



TRUCK *talk*

BY VICKY POULSEN

Three landscape company managers talk about what they expect from a good truck

Landscape professionals want tough, dependable and low maintenance trucks. And they're doing everything they can to get a good return on their investment by staying with proven brands, sticking to a stringent preventive maintenance plan and using quality mechanics.

Landscape pros also want trucks that get the job done in the shortest amount of time while adjusting to the handling styles of many operators.

Depending on its reliability, a truck can be a landscape pro's best friend or worst enemy. But once you've owned a great truck, it's hard to forget it. We asked three landscape managers to talk trucks with us, and here's what they had to say:

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LARGE CONTRACTOR

Name: Preston Leyshon

Title: Equipment Manager

Company: Chapel Valley Landscape Co.

Location: Headquartered in Woodbine, MD, with a branch office in Dulles, VA, and satellite offices in Bethesda, MD and Crystal City, VA. Target markets include Baltimore, Washington, DC metropolitan areas and northern Virginia.

2000 revenues: \$21 million

Business mix: Mostly commercial

Employees: 300-plus total employees/130 year-round

Company profile: Founded in 1968 by J. Landon Reeve, IV, the company provides commercial and residential landscape services, including consultation, design/build, installation,

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landscape maintenance and irrigation and water management. Specialties include tree preservation, Colorsclaping™, landscape lighting and hardscape construction.

Trucks: Fleet arsenal includes 24 cars, 98 trucks (S-10s to Tandem), 32 tractors (Kubota, John Deere, Ford, New Holland), 35 equipment trailers (four enclosed) and 503 small engine units. "We have a truck that's 25 years old and has over 250,000 miles on it, and another truck with over 300,000 miles. A good preventive maintenance program with regular oil changes and wheel alignments to prevent premature tire wear is key to their longevity. Also, our trucks are like rolling billboards, so we always make sure they're kept clean and shiny."

Favorite features: Automatic transmission, tool boxes and sideboards are must-have features.

Finance method: Vehicles are purchased and then leased back to the company.

Dream truck: Four-door, heavy-duty, low-profile truck with lots of crew space.

MEDIUM CONTRACTOR

Name: Rich Rivera
Title: Grounds Superintendent
Company: Joliet Jr. College
Location: Joliet, IL

2000 revenues: n/a

Business mix: Through a work order system, the Grounds Department provides many services from mowing and trimming to snow and ice removal to blacktopping and striping.

Employees: Five full-time, five-part time and nine student assistant groundskeepers.



Company profile: America's oldest public community college established in 1901, Joliet's main campus is nestled on a 400-acre scenic tract of land which embraces two 80-acre farm fields, a lake, an 11-acre arboretum, three miles of nature trails, rows of 200-year-old oak trees, a natural prairie area, seven acres of athletic fields and 10 tennis courts. Of those 400 acres, about 108 is devoted to turf, plant beds and landscape maintenance areas. His crew also maintains two other Joliet Jr. College branches in Romeoville and downtown Joliet.

Trucks: "We use a 1989 3/4-ton Chevy pickup with 1,000-lb. liftgate/towing package and snow removal and four-wheel drive capabilities; two 1993 one-ton Ford F350 pickups, one of which is equipped with liftgate/towing package and the other with a V-box spreader for the winter; 1996 one-ton Chevy pickup and 1999 GMC 3500 Series, both outfitted with liftgate/tow packages and snow plow. My oldest truck is a 1984 2-1/2-ton GMC series 5000 dump truck. We also run

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two Cushman's. All my pickup trucks are diesels and my dump truck is gasoline-fueled."

Favorite features: "My liftgates are real back-savers. The dump bed on our new Cushman saves us time on the job. Automatic transmission is a must."

Finance method: Purchased based on budgetary constraints and a bid system.

Dream truck: "If cost was not an object, I'd love to have pickups with dump beds and a dump truck with automatic transmission and split rear axle with a nursery style bed."

SMALL CONTRACTOR

Name: Ryan Hughes

Title: President

Company: Hughes Nursery, Inc.

Location: Odessa, FL

Business mix: Mostly commercial

Employees: 35

Company profile: Hughes Nursery, Inc. was established in 1972 as a family-owned landscape company. It was primarily involved in landscape, irrigation and sod installation, and now has expanded into other facets of the industry with divisions in lawn maintenance, grading and excavating, hardscaping, exterior lighting and waterscaping.

Trucks: Two Mack mini-wheelers, four Ford F-450's, one F-650, two F-250's, one F-350, four F-150's and two Ford Explorers.

Favorite features: "The most valuable truck we use today is the Ford F-650. It was custom built to accommodate our needs for large landscaping contracts. It also can carry a load that would normally require two trucks, and has a crew cab with seating capacity for seven, perfect for one crew. It's capable of hauling two pallets of mulch, 300 to 400 one-gallon plants, 8- to 10-ft. trees or palms and still has power to pull a 820 TCM loader. It gives us the ability to increase our bottom line because we can trans-

port more product, haul our equipment and transport our entire crew."

Finance method: "We always buy new vehicles. Cost considerations are based upon the task the truck will perform and the amount of anticipated use."

Dream truck: "One that didn't require any fuel to operate — a truck that could run on electric or solar energy would be fantastic. The increase in the cost of fuel over the last year has had a severe impact on our bottom line."



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