

Maximise your utility budget



Golf courses have really taken to utility vehicles. From Gators to Cushmans and Mules to Workhorses, you see them all over the place. If you have not looked at what is on offer more recently, however, you may not appreciate that the choice of kit on offer has widened. James De Havilland writes...

As is so often the case these days, there is a bewildering array of utility vehicles to choose from. Put together a few basic requirements, however, and that wide choice narrows.

First up, you have the established Cushman Turf-Truckster from Ransomes Jacobsen, the Pro Gator from John Deere and the Workman HDX models from Toro.

These models are so familiar it is common for them all to be called the same regardless of who makes them; hands up those of you that call a Workman a Truckster, a Gator a Workman and well, you get the point. A key feature of these 'heavy duty' machines is that they are designed to do a lot more than

provide a load platform and a passenger seat.

These key models have pretty similar capacities as well; the diesel-powered line-up that comprises the 24hp Pro Gator 2030A rated at 1,182kg, the 26.5hp Workman HDX-D-4WD offering a 1,289kg payload and the 23hp Cushman Turf Truckster offering a 1,293kg capacity. In the real world their overall specifications are broadly similar, with mechanical transmissions and a choice of hydraulic packages to suit specific attachments.

It is important, however, to remember that you need to look at these vehicles in the wider context of what you want them to do. The chances are you will want

BELOW: Heavy-duty utility vehicles really come into their own when matched to their own when matched to demount kit such as a sprayer or top dresser. When costing vehicles it pays to also price up kit to go with the vehicle too.





Simple, light and petrol powered. There are an increasing number of 'entry level' utilities to choose from but factor in running costs if they are going to cover a lot of ground. A more expensive diesel may make better long-term financial sense for some, but by no means all, courses.

to consider a range of demount kit that will also fit, such as a sprayer, and it is the easy integration and complete package price of the latter that can have a big influence upon your final buying choices.

It is entirely feasible to specify an 'off-the-peg' vehicle based around a utility 'skid' that will subsequently undertake key spraying, top dressing and even core collecting requirements. The total equipment package could be more cost effective than an array of trailed and tractor mounted alternatives.

This is an important point as heavy-duty utilities are relatively expensive bits of kit; a price tag north of £20K will make any accountant sit up and take notice, but it is the ability of these tools to work with purpose built attachments that can make them a viable buy. Build quality is good too, so expect a long life from well-proven models.

Kitting out a machine with a sprayer is a good example. All the listed models will take a sprayer of

around 750 litres, with boom widths of around 6 to 7m dependant upon model. The sprayer will sit low on the machine, to improve stability, with the weight more evenly spread between the wheels than perhaps would be the case with a trailed unit. The same will apply to a top dresser. When these attachments are not in use, they demount easily and free the vehicle for other work.

The caveat is that there are now keenly priced dedicated sprayers available as alternatives; these we looked at in the May issue. The trick is to work out how much work you will do with a sprayer on a utility. If the unit spends more time fitted to the vehicle than sitting in the shed on its stands you may find it more cost effective to buy a dedicated sprayer. Conversely, if you need to rebuild a bunker and ferry turf and sand around, a utility can often do the job better than a tractor and trailer; you do not have that option if you have gone for a dedicated sprayer.

Alternatively, you could also go



The cold spring of 2012 will perhaps be forgotten as temperatures climb, but an enclosed cab can make life a great deal easier for the operator. When choosing a utility, price in various options when making price comparisons.



When it comes to personnel transport, the key is to look to a lighter utility that can also carry a modest load. Space for essential tools, replacement greens flags, rakes or whatever will soon be exploited, so a large load platform is a help.



It really is worth taking the trouble to have a demonstration of alternative vehicles; Deere Gator and Toro Workman controls, for example, have essential features in common but the designs are more different than the spec sheet suggest.



left field and buy a dedicated sprayer and a more general-purpose utility vehicle.

The latter need not have the heavy-duty capacity or fixed forward speed ability of a big Toro, Cushman or Deere, but if your need is to help move personnel and kit around, an entry-level petrol model may be the way to go. Take Kawasaki Mule 610 and Polaris Ranger 400.

These machines have a relatively low initial purchase price and are reasonably cheap to run, despite the need to run on petrol.

There are also diesel powered models to consider, such as the evergreen Kawasaki Diesel Mule, together with alternatives from companies such as Club Car, Bobcat, Kubota, JCB to name a few.

The key is to establish the difference between basic utility units designed to have a light footprint and modest load capacity and machines that have a bigger payload and the ability to power attachments.

Often overlooked are battery powered electric vehicles. These tend to go in and out of fashion, but there is no denying these tools do have a future.

Polaris, for example are selling increasingly large numbers of its Ranger E, essentially sharing the same chassis as its Ranger 400 sibling with the result of it delivering good performance in more extreme conditions.

However, there are other electric models to consider. These include vehicles that can be specified in road legal form, with Ransomes Jacobsen having recently taken over the importation from France of the Mega electric truck range.

This is quite a significant move as Ransomes Jacobsen will no doubt help promote the greater use of this type of vehicle on golf courses. In terms of cost, a road ready electric truck will cost a similar amount of money as a heavy-duty 'turf truck'; well worth a look.

Regardless of what is on offer, the key to selecting the right utility vehicle is to work out what it has to do.

Heavy-duty models fit the bill perfectly when used as 'self-propelled' sprayers and top dressers, but they may not be the most economical choice as a general carrier.

If you can take the time to shop around and try several vehicles for a few days, you stand a much better chance of choosing the right tool.



ABOVE: Battery powered utilities are not new, but the concept of road legal models has yet to gain as wide acceptance in the UK as it has on the Continent. The Mega range imported by Ransomes Jacobsen could change that.

LEFT: More serious off-road ability may not be necessary, so check how well a vehicle on turf-friendly tyres performs on fine turf by doing the odd tight turn. All-wheel drive has its pros and cons, even when a proper differential with locking diff lock comes as part of the package.