Low-end vehicles dominate volume sales

By HAL PHILLIPS

Those manufacturers polled by Golf Course News agreed with the assertion that eight of 10 utility vehicles at any club are mid- to low-end models. They also agreed that, as this market segment matures, manufacturers must choose to market to the high-end market with its dollars, is there enough to go around?

"It's pretty tight," Cairns admitted.

Peter Whurr, product manager at Ransomes America Corp., said he thinks the market has changed: "I think the grounds maintenance superintendent with less money to spend."... and their products are very good. They should give Ransomes a run for their money. But at close to $15,000, only the most exclusive private clubs can afford them."

— Don Smith, Smithco president

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July 1994 27
market has yet to be mined as fully as the
golf course market.”
Manufacturers have tried to keep costs
down by making new vehicles compatible
with existing accessories — more often
than not, that means Cushman’s. With this
approach, superintendents can avoid buy-
ing all new attachments for overseeing,
core gathering, etc.
According to Smithco President Don
Smith: “Cushman went upscale first, and
because of the size and scale of the truck,
they could offer several utilities that are
useful around the golf course. If you’re
spending $15,000, it sort of justified the
cost.”
All three manufacturers of upscale units
are depending on the need for this versatility.
Jacobsen included. Jake’s four-wheel
SV 3422 runs about $14,000, according to
Product Planning Manager Bob Krick. But
it can do many things.
“If superintendents are going to buy a
work vehicle today, they want to do a lot of
different work with it; hauling sand, spray-
ing, top dressing, spreading,” Krick ex-
plained. “A few years ago, there was one
vehicle out there: the Cushman. Now, to
beat the competition, everyone has
upgraded. It was done because the superin-
tendent truly wants to do more tasks.”
Yet Smith feels the high-end utility ve-
hicle is simply beyond reach at courses
with average or low-end maintenance bud-
gets. Smithco’s new utility vehicle is the
Spirit, and it’s aimed at the average super-
intendent.
“We call them ‘people movers,’ and we
want to provide them for less than $3,000,”
said Smith. “It’s transportation. It’s a one-
man vehicle with a very low bed, so a guy
can lift the stuff into the bed by himself.
Manufacturers have a tendency to de-
velop products toward the high-end mar-
ket because those are the clubs that have
the most money to spend. At the modest or
low end — which is most of the courses in
the country — they sort of get left out.
“Our niche has always been to have a
broad spectrum of models for everyone. The
Spirit is the very low end of our spectrum.”
The Yamahauler from Yamaha retails
from about $4,500 to $5,500, depending on
whether it’s been packaged in a golf car
fleet deal. Joe Stahl, vice president of
Yamaha’s Golf Car Division, said his firm
has no desire to compete in the upscale
market.
“I have to say we’re a little bit on the
fringe when it comes to being a competitor
in that area,” he said. “But my observation
is that the thing is getting a little out of hand.
The Yamahauler is better for light land-
scape, light utility use. We’re not position-
ing our product to go after that sector of the
market right now.
“From a price and value perspective, it
offers the course a lot more practicality
than some of these other units. As a seg-
ment of the business, we think we’re posi-
tioned correctly.
“What’s still very unique about our ve-
hicle is the versatility. The dump box and
sides come off to make it a flat bed. Flat bed
today, bar car tomorrow.”

Forecast: Number of
ranges grows by 18.6 percent
MIDLOTHIAN, Va. — The number of
public-access golf ranges associated with
golf courses in the United States has
grown by 331 facilities, according to
Forecast Golf.
The total number of free-standing golf
ranges in the United States as of Dec. 31,
1993 was 2,112. This represents an
increase, in the number of facilities, of
18.6 percent over the 1992 final numbers
of 1,781 facilities. Between 1991 and 1992
the number of free-standing golf ranges
grew by 18.8 percent, or 282 facilities
(1,499 facilities in 1991).
According to James Turner, vice
president of Forecast, “Free-standing
golf range growth grew steadily at a rate
of approximately 18.7 percent per year
between 1991 and 1993. If this growth
rate continues for 1994, approximately
395 new free-standing facilities will be
opened this year. That would bring the
total to just over 2,500 facilities at the end
“Based upon the rate of inquiries
received at Forecast, from potential golf
range developers, this projection is
realistic.”
The total number of all golf range
facilities, excluding on courses ranges, at
the end of 1993 was 2,284. These
facilities include free-standing golf
ranges (2,112), indoor golf ranges (129),
and aqua ranges (23). In 1992, indoor
golf facilities represented 4.5 percent
of free-standing facilities. In 1993, this
increased to representing 6 percent
of all the free-standing golf range facilities.
“There is a strong possibility that over
the next five years, the number of under-
supplied markets will significantly
diminish,” said James R. Murphy,
president of Forecast. “This means that
as developers continue to pursue the
development of new facilities, the proper
analysis must be performed to quantify
the actual demand for additional golf
ranges. This also means that the existing
golf range owners must be prepared to
protect their market share from new
facilities.
“Golf ranges, in competitive markets,
must now concentrate on streamlining
overall operations, increasing marketing,
and improving customer service to
compete with new facilities in the
market.”