

SPECIALIZING OR VERSATILITY

Some utility vehicle manufacturers are getting away from the one do-it-all vehicle to machines designed for specialized tasks. But by no means is it the end of the 'do-everything' vehicle.

Utility. Webster defines it as "capable of serving as a substitute in various roles..." Golf courses have long used turf vehicles described as "utility vehicles," and more, these vehicles are finding their way into the landscaping, parks and athletic field markets.

But a funny thing is happening along the way. Manufacturers are producing specialized utility vehicles. An oxymoron if there ever was one. "The trend toward specialization has been going on for several years," notes Bob Brophy of Cushman-Ryan, manufacturer of a number of popular utility vehicles.

One firm that is making a good living off this specialization is Hahn Agri-Turf. The company's Multi-Pro 44 is designed for application only. "We take the application part of the utility vehicle and specialize," explains Kent Hahn, general sales manager at Hahn.

"It used to be one vehicle for everything," Hahn continues. "But not any more." The Multi-Pro carries either a 160 gallon spray tank, a 1,000 lb. capacity hopper or a 10-inch deep bed for hauling up to 1,500 lbs. Hahn will release a version in January with a 35 hp engine capable of hauling a 300 gallon sprayer or a 3,500 lb. capacity hopper.

More specialization, just on a larger scale.

UV economics

What seems to be happening is that two markets are developing within the rapidly expanding UV/golf course market. On one hand there is the specialized vehicle manufacturer aiming mostly at the higher end golf courses with the big to megabuck budgets.

These courses can afford to get a vehicle to spray and topdress like Hahn's, another to haul material and others, like all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) or converted golf cars to transport people and small loads of material, Cushman's Brophy notes. With these courses, niches exist for all these products.

On the other hand is the medium or lower budget golf course. Superintendents needing to do their job with as much economy as possible can't afford three vehicles for five jobs. They need that one vehicle, like the E-Z-Go or Cushman, among others, to do all those jobs.

"What we have tried to do," explains Frank Smith, manager of Turf Products at E-Z-Go, "is take our vehicle and make it as versatile as possible so a golf course will not have to buy more than one."

"A lucrative golf course can afford to buy specialized vehicles," he says. "The average golf course can't afford that."

Smith says that E-Z-Go's intentions are to expand its present product line and accessories to those products.

Daihatsu's John Brozek agrees with this general use vehicle philosophy. He notes that Daihatsu produces its Hijet for longevity and low maintenance, providing a standard vehicle that can adapt to the end users' own needs.

"We are selling to a very educated individual today with very specific needs," Smith contends. "We need to meet those needs."

The utility vehicle market is still expanding rapidly and will continue to do so as long as the golf course construction boom continues. Companies such as Kawasaki, with its Mule 1000, are entering the market with regularity.

This greater awareness on the part of the superintendent, having evolved from the greenskeeper into an agronomist, coupled with increased competition has improved the quality of utility vehicles and given the superintendent more options.

There seems no reason to suspect a slowdown in the market or improvements, either. **LM**

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