



Midsize tractors can be used to mow large areas, as this JI Case model shows. But their versatility goes far beyond that function to encompass topdressing, tilling and grading.

MIDSIZE TRACTORS HERE TO STAY

Though not an answer to every landscaper's every need, midsize tractors have a versatility that makes them valuable in many situations.

by Jack Simonds, contributing editor

Midsize tractors have come into common use with landscapers and other green industry professionals in the last three to four years—not replacing their heftier counterparts, but augmenting other motor pool vehicles.

Midsize utility tractors (about 20 to 40 hp) are seen industry-wide as useful tools in the fleet; as money-savers which share a spot in the workload because of their versatility, which often includes a good selection of attachments requiring hydraulics.

Simply, midsize tractors are here to stay. They have relatively low sticker prices, longer service life, lessened maintenance costs and sustained and strong resale and trade-in value. Industry watchers and practitioners seem also to zero in on their wide range of workload capabilities.

With hydraulic attachments and implements, these performers can often replace single-purpose machines in some settings, but also are not the panacea for every situation.

Carter Winn of Winn Nursery of Virginia, Inc., Norfolk, sees the midsize Ford and Kubota lines as good combinations in his 80-man operation; in part for one easy-to-understand reason.

"The units simply fit better between the rows at the nursery while cultivating," he says.

Winn explains that his original intent in bringing in a midsize line was for top-dressing, tilling and grading in the landscaping portion of his operations; an idea he says works well.

"In many cases, I need something small and sturdy," says Winn.

But the almighty dollar also played a practical role in Winn's original decision to downsize.

At one time, Winn Nursery's buying budget simply didn't allow for the purchase of larger tractors, although he says both have a place in his opera-

tions, and Ford's larger line complements his midsize vehicles.

"For loading and other bigger jobs, you really do need a bigger tractor," says Winn. He finds attachments for the middle line are no more superior than offerings for larger tractors.

However, he recently traded in two midsize tractors to add a larger one to the fleet. The smaller models, he says, spent an inordinate amount of time in the shop when used heavily.

Dave Davies, superintendent at Dry Creek Golf Course in Galt, Calif., uses four midsize tractors—including John Deere models—daily on the tees, approaches and other open areas, as well as in tight spots.

"The midsize lines are easy on maintenance. They're easy to operate overall and they're dependable," says Davies.

He commonly uses a spreader, drill seeder, fairway blower and sweeper, and tree auger as attachments to his midsize tractors.

Davies likes the maneuverability inherent in the line. His motor pool also includes Ford models and a larger Case frontloader.

Easy maneuvering can and does lead to good productivity for his eight full-time staff, Davies has found.

"We enjoy a much greater efficiency when using midsize tractors. This is particularly true when we use our applicator attachments. It seems the crew does not spend as much time in and around things setting up, but more time on the actual tasks at hand," Davies says.

But smaller units aren't the total answer for his little corner of the world.

"Smaller units are sometimes just not capable of doing some of the things you want to do. Some tractors are too small, some are too big. It just depends on the kind of job you're undertaking," says Davies.

Mixing breeds also works well for

Bob Dickison, superintendent at the 27-hole Upper Montclair Country Club in Clifton, N.J.

His Jacobsen 42 hp model gives mowing in the rough throughout the season and leaf blowing clean-up in the fall.

"Cost was not a factor for me. I feel the size (of the Jacobsen) is adequate do the jobs required of it," says Dickison, who also has larger tractors in the fleet.

Sometimes, says Dickison, bigger tractors simply need not apply. "There can actually be too much power in the bigger lines," he adds.

Tim Thilo doesn't know of such problems.

"I've never worked with a bigger tractor, but I assume the operating costs would be more," says the superintendent of Peach Tree Country Club in Marysville, Calif.

Four midsize John Deere models are used to groom the 35-acre, 18-hole course located in the north central section of the state. He says the course is "greening up nicely."

Also happy with midsize maneuverability and flexibility of job functions, Thilo says daily use may also lessen the chances of compaction forming under the surface of roughs and fairways because of the vehicles' relative light weight.

Although one 20-year-old model spends some time in repair, the new John Deeres, he says, have proven little trouble in maintenance and are adept in carrying out fairway mowing, clearing tasks and other daily chores.

Landscaper and nurseryman Mark Ball, with Stonegate Nursery Center in Algonquin, Ill., has more than a dozen midsize tractors in his operations—all of them Fords.

"Small tractors don't always get the job done and the larger ones don't have the maneuverability on residential lots," says Ball. He has used Fords exclusively since the mid 1960s. **LM**



John Deere's 855 compact utility tractor.



Cushman's Front Line series with grass caddy.



From Ford New Holland, the Model 1220.



Case 1100 Series engines from 19 to 27.

Mid-size roster: ready to ride

Many players vie for a job in the starting lineup, so tractor manufacturers—veterans and rookies—are eager to supply the talent. From established hitters like JI Case, John Deere, Ford, Jacobsen and Kubota to Honda, the newest walk-on, comes no shortage of midsize tractors on the market.

Reasons vary for selecting one make or model over another, ranging from budget, reliability, product loyalty, ease of operation and operating cost concerns to attachment and servicing availability and performance.

Although not a complete list, here are some of the utility player choices for managers large and small.

JI Case introduces a new line of smaller tractors in its 1100 Series; machines equipped with 19-, 23- and 27-hp diesel engines. The tractors are designed with golf course, estate, park and farm settings in mind.

The three-cylinder engines feature direct fuel injection and a choice of mower sizes and arrangements are available. Also optional is an auxiliary hydraulic valve.

Front end loaders are available in the larger two models and backhoes; rotary tillers and

box scrapers are other options for the line.

Case's 95 Series ranges in models from 35 to 85 PTO hp and eight-speed creeper transmission. The company's Model 275 sports a 31 hp engine.

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Cushman's Front Line series offers both gas and diesel powered machines with a selection of mowers and maintenance tools to perform a variety of tasks. Power plants range from 22 and 27 hp gas models and 22 hp diesels, with both three and four-wheel drive options.

Mowing options include 60- and 72-inch front-mounted decks and a 61-inch flail mower. A 16-bushel grass caddy is also optional.

Among other attachments are a core destroyer, used after aeration which pulverizes cores. Cushman says the device covers 115,000 square feet per hour. Also available: a front-mounted 60-inch brush, snowblower and snow blade, tine rake dethatcher and front-mounted blower.

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John Deere offers two lines including midsize tractors for both grounds care and golf and turf settings. Three hydrostatic compact tractors equipped with

20 to 30 hp engines include the 755, 855 and 955 models. Five compact utility tractor models from 670 to 1070 are driven by 18.5 to 38.5 hp power plants. Two lawn and garden class tractors—the 400 and 300 series—come with 20, 18 and 16 hp engines.

All are diesel powered, and a wide array of "category one" attachments are available, including mowers, collection systems, aerators, loaders, snow blowers and throwers, backhoes, tillers, posthole diggers, front and rear blades, thatchers, dumpcarts, cultivators and other daily use options, offerings common among other manufacturers as well.

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Ford New Holland offers seven midsizers ranging in power from 14.7 to 42.6 hp and optional hydrostatic transmission on the four smaller models. Creeper gear in the larger tractors gives eight workings speeds less than 1 mph.

The all-diesel line also has different mower and landscaping optional attachments including mower configurations, many standard implements as well as disc harrows, cultivators, box scrapers, landscape rakes, windrow inverters



Gravelly midsizers come with many attachments.



Honda's H6522 diesel tractor enters the market.



Kubota's L4350 pulls a rotor cutter.



Ransomes markets the Turftrak system.



Jacobsen's G-20D utility turf tractor.

and hay and rake tedders.

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Gravelly's established smaller line varies from lower-powered 14 hp up to 24 hp models with Kohler-equipped engines. The 24 hp model is powered by an Onan engine.

More than 20 attachments are available and a mower surface cut of 100 inches is possible when the company's 44 inch wing mower works in tandem with the 60-inch center attachment. Snow blower, snow blade and power brush attachments, for parking lot maintenance are readily available as are three styles of grass catchers and four sizes of center mount mowers.

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Honda introduced the H6522 diesel tractor last year and full-scale marketing and sales are expected this season.

The 22 hp diesel accepts "category one" implements including a front-end loader, backhoe, snowthrower, dozer blades among other options.

The company says its three-cylinder, liquid-cooled power plant has a direct fuel injection system which saves fuel. Nine forward and three reverse speeds make up the transmission. Two- and four-wheel-drive versions are available.

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From Jacobsen comes both a traditional midsizer and a choice that defies the "looks-like-a-duck, walks-like-a-duck" rule.

The company's 45 hp G-20D diesel utility tractor has eight speeds and a three-point hitch. Creeper gear is also available on this lighter vehicle.

A double-take may be required for the company's G-4x4 Plus four-wheel drive utility tractor which features a low center of gravity and wide stance for stability. Beyond standard front-mount mower, brush and snow equipment, the G-4x4 Plus has front and rear three-point hitches and accepts an array of "category one" attachments. The power plant is a 32 hp Kubota diesel. Four reverse gears also are built in.

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Kubota offers wide choices in its B-Series and L-Series tractor lines and accessories.

New from the company are L-Series models L4350, L4850 and L5450 with power plants from 38 to 49 hp. The three diesels were introduced late last year.

Designed specifically for light construction, grounds maintenance and nursery and agricultural settings, the models

feature a wet clutch system Kubota says is designed for long life. Hydraulic transmissions are on all three models with a mechanical shuttle transmission option for the L4350. The complete Kubota tractor catalogue ranges in models from 10 to 85 hp.

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Ransomes offers its Turftrak System in three engine options including 16.5 hp Kubota diesel, 20 hp Onan gasoline and 21 hp Kubota gasoline engines. The line will be available at dealerships soon.

Among attachments are included a rotary broom, power blower, lawn sweeper, snowblower, dozer blades, sand trap blade, aerator, slip scoop and disc edger.

Mowing options including three hydraulically driven front and rear rollers and rotary mower decks in 60- and 72-inch widths.

Ransomes Jaguar 4000 mower series offers six models ranging in 17 hp to 27 hp selections. The 24 hp and 27 hp models are gas-powered; the 17 hp and 23 hp feature diesel power plants.

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—Jack Simonds □