

Turf vehicles



E-Z-Go

Circle No. 159 on Reader Inquiry Card

Golf car and utility vehicle manufacturers look to a bull market, even though they aren't exactly certain what turf managers really want.

by Ron Hall, associate editor and Jerry Roche, editor

The golf course market smiles. Manufacturers of golf cars and utility vehicles look with optimism to 1986, some beyond.

Witness the healthy construction of new golf courses, a reflection perhaps of a national economy that continues to climb from the doldrums of just a few years ago. With unemployment and interest rates at more favorable levels, the number of golfers taking to the links rises. Their expectations about the quality of play increase.

Longtime golf car manufacturer E-Z-Go's plunge into the utility vehicle market in 1985 highlights the confidence of domestic manufacturers. Other evidence is the new muscle OMC-Lincoln engineers into its 1985 line, making more powerful and versatile Cushman machines.

"We see the market for turf vehicles continuing strong through 1986," says OMC-Lincoln marketing manager Frank McDonald.

Cushman vehicles, long the mainstay of the utility vehicle market, are now equipped with 22 hp engines, giving almost 1/4 more power than previous models. Reliability and longev-

ity were prime concerns for the move to more muscle.

"Customers want water-cooled, low-maintenance vehicles that function like regular on-road vehicles," says Tony M. Nunes, marketing vice-president for SDS Motor Import, Oxnard, Calif. His firm offers the Japanese-manufactured Sanfu line.

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—McDonald

And, while foreign manufacturers continue to nip at the edges of the turf market, the big event in the turf vehicle industry in 1985 happened in Augusta, Ga.—home of the Masters and E-Z-Go.

This past year, E-Z-Go purchased the Pargo Industrial line of vehicles from Eagle Vehicles, Dallas, Tex.

Coupled with the introduction of its own new vehicles in February, E-Z-Go can now boast offerings in 19

different styles, everything from a one-seater to an 11-passenger model.

Management at Augusta headquarters spent much of this year weaving an effective sales network. With distributors in place in 1986, E-Z-Go—with its 18-hp GXT-7 model as its workhorse—promises to pursue the turf market enthusiastically.

"The market has grown quite a bit the last couple of years," notes Dave Johnson of E-Z-Go. "In the turf vehicle market, I see a swing toward smaller-capacity units because of cost, versatility and maneuverability."

Which brings up a philosophical question: do turf managers want one vehicle that can, with attachments, do a myriad of functions, or do they want more specialized vehicles?

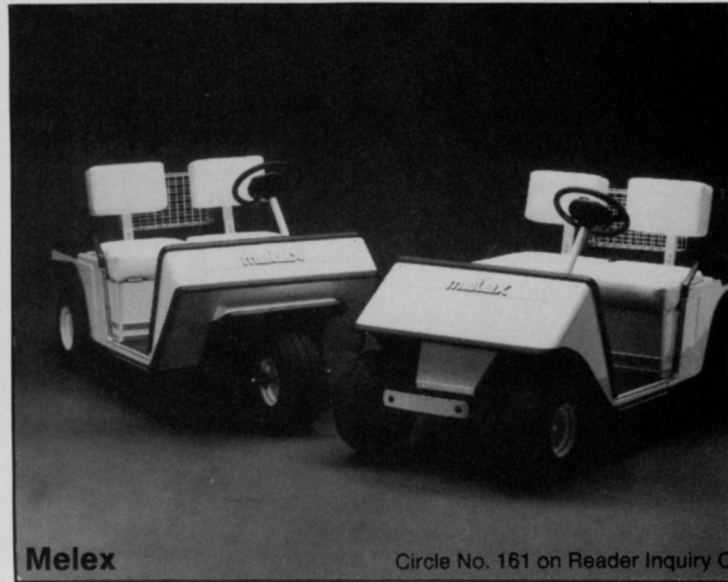
Kent S. Hahn, general sales manager of Hahn, Inc., Evansville, Ind., says, "the golf course superintendent is looking for more specialized turf vehicles. With the cost of chemicals increasing, there is a demand for more accurate applicators of both liquid and dry to reduce chemical waste and misapplication."

OMC-Lincoln's McDonald agrees.



Club Car

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Yamaha

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Cushman

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Hahn

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Sanfu

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"Because more golf course superintendents are utilizing specialized attachments, we believe the 'system concept' will continue to grow. As their primary turf vehicles are increasingly dedicated to specific tasks, we find that they are relying more heavily on lower cost, all-purpose utility vehicles for administrative and runabout work."

It is in the "runabout" area that the relatively inexpensive work/play all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are making their greatest impact. Even so, their use is not yet widespread in the day-

to-day tasks actually related to turf care.

The golf car market is also experiencing a profitable year with the outlook better than ever, partly due to changing tax laws.

"We see some buyers who are buying capital goods—such as golf cars—due to the probable change in tax laws during 1986," notes Sam W. Mays, marketing vice-president for Club Car, Augusta, Ga. "Of course, this applies to for-profit clubs, so they can achieve favored treatment with the investment tax credits and acceler-

ated depreciation."

Scott Pierce, president of American Continental, Wilmar, Minn., sees the same bull market as Mays.

"There's a lot of pent-up demand out there," he notes. "There's going to be quite a scramble for business, and next year will be an excellent one."

One other golf car manufacturer has experienced strong sales this year from buyers replacing entire fleets because of the strong economic conditions. "We expect this condition to continue at least over the near term," says Pierce.

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