# Guide

work

done

Landscape managers look for products that give crews selfsufficiency and higher productivity

# By ROBERT E. REAVES



Ram Sport 1500

e talked with a cross section of landscape and lawn contractors,

property managers and manufacturers, and found there are definite vehicle buying trends in the industry:

► Most contractors stay loyal to a specific brand of truck.

► They prefer to *purchase* vehicles whenever possible.

▶ *Preferences* include automatic transmission and gasoline engines, especially in snow-belt areas; but diesel engines for medium-duty trucks.

► They prefer products that *deter theft* and equipment damage.

► *Image* is important. Trucks, trailers and vans are moving advertisements.

► They are using more cargo trailers and medium-duty trucks with box vans, such as the Super Lawn Truck.

► Contractors use the *Internet* on a regular basis to obtain product information.

Before you decide to buy a truck or accessory, learn what other contractors are saying around the country. Then check out the latest innovations in trucks and accessories.



International

# So many vehicles, so many solutions!

#### Ford's field

New features of the F-Series include: more powerful 5.4-liter, V-8 engine; standard fourth door on F-Series Super-Cabs; full rear-passenger compartment; and separate platform construction for models over 8,500 lbs.

Super Duty F-Series trucks — F-250, F-350, F-450 and F-550 — come in 44 model configurations, 21 of which are new and 15 unique to the industry. Two new commercial trucks in weight classes 6 and 7 (Super Duty F-650 and F-750) offer three cabs and three diesel engines.

The Explorer Sport Trac will debut next year; a combination sport utility vehicle (SUV) and cargo bed. The cargo bed can remain open or can be closed with a lockable, foldable, hard tonneau cover.

► The addition of a fourdoor SuperCab to the Ranger line makes it one of only two compact pickups to offer a fourdoor model (Mazda is the other).

Econoline vans, E-150, E-250, E-350 Super Duty and E-450 Super Duty designations are easily personalized.

#### **Chevrolet's lineup**

Silverado is available in regular and extended cab 1500and 2500-Series models, with a new four-wheel disc brake system with ABS.

The C/K pickup in regular and extended cab models have a third door, crew cab and chassis cab design. New Short Box crew cab has a much smaller turning radius and shorter overall length than the Long Box. Optional "Big Dooley" rear wheels help give the crew cab a GVWR of up to 10,000 lbs.

Rear-wheel-drive Astro cargo van tows up to 5,500 lbs.

Express cargo vans can be used as a service vehicle or as the platform for a conversion van and comes with two wheelbases (135- and 155-in.). Three heavy-duty G3500 cutaway models offer wheelbase lengths up to 177 in.

Venture cargo van is available in a four-door extended wheelbase model.

#### **GMC's full line**

► All-new Sierra comes in 1500 Series and 2500 Series models up to 8,600 lbs. VRW. Current generation Sierra ranges in GVWs of 8,600 lbs. through 15,000 lbs. A new shortbox crew cab version of the 3500 Series Sierra gives greater maneuverability.

Sonoma compact pickup offers of wide choice of body styles, wheelbases, pickup boxes, suspensions and powertrains.

Savana cargo van and Special cutaways range from 135-in. to 155-in. wheelbases, with GVWs up to 9,500 lbs.

GMC and Chevrolet are the only manufacturers to offer both diesel and gasoline engines in the medium-duty category. Other featured trucks include the T-Series tilt cab models in Classes 5-7 and a revised line of W-Series tilt cabs, aimed at the lighter Class 3-4 market.

#### **Dodge does trucks**

1998 Dodge Ram Quad cab has an extended-cab, fullsize pickup with four doors (available throughout the entire Ram lineup).

Next-generation 24-valve Cummins turbo diesel engine is more powerful and fuel efficient than the popular engine it replaced.

Rams with five-speed manual transmissions have hp increased to 235, plus increased torque. Automatics also have greater hp and torque, with better fuel economy.

Choice of power trains includes the 3.9-liter V-6, 5.2liter V-8, 5.9L V-8 and the 8.0-liter V-10, with 300 hp and 450 lb.-ft. of torque.

Dakota compact pickup continues as a popular contractor choice as the only pickup cont. on page 56



Sierra 3500 HD, with both carrying and pulling capacity, is the workhorse of many landscape firms.



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with a V-8 engine. Its 6,700-lb. maximum towing capacity and 2,000-lb. maximum payload exceeds all other compact pickups on the market, rivaling some full-size pickups.

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### International's diesels

▶ Navistar's International trucks may be the most durable diesel truck on the market, when you look at the *Truck Blue Book*. International 4000 Series trucks are said to be consistently worth more at resale, one reason why many contractors purchase International trucks and get 300,000 or many more miles per truck.

Maintenance costs may also be lower, because routine maintenance has been engineered down to a minimum. Model DT 466E and 530E diesel engines run a full 12,000 miles between oil changes.

Nissan trucks offer body choices.

► 4700 Lo-Profile or 4700 LPX probably have the best fit with the lawn care industry, with a chassis as low as 24 inches off the ground for less fatigue from lifting. The 4700 LPX handles narrow alleys and tight loading areas with ease.

#### Medium-duty Isuzus

▶ Isuzu was the highest ranked cab-over medium-duty truck in the J.D. Power and Associates 1997 Medium-Duty Truck Customer Satisfaction Study. NPR-HD diesel and gas models are new.

▶ N-Series trucks have low cab forward design, a range of GVW ratings and four wheelbase choices, to accommodate 20-ft. bodies. With a 109-in. wheelbase, the turning radius is 33.5 feet.

► The panoramic windshield gives good visibility, with drop-design side windows to help eliminate blind spots. Middle passenger seat folds down as a workstation and N-



#### Isuzu medium-duty, cab-over trucks got a high rating.

Series trucks come prewired for CB radio, portable computer and cellular phone.

Scheduled maintenance on the NPR gas truck gives an extra 1,500 miles between service stops compared to the Ford E-350.

#### UD Trucks

► Three light-duty UD trucks from Nissan Diesel America meet a variety of landscape industry needs: UD1200 is rated at 12,000 lbs.; UD1400 at 14,250 lbs.; and the UD1800 CS at 17,995 lbs. All three accommodate various van bodies, flat beds, insulated bodies, towing bodies, landscaping bodies and utility bodies.

Trucks have a turning radius ranging from 17.4 to 25.9 feet, large windshields for good visibility and tilt cab for easy maintance.

Medium-duty trucks range up to 32,900 lbs. GVWR.

#### Mitsubishi Fuso's haulers

▶ Model FG has four-wheel drive; bodies up to 14-ft. long; payloads to 12,000 lb. GVWR; and choice of two wheelbases (109.4 in. and 133.1 in.), making it well suited for landscape contracting.

"The FG can face the challenges of some of the most demanding terrain," said Robert E. McDowell, MFTA senior vice president of opera cont. on page 58





# **Accessories Galore**

We can't list all the vehicle and trailer accessories available today, but here's a sampling:

Green Industry Innovators' Mulch Mule is the ultimate mulching machine. With the pull of a hydraulic lever, you can fill a wheelbarrow in less than 10 seconds, or you can swing open the back door and unload the 15-yard come in lengths from 8 to 24 ft. Pickup accessories keep tools and equipment safely stored, accessible and organized. Call 800/458-2226. www.readingbody.com

Oxlite Manufacturing manufactures loading ramps for trucks and trailers. Its #49 aluminum ramp has 800-lb. loading capacity and is designed to load rear-engine lawn mowers on trucks with high tail-



#### Mulch Mule is easy to unload.

capacity box in less than two minutes. It's powered by a 11-hp Honda motor and can be pulled by a 3/4ton pickup. Call 330/875-0769.

Highland Group Industries makes ramp kits and ramp mats; towing and trailering products such as straps, tie downs; truck hardware (like truck anchor points), cargo bars and truck accessories (in-



Highland ramp offers kits, mats.

terior floor guards and custom molded splash guards in several colors). Call 908/362-5396. www.ramparts.com

Reading Body Works is the place to go for stake and platform bodies for trucks. Steel or pressuretreated Southern pine stake bodies gates and long wheelbases. Special arch prevents drag on equipment with low ground clearance. The Oxlite #98C loads four-wheeled machinery into small to mid-size short bed trucks. The ramp only weighs 21 lbs. per runner, with 1,000-lb. loading capacity. Call 800/256-2408. www.oxlite.com

**TruckCraft's** line of pickup truck dump bodies and combination service/dump bodies includes heavy-duty tempered alurninum truck flats for the landscape contractor. Available sizes range from 81 in. wide by 8 ft. long for pickups, to 96-in. wide by 18-ft. long for cab-chassis. Call 717/375-2900.

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Maxi offers six dump trailers.

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tions. "And, a wide variety of specialized bodies — dump, utility, tool carrier, stake body and dry vans — can be fitted to the chassis, making the truck adaptable to virtually any landscape need."

#### Toyota pickups

▶ The new Tundra full-size pickup truck sports a 4.7-liter engine offering the first doubleoverhead-cam, 32-valve V-8 offered in the segment. It will deliver approximately 245 hp and 315 lbs.-ft. of torque. The V-8 hauls a maximum payload of nearly one ton and pulls a maximum towing capacity of 7,200 lbs.

Tundra will be powered by either V-8 or V-6 engines, including two- or fourwheel-drive, two-door regular cab with an

eight-ft. bed or four-door access cab with a six-and-a-half-ft. bed. The access cab has large double doors and a expansive entry.

Tacoma compact pickup's cargo bed has a dou-

> ble-wall design to minimize damage to the exterior skin and is fitted with four inner tie-down points. It can tow up to 5,000 lbs. (V-6) or and 3.500 lbs. (V-4).

# Our readers tell us what works for them

## Medium-duty trucks fit the bill

Todd Pugh, president of Todd's Enviroscapes Inc., Louisville, OH, likes Ford and International trucks:

"Ourl 2-truck fleet is a mix of Ford and International. All of our one-ton through Super Duty pickups are Fords, and all of our medium-duty trucks are International. We like International because they have a sharp turning radius and the



This cargo trailer also acts as a moving advertisement.

parts are the same price or less than Ford trucks."

Looks at:

Automatic transmission — "So anyone can drive the truck."

Cost studies — "We do cost studies on each truck, looking at mileage and time. We found the largest International trucks cost us less per mile to operate than the larger Ford trucks."



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Maxi-Products' six new dump trailer models have platform sizes ranging from 5 by 8 ft. to 8 by16 ft., with GVWRs from 3,000 to 20,000 lbs. All models come standard with 10-gauge floors, sealed beam lights, hand-held remote controls and deep cycle marine batteries. It converts any standard size pickup into a dump truck. Call 800/833-3740.

Martin Industries' NuWay Utility Trailer Division offers three 85% preassembled Kit-N-Caboodle trailer models. The kits allow do-it-yourself contractors to save money with a partially assembled kit, yet have a usable trailer with only two hours set-up time. Many accessories are also available. Call 800/647-2558. www.MartinIndustries.com

Klipping King Inc. offers debris hauling trailers in several models from small to large. The Klipping Jr. is a debris hauling trailer. The midsize model hauls debris and equipment for a variety of grounds maintenance uses. Call 800/279-3904.

GNC Industries' 100-gallon, fiberglass spray rig designed for lawn care has a Briggs 5-hp IC Plus engine (with oil guard), Hannay hose reel, 300-ft. 1/2-in. 560 PSI hose, Mag 1 spray gun, 8 GPM @ well as a full line of coated and lockable racks and mounts to fit open landscape trailers and trucks. Call 800/621-6919.

Innovative Industries' new Stowramp is a 100% self-contained, heavy duty ramp with a 1,000 lb. capacity. There is no need to remove a truck's tailgate unit it bridges the tailgate so there is no



**Innovative Industries' new ramp** 

weight on it, reducing the risk of lost loads or injuries. Call 800/374-1134.

Wells Cargo's high-quality cargo trailers range from six-ft. mini-wagons to 36-ft. models. All trailers have a three-year warranty.



600 psi piston pump — all with a one-year warranty. Call 800/462-2005.

Landscape organizer racks from Green Touch Industries, Inc. include Ultimate Racks (to fit the body styles of most utility vehicles), as Wells Cargo trailers up to 36 ft.

Frame construction is exceptional. Many different accessories, interior and exterior options are available. Call 800/348-7553.

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▶ Used trucks — "We buy most of our trucks used, primarily because we only put about 10,000 to 20,000 miles per year on our vehicles."

Customizing: "Our trucks and trailers have a white cab with a green bed, plus our logo and phone number on the saddle boxes. All have a Reese hitch, saddle box, tool box for general tools, plus any equipment associated with a specific job. We recently purchased a 24-ft. enclosed cargo trailer to be used by the maintenance crew."

#### Large campus, tight budget

Jackie Toburen, grounds manager, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS, mixes trucks and utility vehicles.

"We maintain approximately 350 acres of the 650acre Kansas State University campus, with a tight vehicle budget. We have nine trucks, including Ford and Chevy, as well as 17 utility vehicles. Most of our equipment is on the older side."

Looks at:

► Trailer hitch — "Probably our most important feature because we do a lot of hauling."

▶ Dump beds — "Makes limb removal much easier."

Crew cab — "You can haul more people, but we would not want all the trucks to be crew cabs."

Accessories — "Tool boxes are very important — especially on our irrigation vehicles." Vehicle age range: "Our oldest truck is a 1978 and newest 1993.

## Dodge meets needs at Villanova

Kevin O'Donnell, superintendent of grounds for Villanova University, Villanova, PA, says his motor pool fleet has about 150 vehicles to handle services like snow removal, tree care, small moving operations, set up and trash removal.

*Brand loyal:* "All of our vehicles are Dodge, including utility vans, full-size pickup trucks and Dakotas. Since we repair our own vehicles, one brand gives us better efficiency in stocking parts and training our mechanics."

Looks for:

Standardized storage — "We would like to secure landscape equipment directly onto the bed, as well as racks and tie-downs designed specifically for that model."

Standard skid — "We could put landscape implements into the trucks (such as spray rigs, portable dumpers) that could be changed out easily."

Accessories — "Most important are salt spreaders, spray rigs and liners for our truck beds that make it easier to move mulch. We have bed liners in all of our trucks."

#### **Specialization works**

Jody O'Donnell, president of Landscape Management Inc., Carrollton, TX, is a big Ford fan.



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SouthEast Easy Rider's new Pickup Hauler is a 317-cu. ft. square mesh enclosure for pickup beds with an easy loading ramp and the ability to lock up equipment. Installation is easy, using four bolts and a mounting bar that remains out of the way when not in use. Call 800/535-2121.

www.southeast-easyrider.com

#### Holt Specialty Equipment's trailer-

mounted hoists (in bumper-hitch and gooseneck style) and truck mounted hoists roll completely off the trailer or truck and may be left at any location, giving the convenience of multiple containers at various job sites. The hydraulic lift and winch is powered by a gasoline engine or PTO unit of the truck. Call 800/643-8713. holtequipment.com

Intromark Inc. manufactures the Gater, a tailgate replacement system that acts as an extension for longer loads and a restraint for smaller cargo loads. It is adjustable, stores conveniently and can lock in an upright pusition. Call 800/851-6030.

S-N-G Equipment's Contain-O-Shell is a one-piece mold containment polyethylene spray unit compatible with any full-size pickup. It is lightweight and may be installed quickly. Side door gives easy access to pump and filter. Call 800/874-0253.

Jungle Jim's Accessory Products' Gear Caddy to meet the storage needs of the landscape care industry, with trimmer, blower and tool racks. These racks ensure a



Jungle Jim keeps tools in place.

snug fit to prevent rattling during transport — as well as quick locking to deter theft. Call 888/844-JIMS.

C & S Turf Care Equipment Inc. has custom-designed spray rig truck bodies and spray accessories, including electric and gasoline skid sprayers. A fiberglass pickup unit combines a 350-gallon tank, three compartments, dual pumps and hose reels in a compact design. Westheffer's 450-gallon flatbed cont. on page 64



S-N-G's molded container.



#### Ford offers a full line of trucks.

#### cont. from page 60

"We have 150 pieces of rolling stock, including 75 trucks. The only brand we allow is Ford. About 99% of these are diesel, because of their durability, ease of service and power."

Looks for:

Diesel irrigation vans — "We use 14-ft. Ford E-350 diesel cargo vans. Interiors are customized with bins and pipe racks, as well as a ramp to load and unload a trencher. It's virtually a rolling irrigation store."

Landscape construction flatbeds — "These are all Ford F-700 2-1/2 ton flatbeds, some with dump beds and removable sides for loading."

Landscape maintenance flatbeds — "We use a one-ton flatbed with a 12-ft. bed and a big dovetail ramp that is the width of the bed, used to service the smaller properties. Another vehicle is a F-250 Super Cab that pulls a 20-ft. trailer."

New idea — "The experimental vehicle this spring is a 14-ft. enclosed box van with a dovetail ramp — the Super Lawn Truck. Everything is selfcontained, and that should mean greater productivity for our crews."

Aircraft-grade paint — "We use an aircraft-grade paint that holds up a lot better than other automotive paint."

#### **Truck rating system**

Dean Snodgrass, vice president of Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping, Portland, OR, says his firm has about 75 trucks — all Fords.

"We use Ford's F-450 through 800 Series (diesel). For irrigation, we use trailers. We are making crew cabs a bigger part of our business."

Looks for:

► Load capacity — "It is always a concern, as well as horsepower, hauling capacity and serviceability. My mechanics select the engine that they work on. I will special order my trucks based on their recommendations.

"Right now I am retiring some older vehicles and am trying to put together an F-450 Series crew cab with a short box dump. I want to carry medium-size loads, transport people and pull a 10-ft. trailer."



cont. from page 62 unit, custom van unit or custom designs meet larger needs. Low Profile Tree & Shrub/Lawn Care unit fits nicely on the back of an Isuzu NPR. Call 800/872-7050.

Graham Lawn Equipment's ready-to-use spray rig units include the GLE 300-gallon model, with a Tuflex 30-gallon fiberglass tank and loading and unloading. They are easily removed in two to three minutes, freeing the truck for other uses, and can be used to haul cargo. Call 800/220-0419. www.truckbuddyinc.com

**Gempler's** 1999 Master Catalog of accessories highlights the MX50 tire changer — a small tire tool that makes changing small tires



Graham Lawn spray rig unit.

metal skid mounting on pickups. For medium-duty trucks, try the GLE HX 600 + 100 spray unit, for trucks with a GVW of 14,000 plus. Call 800/543-2810.

Trimmertrap Inc. offers a line of racks for protection from theft and damage, including racks for trimmers, backpack blowers, a combination rack for blowers, hedge trimmers and chain saws — as well quick and easy — ratchet tie downs, Husky truck floor liners, vehicle desks, first aid kits, safety items, water coolers and more. Call 800/382-8473. www.gemplers.com

Westheffer Co., Inc. manufactures an impressive line of customdesigned spray units for pickup and flat-bed trucks. The covered Commander Body series can serve as a moving billboard for your business. Call 800/362-3110.



Trimmertrap racks protect tools.

as portable hand tool and accessory hand tool racks. Call 800/279-8727.

**Truck Buddy** and **Mobility's** family of durable, fiberglass pickup truck containers have pushbutton Robert E. Reaves is with Irricom, a public relations and communications firm in Austin, TX. He holds a master's degree in horticulture from Oklahoma State University.

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Rating system — "We keep our trucks approximately eight years and, each year, we give a point scale to the condition of the truck and weigh it against the cost of purchasing a new vehicle."

Cargo trailers — "For irrigation and job-site shacks, we use cargo trailers. We can keep tools on site, acting as a warehouse."

Theft deterrent — "We've gone to a rack system that holds small hand tools. It's theft proof and very organized. Now, everything is cabled and padlocked to prevent theft."

#### Gasoline engines are best

Rick Kier, president of Pro Scapes Inc., Syracuse, NY, prefers gasoline engines for smaller trucks.

"All of our small trucks have gas engines, and larger trucks have diesel because they hold up better."

Looks for:

Bench seats — "For a crew truck, you need a bench seat so you can put three people in it."

Capacity — "We want to be able to haul at least 10 yards of mulch on the larger trucks. We've found that pto hydraulic systems hold up longer than electric hydraulic systems."

▶ Work/personal vehicle — "It's a Chevy Tahoe, which I use both for work and personal use. If I need to take a client somewhere to view a property, the Tahoe is a clean vehicle. I can also carry five or more people when I do training."

#### Can't do without it

Bob Rocchio, Town & Country Landscaping Company, Johnston, RI, sticks with one brand.

"All of our trucks are Ford — three F-350 dump trucks, two F-250 pickups and three LN-8000s (35,000 GVW). They are a mix of diesel and gas. Ford F-350s are the basic maintenance truck, which we use to haul trailers."

Looks for:

▶ The right fit — "It's important to match the vehicle with its purpose. We like to keep the same brand of truck to make maintenance more simple."

Organizers — "We'd like to see rear organizers, especially for commercial trucks."

Regular updates — "We want to keep our fleet updated. We keep our small trucks four to five years, larger trucks six to seven years."

► Likes leasing — "We do some leasing on some of our equipment. Our accountant helps us determine whether it is better to lease or buy. At the end of the lease, we sometimes purchase the equipment."

#### **Recycles used trucks**

Dave Peabody, president of Peabody Landscape, Columbus, OH, customizes used Isuzu trucks.

"We're converting our oneton Chevy and Ford mainte*cont. on page* 66



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nance trucks to 18,000 GVW Isuzus. The Isuzus have a cabover style with 18-ft. cargo boxes that will be removed from the truck and converted to covered trailers with dual axles for mowing crews. They also have dual tanks which can be valved shut to function as one tank for truck fuel and the other for off-road fuel for the

## One type of customized truck for Peabody Landscapes.

lawn mowers (powered by an electric pump). Purchasing used Isuzu diesels with around 120,000 miles and customizing is more efficient. We are able to set up two trucks and trailers for the price of one new Isuzu. It doesn't make sense to buy new if you can find well-maintained used vehicles and customize them to fit your needs."



No one manufacturer. "We are not tied to one manufac-

turer. We think International is the best vehicle for mediumduty trucks. For supervisory vehicles, we prefer 3/4-ton Chevy trucks and for sales vehicles, Ford Rangers with extended cabs."

# Lawn trucks organize daily operations

For many years, Bonaire, GA-based contractor Tony Bass thought there had to be a better way to organize his landscape maintenance vehicles and make major reductions in the waste of time and money. He also wanted to eliminate theft of his equipment.

He customized a truck that would meet his goals and put it into actual use in his business, where it saved him 484.5 man-hours a year per crew of non-productive labor. Now Bass is offering his system to the entire landscape industry.

The Super Lawn Truck system consists of a 1999 Isuzu NPR Diesel truck; 16-ft. box van; hydro ramp; fuel station system; hand and power tool storage system; irrigation parts and inventory system; underbody tool storage system; media and marketing package; and custom paint job — all with a three-year unlimited mileage warranty and a one-

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year warranty on all other products and workmanship. Cost is approximately \$44,000.

According to Bass, president of Super Lawn Trucks, his system allows contractors to:

Stop wasting

labor, loading and unloading equipment daily.



Reduce fuel stops to once per week.

Secure tools from thieves, accidental loss and bad weather.



Organize tools so you know exactly what you have on the truck.

Reduce warehousing needs by maintaining an inventory on the truck.

Add simple irrigation repair jobs to your lawn maintenance crews.

Improve your marketing efforts by having two 7x16-ft. rolling billboards.

Redirect wasted labor hours into productive work hours.

For more information, contact Super Lawn Trucks at 912/923-0027 or on the web at www.superlawntruck.com.

## Clean really counts

Tynes Stringfellow, president of Jubilee Landscape, Inc., Fairhope, AL, is partial to Ford.

"We have 48 vehicles, most of which are Ford-250 Super Cab diesels with automatic transmissions. We like diesels because they run with less downtime and are also less expensive to maintain. I like Ford because they've been real good service trucks. My personal vehicle is a GMC pickup, and I really like it. Other Ford vehicles include several F-800 twoton dump bodies, F-600 series. Many manufacturers don't think about the contractor when they build trucks."

*Customization:* "We pull everything on a utility trailer. Our landscape trailers have retractable tarps, which we use to haul plants, pavers, bricks and other job materials." **LM** 

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