't the only reasons to go with a heavy-duty unit. Construction, serviceability, dealer support and hauling capacity should also be taken into account. Is a heavy-duty vehicle right for your particular operation? Read on — the following guidelines can help you answer that question.

Durability

Hauling capacity. "Heavy-duty" utility vehicles are named that way for a reason. To be classified as heavy-duty, the vehicle should have a total rated payload capacity of at least 2,000 pounds. Payload capacity includes total weight of cargo, plus one operator and one passenger.

Construction. When considering the purchase of a heavy-duty vehicle, keep in mind that long-term durability is a must. Make sure the frame materials and construction can withstand even the most grueling punishment. Notice the gauge of steel used construction and if the frame is welded or bolted together. From a practical standpoint, welded, "unitized" frames are preferable.

Versatility

Versatility is the hallmark of heavy-duty turf utility work vehicles. The ability to perform multiple tasks with the same piece of equipment can not only save you time, but also a large part of your turf maintenance equipment budget. Plus, the more versatile the piece of equipment, the more productive the crew using it. To this end, most of today's vehicles feature attachments and implements for any number of maintenance tasks.

To help decide which attachments and implements best suit your needs, make a list of the different tasks you and your crew perform yearly. Do you work exclusively on sports fields? How often do you aerate, overseed and fertilize? Are you responsible for municipal park grounds and gardens? Do you perform maintenance during the winter? The answers will help you decide if a heavy-

duty turf utility vehicle has a place in your maintenance program.

In terms of attachment purchases for heavy-duty units, here are a few things to consider:

Aerators. Depending on your geographic region and the level of activity on your sports fields, you may aerate anywhere from two to eight times a year. Many sports turf managers use tow aerators. However, large, independently powered aerators are available. These "fifth-wheel" units are designed to efficiently aerate large turf areas.

Spreaders. When it comes time to fertilize, overseed or topdress, you may want to consider a spreader attachment. Keep in mind that a spread width of at least 45 inches will enable you to get the job done quickly. Also, the unit's hopper should hold enough material to cut down on time-consuming refills.

Cushman Turf-Truckster with infield rake attachment. Photo courtesy: Ransomes America Corporation.



The Gator six-wheel unit is John Deere's newest offering to the utility vehicle market.



During the winter, spreader attachments are often used to distribute sand on icy sidewalks and parking lots.

Sprayers. For large-scale chemical application, a heavy-duty utility vehicle can be modified into a time-efficient sprayer. Available as mounted or fifth-wheel implements, many of these sprayers can handle a variety of chemicals with boom or spray gun application. As with the spreader, tank capacity is paramount. In short, the larger the tank, the faster you will be able to move from work site to work site without refilling.

Sports Field Implements. Consider dump trailers and infield rakes. Designed for grooming baseball diamonds, rakes and dump trailers can be used to haul and spread material in one operation. Many infield rakes come with a scarifier/riper for breaking up hard ground surfaces in the spring. If your responsibilities take you out of the ballpark, dump trailers are ideal for hauling sand, field mix and mulch.

Available Power. Because many implements are powered by the utility vehicle's engine, choosing the right one is critical. An engine of at least 789 cubic inches should be powerful enough to run any implement you choose. Another important standard feature of any heavy-duty utility vehicle is a ground speed governor. When using an implement like a spreader, the governor keeps the vehicle speed consistent when driving over undulating terrain. This makes for uniform distribution of materials, which saves time and money.

Maneuverability. Wheel configuration is another factor to consider. While three-wheel heavy-duty utility vehicles are somewhat more maneuverable, four-wheel models can haul 100 to 200 more pounds of cargo. On a related note, large tires (widths of 13 inches or more) will adequately disperse vehicle weight, which reduce compaction. Your work requirements, profile of the terrain and size of the work sites are guides to balancing maneuverability against payload requirements.

Serviceability

From time to time, all equipment needs servicing. When considering a heavy-duty utility work vehicle, serviceability should play a major role in your purchase decision. Factors such as design simplicity and accessibility will get your equipment out the

maintenance shop and back to work faster.

Manufacturer/dealer support is imperative. Regularly scheduled maintenance, such as changing oil and oil filters, cleaning air filters, checking tire pressures, and so on, can be handled in house. However, when maintenance requires you to bring the vehicle to the dealer or distributor, the service department should be conveniently located and receptive to your needs. Product support, in the form of service contracts and warranties, from a reputable dealer and manufacturer,

should figure prominently in your buying decision.

Purchasing a heavy-duty utility work vehicle is an investment in overall turf management productivity. Carefully selected attachments and implements will not only make the vehicle more versatile, but will also enable you to do more work in less time. With today's increasing demand for athletic excellence on tight time and monetary budgets, that's a competitive edge. □

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