

New 'players' in utility field have done their research

By Kit Bradshaw

Although the first utility vehicle was essentially a modified golf car, it wasn't until the 1960s that utility vehicles really became a new segment of the market.

Cushman Inc., now a division of Ransomes America Corp., came into the market in 1964. At last year's GCSAA Convention and Show, Cushman held a contest to discover the oldest Cushman Truckster still in use. The winner? A 1964 model.

Just as with facsimile machines, cables television and VCR's, Cushman not only developed a utility vehicle, but created a market for the vehicle that was not recognized before. But others soon followed, and today, there are more than just a handful of companies in the utility vehicle market to a greater or lesser degree.

Smithco arrived on the scene in 1967, and is still selling its Red Rider and Bandit models.

E-Z-GO Textron began offering utility vehicles in the late 1960s-early 1970s and is still expanding its model line. Jacobsen/Textron is also still in the marketplace.

The Toro Co. has a slightly



The oldest Cushman utility vehicle — Model 880-325 — found at Wading River Golf Course in Charley, Mass., served well for many years. Its descendent as it right.



different history in the utility vehicle arena. Its Workmaster came out in the mid-1970s, as a middle-of-the-road vehicle with a limited number of accessories.

Rick Cairns of Toro said the Workmaster "became a vehicle that met a lot of niche needs, and was a product that provided runabout capability with a hydrostatic transmission". On the positive side, the Workmaster filled this niche very well and met a lot of people's needs. But it stayed in this niche. And many of our customers expected us to fill their work vehicle needs by expanding its capabilities.

"We, however, never came back to the vehicle to make these changes. Now, the Workmaster has not been made for a year, and it is being replaced by our new utility vehicle line."

The most recent entrants are Club Car and Deere & Co.

Club Car began its utility vehicle line with the 1986 Carryall II model, and has been developing products since that time.

Michael Alexander at Club Car said the company's entry into the market came because of the inadequacy of modified golf cars for the turf maintenance areas.

"We looked at this industry from

a different perspective," said Alexander. "We knew that the modified golf car, with the cargo box on the back, was serviceable, but it simply wasn't built for the demands of golf course work, so we looked to fill that need for a different utility vehicle that could do a lot of different jobs on the course."

Deere & Co., which has been involved in the utility vehicle market for five years, came into this area through the lawn and turf maintenance field, where its equipment was already being used.

Clair Peterson at Deere said: "We were looking at new

opportunities, and since we were already involved in the lawn and turf-care industries, providing the vehicles was a logical next step. In addition, we could use components that were already designed, such as engines and drive trains, and the manufacturing expertise we had developed over 25 years to give us an advantage in the utility vehicle area."

All of the companies interviewed are not resting on their historical laurels, but are constantly seeking new opportunities in the marketplace. So, for them, the past is still just a prologue.

To produce the only completely proven, longest lasting, hardest working, and

