

Got it, Use it

BY VICKY POULSEN

Three landscape contractors discuss getting the most out of construction and installation equipment

Every landscape contractor knows that if his equipment "ain't workin', it ain't makin' money." That's why they look for equipment that's versatile enough to handle many tasks and productive enough to pay for itself in a short time.

Equipment with those qualities does exist in this industry, as you can learn by reading what the manufacturers have to say and reviewing the latest products in the pages that follow. First, read about what types of construction and installation equipment work best for three contractors we interviewed.

▲ PHOTO COURTESY TORO

LARGE CONTRACTOR

Name: Frank Mariani

Title: President

Company: Mariani Landscape

Location: Lake Bluff, IL

2000 revenues: \$23 million

Business mix: 97% commercial

Employees: 320

Company profile: Founded by Vito Mariani, Sr. in 1958, the company also has a satellite office in Bollingbrook, IL, to service the western suburbs. Located in Lake Bluff is its design/build and landscape management maintenance divisions hailed as its top two "profit centers." Both departments are operated with their own staffs. Maintenance crew sizes range from two and five people and construction crews may need between four or five, depending on the job. Crews may even be combined since construction projects can range from \$2,000 to \$2 million per job.

Construction/installation equipment: "We have close to 100 trucks. For safety rea-

sons, we decided eight years ago that any truck we purchased would have a crew cab and four doors. All our trucks are equipped with an enclosed trailer and outfitted with every piece of equipment necessary for a job. All equipment is turned in twice a week for maintenance. We have five full-time mechanics on staff. Our loading crews pull up to a marked spot near our garage where our trailers are undone and add a new set of equipment. We pattern our maintenance.

program after UPS's preventive maintenance program. We run a 4900 series International four-door dump truck equipped with a 12-ft. contractor's box and a side lift gate that can lift almost 3,000 lbs. We like our Case skid steers because we do a lot of high-end residential work that requires a greater lifting capacity. We've also had one of our semi-tractors custom built with a heavy laid-up crane."

Best features: "Our dump truck

lets us load and unload plant material without damaging any of the plants. Also, the lift gates on our construction trucks save us a lot of time and labor."

Making a profit: "In our industry, it's important to follow a schedule where your crew is at the job on time. We pride ourselves in handling unapplied labor or labor that can't be billed to a job. We also have all our materials direct-shipped to the site."

Purchase method: "We have our own leasing company."

Equipment needs: "This year, we added seven maintenance crews, which means seven more vehicles, seven more trailers and all the equipment that makes up a maintenance crew. We also retire about 10% of our equipment a year to keep our stock fresh. Every 10 years, we have a new equipment base. We're buying based on need, and can identify that need far enough in advance."

Dream machine: "We would

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love a skid steer that was a little more compact but with the lifting capacity of a larger machine. I don't know if that's possible."

MEDIUM CONTRACTOR

Name: Billy Gray

Title: General Manager and partner

Company: The Southern Landscape Group

Location: Pinehurst, N.C.

2000 revenues: \$1.4 million

Business mix: 81% residential

Employees: 23

Company profile: Company started in April 1999. Landscape construction encompasses 68% of business, while the rest is maintenance. Crews usually consist of two people but, for construction, the crew size can vary from two to five. Each crew is headed by a supervisor.

Construction/installation equipment:

Dump trucks, dedicated spray vehicles, pickup trucks, a van dedicated for irrigation purposes, Bobcat 763 and a Toro Dingo, both with various attachments, New Holland and Mustang skid steer loaders, Ditch Witch trencher, and the King Of Spades, one of Gray's favorite tools.

Best features: "We like to use equipment that can perform many tasks. With the Dingo and Bobcat, you can switch out of various attachments. We also try to keep



all our attachments centralized on a trailer with the Dingo and the Bobcat. We'll pull the trailer to the job site and hook from one attachment to another. The same goes for the Bobcat. We like to take our loaders into small areas without disturbing the existing soil."

Making a profit: "We purchase all multi-function equipment that's easy to operate and efficient. Our employees are more productive and the morale is high because they are less tired at day's end."

Purchase method: "Always buy new."

Equipment needs: "We believe in preventive maintenance and regular cleaning of our equipment and vehicles. For bigger repairs, we take our vehicles to one centrally located outside mechanic. We have all vehicles professionally cleaned bi-weekly because our company is big on image. New purchases depend on what our needs will be for the following year."

Dream machine: "A small loader that can pick up heavier material and move a substantial amount of weight."

SMALL CONTRACTOR

Name: Richard and Ann Marie Breimann

Title(s): Co-owners

Company: Breimann's Landscaping, Inc.

Location: Allentown, NJ

2000 revenue: \$350,000

Business mix: 75% residential

Employees: 8

Company profile: Founded in 1986, the company provides a 50/50 mix of landscape and maintenance services performed, mostly, by three-man crews.



Equipment: A dump truck with an aluminum bed, Kubota tractor/front-end loader, a roto-tiller, a bed edger, several barrels and shovels.

Best features: "The tractor has helped with loading topsoil and mulch. The new bed edger lets us prep beds in 15 minutes. The roto-tiller has also helped us get through some of the heavier clay soils."

Making a profit: "It's important to order your materials ahead of time. I personally pick up our plant materials from the nursery before heading to a job, and I always make sure we're getting a good price."

Finance method: "We initially lease, then purchase later."

Equipment needs: "We usually base any purchases on the contracts we currently have. We plan to offer irrigation services, which means we'll need to invest in a trencher and other pieces of equipment. We'd also like to get a sod cutter."

Dream machine: "A Finn mulch blower. It would free me up and maybe allow me to stretch the season by subcontracting it out to other companies."

Rough and tough

Manufacturers tell about the versatility, toughness and power contractors want in construction/installation equipment

BY VICKY POULSEN

Construction and installation equipment versatility makes it hard for contractors to say "no" when it's time to buy. With so much popularity, manufacturers are introducing new equipment that can handle more add-ons.

We went right to the source — the manufacturers and here's what they had to say:

ALLMAND BROTHERS, INC.

Rick Veenstra, Product Manager

Product: TLB loader-backhoe tractors

Design trends: "We have five loader-backhoe tractors that can perform many jobs traditionally reserved for larger machines."

Accessories & attachments: "One new feature that is not currently available is a combination loader bucket and grapple fork that can pick up and transport debris."

Special features: "We have quick-attach plates for loader arms that permit the use of pallet forks or a hydraulically driven auger. The TLBs are available with an auxiliary hydraulics circuit. The front loader joystick control has a built-in bucket float position for quicker, more precise grading and back filling. The backhoe can also be equipped with an optional hydraulic breaker."

Finance terms: Our experience tells us that many contractors lease their machinery, but others purchase them outright."

BOBCAT

Paul Anderson, Attachment Business Manager

Product: Skid steer loader

Design trends: "Users want tools that help them do jobs faster and more comfortably. That's why operator cab options such as air conditioning in our larger Bobcat skid steer loaders are so popular."

Attachments & accessories: "Landscapers want flexible tools, and the compact Bobcat 463 is ideal because of its size and versatility."

Finance terms: "Contractors generally purchase the smaller equipment."

Components and accessories for skid-steer loaders are shown on the production line at Bobcat's factory.

THE BOSS

Rick Robitaille, Marketing Manager

Product: Skid steer power-V plow

Design trends: "Contractors want attachments with greater control and versatility. The trend is to make hitch systems easy. We have also introduced a poly-power-V multi-position plow for pickup trucks. Plows made of polyethylene are becoming popular."

Attachments & accessories: "They offer the power, control and versatility contractors need to work more effectively than with traditional skid steer attachments."

Special features: "Our skid steer power-V plow adapts to any position — V-, scoop, straight or in between. It features a hydraulic side-to-side tilt option."

JOHN DEERE

Kyle Phillips, Product Specialist/Skid Steer

Product: Skid Steer 200 Series (240 & 250)

Design trends: "Contractors want machines that are powerful, versatile and compact. We've designed our products based on what our customers in the field have told us."

Accessories & attachments: "Over 100 attachments fit on these skid steers. This may allow contractors to take on more business. With today's tight labor market, they need equipment that can do many tasks quickly and efficiently."

Special features: "All our models feature our Quick-Tatch system, which uses a self-cleaning, rotating paw to stop dirt from clogging levers. Also, contractors want equip-

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 ment that's small but powerful."

Finance terms: "We probably see more attachments rented than skid steers because it's often cheaper to rent different attachments that you use only once a year."

JOHN DEERE

Terry Brown, Product Manager/Compact Tractors

Product: 4000 series compact utility tractors

Design trends: "Contractors want versatility, convenience and serviceability."

Accessories & attachments: "Adjustable sway bars make attachment and removal of implements to the three-point hitch easy."

Special features: "A well-designed product should have a dual element air cleaner with a primary air filter on the outside. We've equipped these tractors with an air cleaner restriction indicator that warns the operator when the air cleaner needs to be serviced and put all essential service checks on one side of the machine."

Finance terms: "Many contractors rent equipment locally, then make a purchasing decision."

DITCH WITCH

Richard Greenwell, Product Manager/Compact Line

Brent Bolay, Product Manager/Heavy-Duty Line

Product(s): 3700 compact trencher; 1030/1230 pedestrian trencher; 5700

trencher; HT25 light utility trencher

Design trends: "Landscapers use our machines for installing irrigation systems, fencing and electric lights. Compact, light utility vehicles are also important."

Attachments & accessories: "Our HT25 can be equipped with a cab, backhoe, backfill blade and one of three available digging attachments."

Special features: "Our customers wanted a trencher that would go through a 36-in. wide gate, so we developed the 35-1/2-in. wide HT25 with zero turn radius."

Finance terms: "Large contractors typically buy equipment while smaller ones rent."

FINN CORPORATION

Dana Ellefson, Director/maintenance product division

Product: Eagle skid steer 250 (compact)

Design trends: "Contractors want units that can get into tight places but have as much power as the larger units."

Accessories & attachments: "The most com-



mon attachments are augers and power heads. For waterscapes, you can dig 36-in. holes with our machines and use a trencher with a reversed chain to sculpt the sides."

Special features: "Our universal faceplate allows the use of all standard mini-skid steer attachments currently on the market. Another important feature is the ability to haul the compact skid steer with up to 10 attachments on a trailer."

Finance terms: "We see a mix of both leasing and purchasing."

HUSQVARNA

Ken Taylor, Business Unit Manager/Commercial Lawn & Garden

Product: Power Cutter

Design trends:

"Our sod cutter offers an exclusive 4-wheel drive design, which increases traction and requires less operator effort. Our Power Cutters have an ergonomically designed handle and "air injection" system."



Attachments & accessories: "End-users want machines that can perform multiple tasks."

Special features: "With our Power Cutters, a contractor can change the type of blade to perform different tasks or purchase a portable cart and water cart for larger tasks."

Finance terms: "Some contractors believe in leasing this type of equipment; others purchase outright or look for financing options."

KANGA

Brent Matthews, Vice President

Product: Mini-skid steer loader

Design trends: "There will be smaller versions of these machines getting into smaller areas."

Attachments & accessories: "We design and manufacture most of our attachments, so they're built to work with this machine. A hot item is our new Kanga Kid, a 30-in.-wide, 13-hp skid steer that can fit into tiny places."

Finance terms: "The average contractor will keep a machine for three to five years. When they update, they purchase a new one."

TEXTRON GOLF, TURF & SPECIALTY PRODUCTS

Peter Whurr, Vice President/Product Management

Products: Cushman, Turf-Truckster, Cushman, Commander, Ryan Jr. Sod Cutter

Design trends: "We're interested in designing equipment that reduces noise, eliminates noxious fumes and features a tighter gap between service intervals. We're also interested in operator comfort and safety."

Attachments & accessories: "The back end of our trucks can take a PTO, so any PTO-driven piece of equipment up to a certain horsepower can be used with this product."

Special features: "With our sod cutter, controls are within easy reach. With our Truckster, the carrying capacity is 2,500 lbs. for the three-wheel version and 2,850 lbs. for the four-wheel version."

Finance terms: "We see a mixture of both leasing and purchasing."

TORO

Marc Bowers, Marketing Manager/Toro

Sitework systems

Product: Dingo compact utility loaders

Design trends: "There are an ever-expanding number of attachments for compact utility loaders that increase the number of applications, and manufacturers now offer walk-behind track-driven units."

Attachments & accessories: "With over 40 attachments available, a compact utility loader can accomplish anything on a job site. Some of the more popular attachments are the trencher, auger, ad-

justable forks, leveler, multi-purpose tool and buckets."

Special features: "Toro has introduced the Dingo 420 TX, a walk-behind, dedicated track drive machine that provides more ground engaging, power reducing slippage, single-hand steering and joystick-operated loader arms."

Finance terms: "The most economical, long-term solution is to purchase a compact utility loader with three or four attachments. An advantage of leasing is that the company or person leasing the equipment is often responsible for maintenance and repairs." **LM**

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All power

Allmand Brothers, Inc.'s TLB-220 compact tractor loader backhoe can maneuver in tight areas. It's 3,100 lbs. and features a Robin EH65D air-cooled gasoline engine that generates 20.5 hp at 3,600 rpm. A Kohler 20-hp air-cooled engine is optional. The backhoe features 2,875-lbs. of digging force as well as an 8-ft., 4-in. digging depth. For more information contact Allmand Brothers, Inc. at 800/562-1373 or www.allmand.com. Circle 281

The ace of spades?

Bamboo Gardener's King Of Spades is designed for harvesting or planting trees, shrubs and bamboo. Made of 1/8-in. thick steel, the blade is ground to a self-sharpening tip. Spades come available in a traditional straight blade or diamond point. A 13-in. or 15-in. blade length is available in both designs. For more information contact Bamboo Gardener at 206/782-3490 or www.bamboogardener.com. Circle 282

No small deal

Bobcat Company's ultra compact 463 skid steer loader nicknamed the "Mini-Bob" is the smallest

model in Bobcat's loader line. It has a 700-lb. rated operating capacity. Measuring 3-ft. wide and 6-ft. tall, the 15.7-hp loader can power numerous attachments with its 10-gal.-per-minute hydraulic flow and 2,450 psi hydraulic system pressure. For more information contact a Bobcat dealer or visit www.bobcat.com. Circle 283

Power plow

The Boss skid steer Power-V plow adapts quickly and easily to any position. Designed for moving snow or dirt, it can also be used for light trenching, grading, leveling and bulldozing. For more information contact Boss at 800/286-4155 or www.bosspow.com. Circle 284

Ditch your problems

Ditch Witch's HT25 is a compact light utility trencher that, at 35 1/2 in. wide, can access confined areas. It can be equipped with a cab, backhoe, backfill blade and one of three available digging attachments: centerline, wide centerline and offset. An optional drilling attachment allows contractors to make installations under sidewalks and driveways. It's mounted on rubber tracks with hydrostatic ground drive and independent track controls. For more information call the Ditch Witch at 800/654-6481. Circle 285

Skid steer here

John Deere's 240 and 250 skid steers feature a low center of gravity, high ground clearance and long reach. The 240 features a 53-hp (gross) John Deere 3029D engine. With almost 4,200-ft.-lb. of torque, the 240 has a rated operating load of 1,500 lbs., a lift height of 9-ft., 6-in., a 29-in. reach and breakout force of 5,500 lbs. The 250 is equipped with a 64.4-hp (gross) John Deere

3029T engine with a 1,750-lb. load capacity and a bucket breakout force of 5,500 lbs. For more information write John Deere at P.O. Box 12217, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709. Circle 287

Hole everything

Husqvarna's 19-Series aerator features a free-wheeling outer tine system, minimizes turf damage around corners and in tight areas, and features variable depth to 3 in. It comes available with Briggs & Stratton or Honda engines from 3.5 to 4 hp. For more information contact Husqvarna at 704/597-5000. Circle 286



Quite a load

Kanga's mini skid steer loader is a compact, multi-purpose machine that's ideal for laying turf and drainage, trenching, tree planting, digging/leveling/transporting soil, fencing post holes, installing irrigation systems, horizontal boring and snow plowing. For more information contact Kanga at 918/252-7930 or www.kanga-loader.com. Circle 288

Fine line

Kubota's L48 compact loader/utility tractor line includes the L48TL tractor/loader and L48TLB tractor/loader/backhoe. The L48 features higher horsepower. With the loader and backhoe mounted, length is 241 in., width is 75 in. and overall height is 113 in. It has a maximum bucket lift capacity of 2,540 lbs. and 3,000 lbs. of lift capacity at the pivot pins. For more information contact Kubota Tractor Corporation at 800/458-2682, ext. 900 or www.kubota.com. Circle 289

