

Equipment Ownership 101: Utility Vehicles Divide And Conquer Tasks

(NAPSA)—Life in the country can be really good when the right equipment is available to maintain the extra property. And thanks to the versatility and functionality of today's utility vehicles, rural homeowners are getting outdoor chores done faster, and letting the good times roll.

Kirby Williams, who has a 136-acre hay operation near Powhatan, Va., uses his two John Deere Gator™ HPX utility vehicles to run errands on the farm and to hunt.

"I get just as much enjoyment out of them running around as using them for work," says Williams. "When I go hunting, I can put a dog box on my Gator and carry them where pickups can't go."

Williams grew up with outdoor equipment and knew how to use it. But for homeowners new to the utility vehicle scene, here are some things to consider before making a purchase.

What Do You Want To Accomplish?

- Tasks—how you will use the vehicle
- Size—Tight on space? A compact utility vehicle can fit under a deck or inside a garage
- Weight—If your cargo is paving stones and deck materials, you need something that can haul at least 500 pounds
- Four-wheel drive—This is a must if you plan to operate frequently in mud and rough terrain

Basic Vehicle Attributes

Since John Deere created the utility vehicle segment more than 15 years ago, the market has exploded with products and manufacturers. Narrow your options by considering the following:

- Power and torque—Make



Many of today's large property owners are new to the country, which means it's even more important to research the equipment, manufacturers and dealers before buying.

sure the vehicle has the power you need. Otherwise you may overuse it, risking expensive repair and downtime. Use the base model of the vehicle as the starting point of your decision-making process.

- Service points—Look for easy accessibility to service points

Most service points on Gator utility vehicles can be found under the cargo box

- Cargo box—Make sure it offers adequate capacity, solid construction and a lower load height for easier loading and unloading

- Terrain capability—Look for adequate ground clearance, good power, proper tires and true four-wheel drive if necessary

- Durability and reliability—Examine the vehicle frame construction for a strong core

- Creature comforts—Bucket seats, operator space, ergonomic controls and 12-volt outlets enhance operator comfort

At 6 feet, 2 inches tall, Kevin Koch of Charlotte Court House, Va., appreciates the legroom in his John Deere Gator HPX 4x4 Diesel utility vehicle.

"It's really comfortable, which is important when you spend a lot of time on your vehicle," says Koch, adding that he switched from a competitive model in part because the competitor's equipment didn't fit his large frame.

Attachments And Accessories

More than 100 attachments and accessories make utility vehicles among the most versatile machines on the market:

- Front and rear receiver hitches—Push or pull anytime, anywhere

- Power lift kit for cargo box—Provides convenient unloading of material

- 25- and 40-gallon sprayers—Allows for consistent water or chemical applications

- Bed liners—Minimizes wear and tear of cargo box

- Blades—Efficiently moves dirt or snow

- Utility carts—Haul more with fewer trips

- Winch—Pull and lift heavy objects efficiently and safely

- Light kit—More visibility for early and late operation

- Full cab enclosures—Operator comfort in all seasons

Dealer Support

A dealer can make or break your ownership experience:

- Talk to your dealer—Find out what services are provided, including parts availability, financing, warranties and maintenance

- Test drive—Try different vehicles, so you don't invest in the wrong machine

- Ask about service—Get a machine that's rugged and dependable, but also find a reliable dealer who can deliver quick and thorough service when those situations arise.



Note to Editor: This is the seventh installment in an ongoing series that provides helpful tips and advice to rural homeowners who are first-time equipment buyers.