



Got Wheels!

On Today's Golf Courses, There's a Set for Every Purpose

When I first set foot on a golf course as a construction laborer in 1959, the rolling stock consisted of two tractors and a pickup truck. The pickup truck was used to haul two walking mowers around and they were walked up and down a plank to load and unload them at each green.

Seems like they added a Jacobsen G-10 to pull a fairway gang mower when the course opened. The bunker-raking crew (all four of us) shouldered those big aluminum rakes and walked the nine-hole course.

Fifteen years later at Walt Disney World, we were riding three-wheeled Minute Misers, Red Ryders and Cushmans and Toro Sand Pros raked the bunkers. Since then utility vehicles have evolved into multi-use workhorses with heavy-duty chassis, or light-duty modified golf cars with an array of options. There are all-terrain-type vehicles and mini-trucks. Something to fit every need and every budget. Read on to see what some of your peers have to say about utility vehicles.

JOEL JACKSON, CGCS

THOUGHTS ON UTILITY VEHICLES

Sales Reps Can Help You Find the Vehicle to Fit Your Need

The very first time I rode on a golf course utility vehicle I was a passenger. It was a 3-wheeled Cushman Truckster and the driver was going like a bat-out-of-hell. I was sitting on the bed next to the driver who was occupying the only seat. I had my feet propped on the



Today's golf course utility vehicles come in all shapes and sizes and have a variety of uses. Photo by Steve Pearson.

deflector on the side, one hand on the back rest of the seat and the other hand holding on (for dear life) to the bed. We flew around a corner heading towards the tee of a par three.

There was a ball in the center of the path.

This guy, skillfully and obviously well practiced, slammed on the brakes, grabbed the ball and threw it at a fleeing coot hitting him in the head, killing him instantly!

There were two problems with his plan: The lady who hit the ball to the path was still on the tee only 20 yards away and the dead coot was floating on the lake that now contained her ball. The following day, at 15 years old in 1972, my second day as a golf course maintenance employee, I was no longer the crew member with the least seniority! I quickly came to the conclusion that these stout little vehicles offered a considerable potential for abuse.

The possibility for abusing the attributes of the utility vehicle is only one consideration that should be given when assessing your needs in this area. There are many and I will attempt to cover some of them in this article.

One thing I would like to point out before proceeding is that you already have the very best people available to help you with this. These are your equip-

ment sales people who represent distributors and manufacturers who have spent, and continue to spend, considerable amounts of time and money analyzing your equipment needs.

I would also like to say that, in my opinion, small pick-up trucks and all-terrain vehicles have no place on the golf course. They were not designed for the work we do, and talk about the possibility of abuse! It is pretty hard to sneak up to the corner store for lottery tickets in a golf course utility vehicle.

In my experience there are three common situations at a golf course when it comes to lightweight utility vehicles; (1) the correct number of properly utilized and maintained lightweight utility vehicles are present, (2) a crew member is heading out to repair a damaged cup riding a bunker rake, or (3) the superintendent is driving the only heavy-duty truckster on site and every other vehicle has tires rubbing against body moldings and no brakes.

How do you determine the right number for your course? The right number is 5!

Seriously, you will need to put a pencil to paper to determine the number of each type of vehicle that is right for your course. Looking at what the course has had historically is also helpful. Just as we have found it difficult to compare main-

tenance budgets, equipment inventories will vary with the demands and idiosyncrasies of each course. You do not need a heavy-duty vehicle for a string trimmer and you do not want a glorified golf cart to carry divot sand, particularly if the divot sand finds its way into the vehicle via that new loader you bought.

If you are going to make a mistake in any area of this business, I believe it is best to make it on the conservative side. I believe it is better to buy heavier duty vehicles if there is any question. At the very least, they will last longer, be safer and less likely to be damaged by your loader. We have many choices now over a wide variety of specifications and prices. As one esteemed colleague once said to me, "It is better to have too much capacity and not need it, than to have too little and overdo it."

The options that are available on today's utility vehicles are somewhat staggering. I suggest purchasing anything that will prolong the life of the frames and bodies. It has been my experience that most heavy-duty utility vehicles were taken out of service, bodies broken in half, with the engine still running.

Galvanizing, alternatives to steel, and utilizing more fiberglass have all prolonged the lives of this equipment. I would like to point out that when you do your long-term capital budget, do not get too carried away with this perception of prolonged life. Historically, I believe superintendents have overestimated the safe, useful life of their equipment. It is my impression that today's attorneys feel that brakes are much more important than the attorneys of days gone by. Did anyone ever use or even check the brakes on their Toro Workmasters 20 years ago?

Safety features are certainly an important consideration on any piece of equipment. If you do not have a plan in place to check your safety switches periodically and you have any assets at all, you're crazy. More and more equipment is coming with ROPS (roll-over protection systems) and guess what else? Seat belts. Having that big bar over your head and not wearing the seat belt is like playing Russian roulette — you may end up with a piece of metal coming at you that will not stop until it hits something harder than you. Anyway, tell your employees to use the seat belts in any

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vehicle equipped with ROPS. Some supervisors have told me their people would quit if they were required to wear the seat belts.

I have used a heavy-duty truckster as my transportation vehicle in the past. It had plenty of speed if I needed it, and many times I would exchange the bed for a spreader or sprayer in order to complete applications more efficiently. I found that it was easy to change attachments: "Hey Charlie, put the spreader on the Cushman, will you?"

I could fertilize all greens in less than an hour with the spreader attachment and the footprint of the unit was so light that I never saw tracking.

It is hard to beat the economy of sprayer with a centrifugal pump and poly tank, but I prefer a PTO-driven sprayer with mechanical agitation, diaphragm pump and repairable tank. Mechanical agitation helps assure that the chemicals stay mixed and help facilitate pumping the mixture to the last gallon. The diaphragm pump provides higher pressures for spraying trees and is

not likely to be affected by turf paints or silicon-based materials. The repairable tank is nice in case Charlie happens to drop it during a changeover!

Certainly there have been many innovations in golf course utility vehicles over the years. I would urge every superintendent to discuss these improvements and the needs of your course with every equipment sales representative who calls on you. Things are changing quickly and these people take the time to stay abreast of these changes. They know more about your operation and equipment needs than you probably realize.

The fact that they come to you, the manufacturers they represent create these innovations with you in mind and their companies support our industry shows that they are committed and deserving of your time. Education in this relationship goes both ways. If you listen to their recommendations, you will become better versed in this area of your operation even if you do not take their recommendations.



If you provide input, who knows? Maybe they will come out with a dependable safety switch or a unit that can be rinsed properly in less than 45 minutes!

SCOTT WAHLIN, CGCS
The Links At Boynton
Beach

MANAGING A SMALL FLEET

Buying Golf Car Fleet Can Expand Your Utility Vehicle Budget

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