Low-end vehicles offer practicality

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market has yet to be mined as fully as the golf course market."

Manufacturers have tried to keep costs down by making new vehicles compatible with existing accessories — more often than not, that means Cushman's. With this approach, superintendents can avoid buying all new attachments for overseeding, core gathering, etc.

According to Smithco President Don Smith: "Cushman went upscale first, and because of the size and scale of the truck, they could offer several utilities that are useful around the golf course. If you're spending $15,000, it sort of justified the cost."

All three manufacturers of upscale units are depending on the need for this versatility, Jacobsen included. Jake's four-wheel SV 3422 runs about $14,000, according to Product Planning Manager Bob Krick. But it can do many things.

"If superintendents are going to buy a work vehicle today, they want to do a lot of different work with it: hauling sand, spraying, top dressing, spreading," Krick explained. "A few years ago, there was one vehicle out there: the Cushman. Now, to beat the competition, everyone has upscaled. It was done because the superintendent truly wants to do more tasks."

Yet Smith feels the high-end utility vehicle is simply beyond reach at courses with average or low-end maintenance budgets. Smithco's new utility vehicle is the Spirit, and it's aimed at the average superintendent.

"We call them 'people movers,' and we want to provide them for less than $3,000," said Smith. "It's transportation. It's a one-man vehicle with a very low bed, so a guy can lift the stuff into the bed by himself.

"Manufacturers have a tendency to develop products toward the high-end market because those are the clubs that have the most money to spend. At the modest or low end — which is most of the courses in the country — they sort of get left out.

"Our niche has always been to have a broad spectrum of models for everyone. The Spirit is the very low end of our spectrum."

The Yamahauler from Yamaha retails from about $4,500 to $5,500, depending on whether it's been packaged in a golf car fleet deal. Joe Stahl, vice president of Yamaha's Golf Car Division, said his firm has no desire to compete in the upscale market.

"I have to say we're a little bit on the fringe when it comes to being a competitor in that area," he said. "But my observation is the thing is getting a little out of hand. The Yamahauler is better for light landscape, light utility use. We're not positioning our product to go after that sector of the market right now.

"From a price and value perspective, it offers the course a lot more practicality than some of these other units. As a segment of the business, we think we're positioned right.

"What's still very unique about our vehicle is the versatility. The dump box and sides come off to make it a flat bed. Flat bed today, bar car tomorrow."

Forecast: Number of ranges grows by 18.6 percent

MIDLOTHIAN, Va. — The number of public-access golf ranges associated with golf courses in the United States has grown by 331 facilities, according to Forecast Golf.

The total number of free-standing golf ranges in the United States as of Dec. 31, 1993 was 2,112. This represents an increase, in the number of facilities, of 18.6 percent over the 1992 final numbers of 1,781 facilities. Between 1991 and 1992 the number of free-standing golf ranges grew by 18.8 percent, or 282 facilities (1,499 facilities in 1991).

According to James Turner, vice president of Forecast, "Free-standing golf range growth grew steadily at a rate of approximately 18.7 percent per year between 1991 and 1993. If this growth rate continues for 1994, approximately 395 new free-standing facilities will be opened this year. That would bring the total to just over 2,500 facilities at the end of 1994.

"Based upon the rale of inquiries received at Forecast, from potential golf range developers, this projection is realistic."

The total number of all golf range facilities, excluding on course ranges, at the end of 1993 was 2,264. These facilities include free-standing golf ranges (2,112), indoor golf ranges (129), and aqua ranges (23). In 1992, indoor golf facilities represented 4.5 percent of free-standing facilities. In 1993, this increased to representing 6 percent of all the free-standing golf range facilities.

"There is a strong possibility that over the next five years, the number of under-supplied markets will significantly diminish," said James R. Murphy, president of Forecast. "This means that as developers continue to pursue the development of new facilities, the proper analysis must be performed to quantify the actual demand for additional golf ranges. This also means that the existing golf range owners must be prepared to protect their market share from new facilities.

"Golf ranges, in competitive markets, must now concentrate on streamlining overall operations, increasing marketing, and improving customer service to compete with new facilities in the market."