

Making the switch

SOUTH CAROLINA SUPERINTENDENT GRADUALLY CHANGES UTILITY VEHICLE FLEET

by JOHN WALSH

A fairly new trend regarding utility vehicles has been to convert them from gas to electric, mainly because of noise and gasoline prices. However, that trend wasn't what drove Mike Fabrizio, GCCS, director of grounds and golf maintenance at Daniel Island Golf Club in Charleston, S.C., to change his utility vehicle fleet. Instead, Fabrizio is gradually switching his fleet from Jacobsen to Club Car.

Daniel Island, which has about 500 members, is a sizable 12-month operation. The facility features two 18-hole golf courses: the Tom Fazio-designed Beresford Creek Course (7,293 yards), which opened in 2000, and the Rees Jones-designed Ralston Creek Course (7,446 yards), which opened in 2006.

Fabrizio has more than \$2.5 million to spend to maintain the golf courses and grounds – 230 acres of irrigated Bermudagrass and 500 total acres, including low-maintained and no-maintained areas. He says the club tries to keep the capital expenditures budget between \$100,000 and \$200,000 a year.

Along with his budget, Fabrizio has 45 full-time employees and three to five seasonal employees during the summer to help him maintain the courses and grounds.

Generally, Fabrizio purchases most of the equipment he and his staff use, with one exception – the Toro Reelmaster

5500 D series fairway mowers, which he leases for a 36-month period.

"Fairway mowers are the lifeblood of the operation," he says. "They are high-tech pieces of machinery, and I don't want to get into replacing reels and other parts. I don't want to rebuild them. I like the philosophy of getting a new fleet every three years. A reasonable life span for everything else is five years or more."

With utility vehicles, Fabrizio is in the midst of slowly changing the fleet from Jacobsen to Club Car's Carryall Turf 2, which is primarily used to move people and tow greens mowers across the course. This change has been an ongoing process that started about three years ago. The 36-vehicle fleet consists of 19 lightweight vehicles (Jacobsen and Club Car), 10 mid-weight vehicles (Cushman, Toro and Club Car), five heavy-duty vehicles (Toro and Cushman) and two sprayers (Toro).

"Throughout the past three years, we've been switching three to five vehicles a year, costing between \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year," Fabrizio says.

The reason Fabrizio is making the switch is partly because Jacobsen hasn't had a stable distribution system in the eastern part South Carolina, he says.

"They have had several different distributors during the seven years I've been here," he says. "But now Vereens seems to be making a dedicated effort for the long haul."

The other reason Fabrizio is making the switch is because Daniel Island's general manager, Greg Keating, decided to switch from E-Z-GO golf carts to Club Car models, and he would like to see all vehicles at the facility be Club Car branded. Club Car also gave Daniel Island an incentive to switch.

"I like trying to stick with the most economic and simplistic utility vehicle

when they're just used for moving people or towing greens mowers," says Fabrizio, who's been at Daniel Island since April of 1999. "You need to have heavy-duty vehicles, but there's no need for an \$11,000 utility vehicle to be pulling a greens mower across the course."

Fabrizio considers his maintenance operation to be normal and utility vehicles should last five to eight years. He says the Jacobsen utility vehicles he's been phasing out didn't last that long and had engine failure because they were used during the construction and grow-in of the courses and took more abuse than normal.

Fabrizio also says utility vehicles generally take a beating because they tend to be used by younger workers who are less responsible than older workers and by people who turn over quickly.

But before Fabrizio makes a purchasing decision about equipment, such as utility vehicles, he receives input from the mechanic, the general manager and his maintenance staff.

"The service of the distributor and the timing of the delivery of the parts are important," Fabrizio says. "The service aspect is the No. 1 consideration. The general manager provides input because he would like to see Club Car carry over to the maintenance side of the operation."

Overall, purchasing utility vehicles nowadays is much different than 30 years ago.

"There are definitely a lot more choices than there used to be," Fabrizio says. "Back then, your choices were Cushman, Red Rider or modifying a golf cart. Now, because there are so many choices, you can make a better educated decision." GCN

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