



What do you want from a utility vehicle?

James De Havilland with his regular contribution on current machinery

These days, few budgets can allow for mistakes when it comes to selecting new items of equipment. Make the wrong choice now and you could end up living with a poorly considered choice for several years. So how do you choose the right type of utility vehicle when there are so many models to choose from?

What are the key demands you will place on your utility vehicles? Does your budget allow for you to select more than one vehicle and, if so, does this allow you the freedom to choose different models that can be more closely matched to their intended use? Are you likely to change the attachments currently fitted to your existing vehicles? If yes, will their replacements be of the same type, capacity and weight? It is surprising how asking a few questions can help refine what you demand from a utility vehicle. In some cases, it may also influence how you tackle certain tasks. A good example can be the application of fertilisers; if an existing solid fertiliser application regime is to be replaced by a liquid based system, for example will a 600 litre capacity utility mounted sprayer be large enough or will you need a high capacity tractor trailed unit instead?

It is worth looking at how existing utilities are employed. These versatile vehicles are often used as a 'self-propelled' trailer, a low platform load height making them ideal for ferrying rolls of turf or loading up with some fresh sand for a bunker. As two people can travel on the machine, it can mean one remaining on the job while the second goes off to fetch fresh materials as required.

But do you have the budget to employ two people to do this sort of work? Would a higher capacity tractor and trailer be a more efficient method of getting materials on site? The key to making the right choice is to not just look at what is done now but to try and see if there is room for develop systems and improve upon them.

Think through capacities

General purpose utilities, typically those used to ferry personnel, kit and materials, need to have the right capacity. Take a look at what current utilities are loaded up with and work out if this is actually within the load capacity of the vehicle. Although a ball park 500kg platform capacity is typically enough for a general work it could well be too little for some jobs.

Move up to 'working' models that are designed to operated mounted sprayers and top dressing kit, and matters change. It follows that the vehicles capacity will have to carry both the attachments and its contents, a listed capacity of a typical 1,200kg or so arguably suggesting an attachment capacity of perhaps 600 litres or 600kg. Is this capacity high enough to deliver the daily output you require?

There is then the choice of petrol, diesel or electric power. Light petrol powered utility vehicles have the advantage of lower initial capital costs, some also preferring the smoother running and lower noise levels some of these machines may offer in a direct comparison to a diesel. The downsides are pretty obvious.

Electric power is more widely available these days, with many former sceptics warming to this form of power for a general run-about. Pricing can be competitive





Utility vehicles come in such a choice of designs that it can initially be confusing when trying to select a new one. The key is to work back from the unit's intended duties; top dressing and spraying work will demand certain features that may not be needed on a general purpose unit.

Operators are important, and should be engaged in trying out a range of makes and models if possible. A machine that appears to tick all the right boxes on paper may have issues that can only be picked up by putting the machine through its paces.

Weather protection can take the form of roof, screens and doors. The latter tend to be easily removed, with some suppliers offering a choice of glazed or simple roll-up designs. It is more cost effective to specify weather protection from new.

It is well worth taking a look beyond the more familiar utility vehicle choices. Certain makes and models will have differences that could well fit in with specific needs. Road homologation and high hydraulic power capacity are two examples.

When looking to fit equipment with a payload, factor in the weight of the unit when it is empty. A capacity of around 1,200kg will be fine for most 600 litre sprayers. Where possible, try a vehicle with the type of attachment you will be using fitted.

Good ground clearance and a choice of cleated tyre will typically indicate the utility in question can tackle more extreme terrain. Although this may not need to be exploited fully, the ability of a machine to reach awkward areas should be considered. A bench seat is often liked by operators.



too, although you do need to cost in a charging system. As to operating costs, electric vehicles have a pretty good track record. If you are a golf course that runs a fleet of electric buggies, an electric utility may well be worth looking into.

Diesel power remains the default choice for a 'working' utility. With these units, it is the type of transmission that needs to be thought through. For general work, a CVT transmission is a simple choice, full automatic drive making them easy to operate. If you need to do fixed speed work, manual transmissions tend to remain the default choice. Hydrostatic drive, as used by Kubota on its RTV900, is not as widespread at present, but it is well liked by operators.

A final point is auxiliary power. Hydraulic power may be needed to drive a sprayer pump or drive a top dresser's hydraulic motors. These days, a pump with a capacity of 20 litres/min plus will typically be needed, with extra capacity possibly coming as a cost option. The key point is to match the vehicle to the attachments before assuming a new make or model will be up to the job.

One final point is to consider if the vehicle can be used on the road. The ability to drive between sites using public roads is something that it is all too easy to overlook. Some vehicles, such as the JCB Groundhog 4x4, can be factory specified in road homologated form. In certain applications, this can make them a great alternative to a road going pick-up. Again, look at what is offered before assuming all models can be easily adapted to run on the road.