

Toy, Stealth Craft, Workhorse

By Gloria Hildebrandt

There are times when you need a tractor on a rural property, preferably one with a bucket at the front or a digger at the rear. There are big jobs that need the muscle of a tractor. But I really dislike the noise it makes. Turning it on shatters any silence and announces to anyone nearby that you're going to get busy. You have to wear ear muffs in order not to destroy your hearing. But when I have a little job to do or need to zip back to the house or barn for something, it's annoying to have to drive a roaring machine.

My partner Mike first looked into utility task vehicles or UTVs but all of them seemed to be fossil-fuel powered with a loud engine when we were looking for a quiet ride. He then started researching electric golf carts. He found out that used ones are available that can be altered and customized pretty much how you want. I need a vehicle that can ride over our rocky property. I want it to be able to carry some tools and firewood, both cut and ready for stacking, but also for taking long pieces back to the wood-cutting area. The property has a hill with a few paths going up so it would need to be able to go up the short but rather steep inclines. It would be great if it could pull a little wagon and its load. I liked the idea of a golf car that could take two people sitting beside each other, making it more sociable than a tractor.

Sometimes we're working far from the house and someone, usually a female, needs to use the bathroom. Males have that easier in the woods. Or someone wants a

bottle of water. Or a hat or a necessary tool. With a tractor you're roaring back and forth on two more annoying trips. You tend to walk instead of using the machine. But that can get tiring especially if you are carrying something heavy or awkward. You can wear yourself out on these errands, leaving less energy for the work in the forest you actually want to do.

The virtual whisper-silence of an electric vehicle is a dream. You can return to the barn or house easily, quietly, effortlessly. It's a pleasure to ride. And simple! An on-off switch, a forward-reverse toggle, a pedal to push to go and a brake with a parking brake, plus a button for LED lights in the dark, is all you need to use. There's no maintenance with various liquids to measure and refill. Sometimes you need to plug it in to recharge it, but our golf car runs a very long time on a charge. Even after a day's use, the battery charge has barely been used, but we recharge it fully, just to keep it in top power.

Mike talked with Skylawn Equipment of Stoney Creek to customize a used Club Car Precedent 48-volt electric golf car. We can now attach a small tractor wagon full of firewood, or a large road-worthy trailer or a heavy hydraulic wood splitter and the car pulls it effortlessly, even uphill, without any strain.

The Downside

The downsides have nothing to do with the vehicle itself. They involve our paths, which are slightly smaller than I'd like for the golf car, originally designed for a wide-open golf course, not a woodland. We've been cutting the paths wider and taller, so that tree



The customized golf car with raised base, heavy-duty tires and cargo box. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

Customized Features

We had the following changes made to the golf car:

- Upgraded to a 5.3kWh lithium battery
- Added front brush guard
- Installed lift kit to raise the base of car six inches
- Upgraded to 23" heavy-duty all-terrain tires
- Added hitch receiver for towing
- Installed cargo box

branches don't whack us in the face as we pass or crash into the roof of the vehicle. And I'd like our paths to be smoother, so that the car can go even more quietly, without rattling and bouncing over rocks and tree roots. Actually, what causes the noise are the chainsaw, clippers and other things that rattle in the back of the car. We're working at covering the bumpy spots with wood chips.

At the end of a work day, it's a pleasure to take the car for a quiet tootle around the property. Like a stealth bomber, it's so quiet that

squirrels on the paths are taken by surprise, yet move fearlessly out of the way. We can hear birds singing, breezes blowing and other sounds of nature. It's also fun to take a guest on a tour of the property. We can have a conversation while showing various parts of the property.

The purchase of this electric vehicle has been life transforming!

Technical info provided by Mike Davis. He and Gloria Hildebrandt are co-founders and co-publishers of Niagara Escarpment Views.