

A Purposeful Approach

Roland Taylor investigates what is available to the Course Manager who is looking at a Utility Vehicle you sit in*.

"Useful with some purpose", defines the word utility and vehicles under this category are somewhere between ATV and tractors. Their role as far as golf courses are concerned seems to fall in the area of transporting people, top dressings, fertiliser and mowers around a course. As such they could be a very useful addition to any fleet.

There are several advantages in this type of vehicle compared to a tractor and trailer. They are highly manoeuvrable and have similar characteristics to the ATVs, in that they will travel over terrain where other units will not. In addition, their ground weight is light enough not to damage the turf, even in the wettest of conditions.

Petrol, diesel, LPG and electric models are available with a wide variety of configurations and specifications.

Here in the UK there are a number of suppliers who offer a utility vehicle in their range.

BSG TRACTORS & MACHINERY

From this Essex based company come the Carons. The Runner series has a load capacity of one tonne and four-wheel drive. Their 26hp version has a basic driver platform and cargo carrier, whilst its larger 35hp cousin comes with three-way tipping body.

For those looking for a larger unit there is the 700 series, with a choice of 30hp, 35hp or 50hp diesel-powered models. These have 16-forward and 8-reverse syncro speeds, plus power steering and a 540/1000rpm PTO. Three-point-linkage comes as an optional extra.

Hull Golf Club purchased a 40hp Caron 747 in 2000. This parkland course underwent an Eco study and following the report, one of the recommendations is now well under way. This is a long-term programme to replant the course with native trees. The soil is a clay base and although the Caron is a relatively large vehicle, Head Greenkeeper, Stephen Thackeray, says he has had no problems with the unit damaging the turf or getting stuck.

The cargo bed often carries three tonne loads and its three-way tipping facility makes it ideal for filling bunkers. In addition to transporting equipment and materials the Caron is also used to operate a Sisis Veemo.

Hull GC also has two Gators, which they largely use for the lighter carrying work. Stephen says all his utilities have proved to be a highly cost effective method of quickly and easily transporting staff between sites. There has been a considerable reduction in non-productive travelling time and labour costs.

JOHN DEERE

John Deere's GATOR stands for General All purpose Turf Off Road vehicles, which are designed to have a low centre of gravity, stability and safety. Low ground pressure is also a priority; they say that their 6x4 model, when fully loaded, delivers just 7psi.

There is a 4x2 10hp or an 18hp 6x4 petrol engine model and a larger unit is also available with a diesel engine. All have large capacity tipping cargo boxes and differential lock, plus variable speeds up to 15mph. A turf version, which was introduced for golf courses, has a top speed of 18mph.

The Royal West Norfolk Golf Course uses two Gators. This links course, which was opened on 1 January 1892, is built with the sea on one side and a marsh on the other. At certain times of the day the clubhouse and course are cut off from the mainland by the tide, making access virtually impossible. There is no landmass between this area of England and the northern ice flows so it is often bitterly cold and bleak in winter.

Gavin Playford became Head Greenkeeper in 1993 and has a staff of six including one member who is responsible for all the machinery maintenance. He purchased his first Gator, a diesel, in 1999 and was so impressed with this unit that he bought an electric version two years ago. This was followed a year later with a 6x4 diesel and another is scheduled for delivery in 2004.

Why an electric? Gavin said it fitted our requirements exactly; we were looking for a quiet utility that could be used to transport staff, tools and materials around the course with minimal disturbance to the player. Following the purchase of the larger 6x4 the E-Gator is now used for light transporting work.

Trailers are fitted to both machines and as the mowing regime, from October to March, entails using pedestrian mowers on both tees and greens, the utilities are kept busy. Gavin has found that the units easily cope with the steep dunes without damaging the turf. The course is on pure sand with fescues and bents the dominant grass species.

The Gator that is on order is being modified to take a three gang ball collector for the practice area.

Gavin likes his Gators, but has one plea. "A factory fitted cab would be nice." Standing in the cold wind that was blowing across the course one could well understand this request.



▲ At the Royal West Norfolk GC Head Greenkeeper, Gavin Playford, John Deere Gators are ideal for transporting staff and materials plus mowers around this links course.



▲ Jim Reid at Hunstaston Golf Club likes his Ransomes Jacobsen E-Z-GO because it is fast, light and highly manoeuvrable

RANSOMES JACOBSEN

For 2004 Ransomes Jacobsen are launching their E-Z-Go ST, 4x4 turf utility vehicle. This latest introduction has a load carrying capacity of about 500kg and a top speed of 25mph.

The possibility of corrosion has been taken into account by using a wax dipped, galvanised steel frame, onto which is mounted a polythethylene cargo bed.

A combination of articulating front axle, McPherson struts and self adjusting hydraulic brakes are said to add up to a vehicle that can be used safely over a relatively steep terrain.

Under the covers is an 18hp Honda engine, which is easily accessible. Other features include front and rear differential locks, rear leaf springs and hydraulic shock absorbers and the unit has a ground clearance of 24cm.

There is bench style seating for two people and the console has a host of instrumentation that tell you what is doing this and that, plus somewhere to park your drinks and mobile telephone.

Hunstaston Golf Club overlooks The Wash and is very much open to the elements. In fact the wind, together with the rough, can make many of the holes very challenging. Hunstaston's choice of utility vehicle is a petrol engine Ransomes Jacobsen E-Z-GO.

A nine-hole course was built in 1891 and five years later the second nine was added for the princely total sum of £25.

The Club has a reputation for some of the fastest greens in the country thanks to the Course Manager, Jim Reid, whose magic formula for consistently obtaining readings of 11"+ (using a Stimpmeter) includes a weekly light dust of sand on each green.

A golfing record was also achieved on this course. During the Eastern

Counties Foursome in 1974 Robert John Taylor from Leicestershire achieved a hole-in-one, three consecutive days on the 189-yard, 16th green. The first time was using a one iron and the other two were with a six iron, downwind.

Hunstaston's E-Z-GO is used for a variety of jobs around the course, including transporting staff mowers and materials between greens and ball picking up on the practice area.

Jim Reid said. "It is fast light and highly manoeuvrable. Some parts of the course flood during the year and the E-Z-Go travels over these areas without getting stuck or damage the turf. We have found there is very little maintenance to worry about and although we would prefer a diesel version this unit represents good value for money.

TORO

During 2003 the Workman 3300 and 4300 were introduced with a number of upgrades.

A more powerful and reliable Briggs & Stratton Vanguard, 26.5hp diesel engine, that complies with the 2003 EPA/CARB Regulations on emission and noise levels, has been fitted. This unit replaces the previous Mitsubishi 23hp engine.

For increased comfort and safety, bucket style seats have been introduced in addition to front mounted progressive suspension springs, to give a smoother ride and to absorb heavy loads.

Other improvements include easier access for maintenance and cleaning, plus a newly designed rear stub axles and high traction tyres.

A high flow heavy-duty hydraulic kit is now available and this comes with oil cooler fan, 15-litre reservoir, 30.2litre pump and quick release

couplings to the rear of the unit. Toro say that all the present attachments can be fitted to these new units.

For anyone looking for a smaller vehicle, there is the Workman1100. The unit has the company's 'twister' Active In Frame suspension that is said to provide better traction, plenty of manoeuvrability and comfort in addition to improved operator control.

The unit has independent front suspension, which is claimed to give an almost zero turning radius and 70-degree steering, when working in confined areas.

The unit has a carrying capacity of 454kg with tipping facility and optional electric tipping kit. Other features include, pedal operated start accelerator and a stop brake.

Girton Golf Club is situated on the outskirts of Cambridge and they have a Toro Workman300D. Ian Hankin has been greenkeeping at this parkland course for 23 years.

The site is on a clay base soil, so good drainage is a top priority and to this end a full programme of slitting and vertidrainage is carried out during the year.

Their Workman, in addition to transporting is used for spraying, top dressing and spiking. Ian says he likes the unit's good ground clearance and how it closely follows the ground contour.

They have also found the ground weight has not damaged the turf, even when the cargo box is fully loaded.

When looking for a utility, a good payload was near the top of the list of requirements and the Workman has proved to come up to their expectation. One minus point is the length of the vehicle, when fitted with a rear attachment. At Girton this is not a major problem, but it could be if there were confined areas to work in.

KAWASAKI

The new 3010 diesel Mule was launched at the back end of 2003. This latest utility is said to be the best yet produced by Kawasaki.

So, what have they done to substantiate this claim? A 23hp liquid cooled three-cylinder diesel has been used to provide a low rpm torque and the transmission system has high capacity and includes an automatic torque converter. In addition there is selectable two or four-wheel drive. Load carrying capacity is rated at a total of 740kg and this includes the cargo bed that is capable of handling 499kg.

The dual mode differential to the rear axles is claimed to give a minimum turning radius of 3.4 metres. The bodywork is of a pick up truck styling and the bench type seat is capable of carrying two or possibly three people at a push.

From the courses that were contacted it is clear that utilities have a place in the fleet, largely for transporting operations. They do save time and money when it comes to moving bodies, material and equipment around a course, especially where there is some difficult terrain to transverse. Utilities appear to be an addition rather than a replacement for the compact or medium size tractors, even where they are used to operate equipment such as top dressers and sprayers. Certainly, all those we spoke to were very happy with their utilities and find them a very useful addition to their fleets.

***Next month it will be vehicles you sit on.**



▲ Girton Golf Club's Greenkeeper, Ian Hankin uses his Toro Workman 300D for a variety of work on the course