

UTILITY VEHICLES: TAKE A LATERAL LOOK AT UTILITIES

By James de Havilland

Think of a golf utility vehicle, and it is pretty easy to come up with three typical choices; Cushman Turf-Truckster, John Deere Gator and Toro Workman. No surprises here, although other suppliers to include Club Car, Kawasaki, Polaris and Yamaha should not be overlooked either. But what about something that can go on the road as well?

There will always be pressure to try and come up with a new equipment choice that does the primary target job but, if possible brings something extra with it. In some cases this can lead to buying a compromise that does not do its primary task that well; the phrase Jack-of-all-trades, master of none springs to mind.

So how can you get a utility vehicle to do as bit more without compromising its main duties? The starting issue has to be determining exactly what the main duties are. For a start there is a clear differentiation between a unit that will be used with a top dresser and sprayer and one that will be used solely to ferry materials and people around.

As a simple rule, a manual transmission is favoured for jobs that require a fixed speed. Select a given gear and run the engine at a fixed rpm and you pretty much get an easily repeatable forward speed. When it comes to a simple transport unit, a CVT belt drive automatic has its plusses. With no gears or clutch to worry about, it is just a case pressing the throttle and away you go.

Now what if you want to have a vehicle that can legally travel on the road? Road homologation is a complicated subject and one that most utility vehicle manufactures do not get tangled up with. This can mean finding a road legal utility is not quite as simple as it may at first seem.

For a Course Manager there are other important considerations. As soon as you move to a traditional 'pick-up' type of unit, there are issues of VED tax discs and MOTs to consider, not to mention the need to run on white as opposed to red diesel. A pick-up is also relatively heavy and, if it is running on road-orientated tyres, it will be pretty limited in its on course usefulness.



A well-proven utility vehicle will have little that will beat it for all-round versatility...



Kubota offers its well-proven RTV900 in road-homologated form. Fitted with a screen and ROPS frame, the unit has individual front seats with suspension for the driver, full road lighting and a front 'crash bar'. Full hypostatic drive means there will be little need to trouble the brake pedal.

So is there some middle ground? Well perhaps, take a Kubota RTV900 as an example, this hydrostatic drive utility can be specified with all the right kit to allow it to be run on the road. Realistically, the option is not designed to make it suitable for long trips on tarmac, but more to allow it to run between sites where there may be more than just a simple road to cross.

For some courses, a road worthy Kubota RTV could well be worth looking at. It is a tough utility with a half tonne load capacity for starters and, with its all-wheel drive and locking differential it can get across pretty tough terrain too. It is well worth looking at.



Kubota controls are well thought out and easy to understand, the quality of the fit and finish certainly having more in common with a road vehicle than most utilities. On-road pep not great but on off-road tyres this is no bad thing. Power steering is standard.



Cushman Turf-Truckster... but a cab can make all the difference to its popularity on a cold morning!



A Piaggio Porter may be spartan by modern pick-up standards, but cosy compared to a utility in the same price bracket. This is a proper 'road going' vehicle, with only 2WD and a five-speed transmission. But with a 1400cc diesel engine it is priced in similar territory to a top end utility.

A more radical approach is to consider a really light pick up such as a Piaggio Porter. These diminutive little Italian vehicles are offered with a choice of not just petrol or diesel power but LPG and electric too. Depending upon the specification, you can expect the payload to be between 560 to 685kg but do not look for much choice in the transmission department; 2WD and a five-speed manual is your lot.

Conventional utility vehicle makers will continue to dominate sales, but it can pay to take a sideways glance at an alternative. A little pick-up may well be a very useful addition to the course equipment fleet.



Piaggio has been producing light utility pick-ups and vans for years. Distributor The Pro-Truck Group also offer the three-wheeler Ape range, these little units offering handlebar steering and even lower