

Getting Attached to Versatility

*Equipment with an array of attachment options
can boost your flexibility and productivity*

By MIKE KENNEDY

The low pressure exerted by the Posi-Track all-purpose crawler enables it to climb hills and get to difficult-to-reach spots.

In baseball, the limelight shines most brightly on mighty sluggers like Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa, who do one thing especially well: hit home runs of jaw-dropping distance.

But many managers will tell you the under-appreciated element of a team's success is the utility player. He can shag fly balls in centerfield one day, dig throws out of the dirt at first base the next day and deliver a clutch pinch hit the day after. By filling more than one role, he makes the team more efficient and allows others to focus on what they do well.

In your equipment shed, that kind of flexibility is just as valuable. An extra-versatile machine that can clear snow one day, dig trenches the next day and lift pallets the day after can save you time and money.

Skid-steer loaders and other utility equipment can be outfitted with dozens of attachment options that greatly expand the tools available to you without gobbling up all your storage space-or your bank account.

The Sum of the Parts

The product descriptions hint at the range of these machines. Toro calls its Dingo compact utility loader "a power plant on wheels." Leon's Manufacturing Co. says the capabilities of its Ramrod mini-skid loader are "limited only by the user's imagination."

"People are constantly amazed at the number of things you can put onto a skid loader," says John Osarczuk, New Holland Construction's product manager for skid steer loaders.

Such as?

The list is long:

There are tilt attachments that let you use buckets or other attachments on angles or hills; a water kit that sprays a water mist onto a work area; augers to drill holes for fence posts, trees or utility poles; backhoes; a bale spear to lift and haul bales without damage; a concrete mixer; dozer blades of various sizes, palm graders and snow blades.

And more.

There are buckets of varying shapes and sizes; cold planers to plane concrete and asphalt; demolition/scrap shears

that cut through ferrous and non-ferrous materials; tree shears; drills; a log grapple to pick up and move logs; a scrap grapple for bulky loads; hydraulic hammers to break up concrete; different varieties of rake attachments to groom soil, grade or clean up; a rock picker; a tiller to cultivate land; manure scrapers and forks.

Is that all?

Not yet.

There are mower attachments-rotary mowers and flail mowers-sod layers; pallet forks; a post driver; rock wheels to cut through rock, concrete, asphalt or frozen ground; snow blowers; stump grinders; scarifiers; trenchers; rollers; sweepers; brushes, and brooms.

You can get a wide variety of tires, or rubber or steel tracks; tree spades let you dig up and transplant trees and shrubs.

You Can't Keep 'em Down on the Farm

The skid-steer loader has come a long way from its origins 30 years ago as a modest piece of equipment moving manure and bales of hay on farms. Its compact size and ability to turn quickly allowed it to get to places larger equipment couldn't reach.

Over time, as more attachments have become available and interchangeability of the attachments is more common among skid-steer brands, the popularity of the machines has mushroomed in the worlds of construction and maintenance.

"If you have a dedicated working condition, and it's a very high-productivity application, it makes sense to have a specific machine that does one thing," says Osarczuk. "But more and more, construction crews are using a skid loader that can handle a lot of applications."

That has made the skid-steer loader market that much more competitive.

Besides the Melroe Company's Bobcat, which introduced the skid-steer loader in 1970, there are plenty of companies offering their own versions-Case, New Holland and Gehl-and the field is getting more crowded.

Last year, John Deere began to design and manufacture its own skid-steer loader. Earlier this year, Caterpillar entered the market when it introduced a line with six models.

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Versatility-

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Smaller than a Skid-Steer

In terms of versatility, the Toro Dingo's capabilities-it has more than 35 attachments available-are comparable to skid steers. But the company emphasizes that the Dingo is not a skid steer loader, but a compact utility loader.

A worker operates the Dingo by standing on a rear platform instead of sitting, and the machine is smaller than a typical skid steer.

"Through our research, we have found that there are still a lot of manual labor tasks where it's not practical to bring a skid-steer loader," says Pat Cappucci, senior marketing manager for the Dingo. "The Dingo is a lot lighter and easier to handle."

Toro also has a trailer specifically made to haul the Dingo and its attachments.

Another smaller piece of equipment with an array of attachments is the Ramrod Taskmaster line of mini-skid loaders, which is also geared toward jobs in confined areas that larger equipment can't reach. The operator controls the machine by standing on a rear platform.

Another small machine that offers versatility is the Gardener series from BCS. Among the attachments available are tillers, hillier/furrowers, sickle bars, lawn mowers, snow throwers, sweepers, chipper/shredders, dozer blades and suikies.

The handlebars on the machine rotate 180 degrees, so you can switch quickly from a rear attachment to a front attachment, says Cherie Bazzell, a spokeswoman for BCS.

Other Options

The Posi-Track all purpose crawler, manufactured by All Season Vehicles (ASV), claims extra versatility not only because of the attachments available it can use, but also for the low ground pressure it exerts. That gives the machine added flexibility, says Jay Lemke, a spokesman for ASV. After all, having an attachment won't do you any good if your equipment can't get to the job site.

"The Posi-Track is light on the grass and won't tear it up," says Lemke. "It will also go up hills and through mud and snow to

get to places where you want to use your attachments."

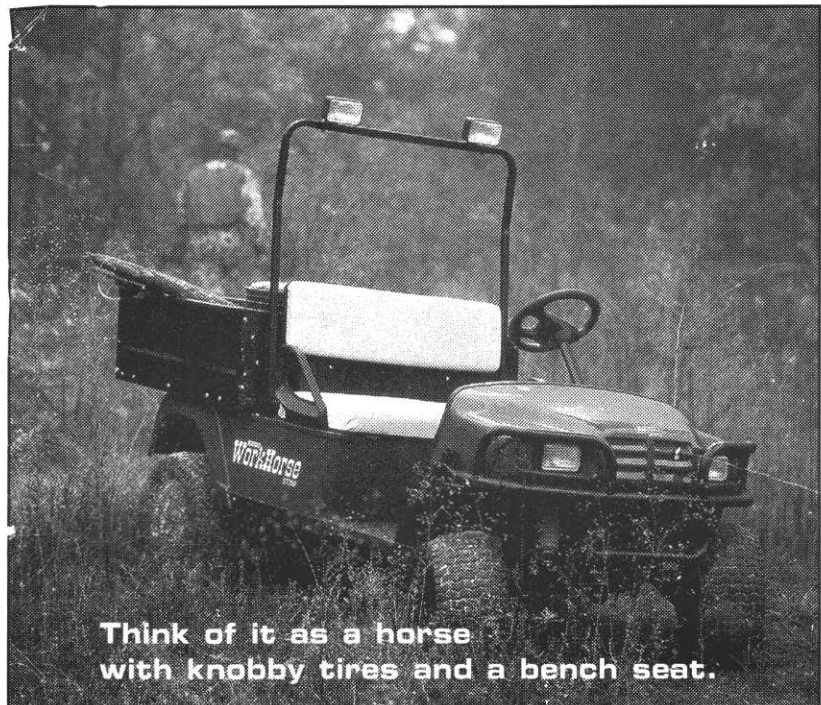
Mowers offer attachment options to expand their versatility. Besides cutting grass, the Jacobsen Turfcut and the Ransomes 700 series can be equipped with attachments such as a snow blower, a leaf or debris blower, rotary broom or dozer blade.

In addition to various mower blades, Excel Industries Inc. offers plenty of attachments for other jobs: snow blades and blowers, stump cutters and edgers.

The Grasshopper Co. sells mowers with optional attachments such as vacuum collection systems, dethatchers, aerators, bedshapers, rotary brooms, snow blowers and blades.

Tractors haven't been left out of the attachment craze, either. John Deere's 4000 series of machines can be outfitted with backhoes, loaders, a variety of mowers, brooms, snow-blowers, posthole diggers, blades and tillers.

Kubota Tractor Corp.'s compact and utility tractors have a similar array of attachments available: snow and debris blowers, blades, scrapers, buckets, tillers, backhoes and diggers.



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