HIGH ON VOLTAGE

Electric-powered utility vehicles gain in popularity

BY PETER BLAIS

Superintendents seek utility vehicles that are powerful, quiet and environmentally friendly — a combination that has led manufacturers to provide an ever-growing variety of products.

John Deere, for instance, offers many variations. There's the Pro Gator in gas and diesel with two- and four-wheel drive and a 2,000-pound payload capacity. There's the 6 x 4 diesel with a 1,000-pound capacity. And there's the quiet-running electric Turf Gator with a regenerative feature that puts an estimated 3 percent to 5 percent of the full electrical charge back into the battery during a day's work, says Deere's Chuck Greif, director of worldwide marketing. Greif notes that superintendents desire two components on utility vehicles. First, they want them quieter, which is the reason for the electric versions.

"The electric functions just like the diesel and has the same specs as it," Greif says. "We're also looking at a lower-end gas version that we can make quieter."

Club Car debuted its Turf Transporter 472 at the GCSAA show. It begins shipping later this year.

Second, they want versatility — as in capacity for large payloads and the ability to scoot around the golf course at 13 mph to 15 mph, Greif notes.

Superintendents also want vehicles that can be driven most anywhere while doing minimal damage to turf, says Ralph Nicotera, Jacobsen's vice president of marketing and product management. That's why Jacobsen introduced the Cushman Commander 4800 lightweight turf vehicle.

"It's a lighter unit with a bit more power than our other vehicles," Nicotera explains. "It has a 16-horsepower, V-twin engine vs. the 11-horsepower in our standard Commander. It has larger flotation tires for better ground clearance."

Craig Currier, superintendent in charge of the five courses at Bethpage State Park in Farmingdale, N.Y., uses the Toro Workman as a heavy-work vehicle. "We've gone to the diesel Workman because they're beefier," he says.

That "beefier" label is due, in part, to the updated Briggs & Stratton Daihatsu engines Toro installed. The Workman 3200 and 4200 feature a 31-horsepower, liquid-cooled gas engine; and the Workman 3300 and 4300 feature a 26.5-horsepower, liquid-cooled diesel engine. The Workman 3100 has a Kohler 23-horsepower air-cooled gas engine. Toro also improved the front suspension springs and added an optional high-flow hydraulics kit to the Workman.

At the GCSAA show in February, ClubCar unveiled the 13-horsepower Turf TransPorter 472, which features a 36-inch bed and 1,200-pound total vehicle payload. The four-passenger vehicle, available in the second half of this year, is billed as a "mobile work station."

ClubCar also recently released a newly designed cab with new features, including a Rollover Protective Structure Certification, which indicates the possibility of injury to a seat-belted operator and passengers has been minimized if the vehicle overturns. The cabs are available for Club Car's entire line of utility vehicles.

The WorkHorse ST 480 is the newest addition to the E-Z-GO WorkHorse line. It has an 800-pound payload capacity and a 48-inch bed. The 16-horsepower, 4-cycle twin cylinder Vanguard V-twin engine is the largest in the WorkHorse ST line and is capable of reaching a maximum speed of 17 miles per hour.

Currier said New York state will soon require that 10 percent of golf course vehicles be powered by something other than fossil fuel. That's an environmental consideration he and superintendents in other states and countries with similar mandates will have to keep in mind when making future utility vehicle purchases.

Greif says environmental issues and noise ordinances are partly responsible for the rise in electric vehicle sales. He predicts hybrid engines that run on both gas and electricity, or perhaps even hydrogen fuel cells, could power future utility vehicles. ■

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