

CARRY THAT LOAD



The RoadLoad transporter carries a team of 3 in the cab and the John Deere 1445 mower on the bed. "The maintenance work is a high pressure contract and the self-contained transporter enables us to keep production up," says Richard Gardiner (inset).



A Surrey firm of landscape and grounds maintenance contractors uses a purpose-built transporter for a specific operation.

Norris & Gardiner runs two types of vehicle transport systems, a self-contained load transporter (LT) and a 4x4-trailer combination. "Each suits a specific aspect of the business grounds maintenance operations," explains Richard Gardiner, managing director of the Woking-based family firm that was established in 1964. The LT is dedicated to carrying the staff and machinery involved in the highways and urban area maintenance contract the company has with Runnymede Council, which involves mowing 36ha of grass annually throughout the borough.

"We run the contract with a self-contained 3-man team with a ride-on rotary mower and trimmers and blowers, and we've been using a purpose-built LT for the past 15 years as it is less cumbersome than a 4x4 and trailer," Mr Gardiner explains.

"The highways contract involves mowing and trimming or blowing for a distance of some 400m, when one man goes back and brings up the support vehicle. This is more awkward with a

4x4 and trailer combination capable of carrying the equipment as it is so long."

Norris & Gardiner's current LT was purpose-built by RoadLoad of East Harling, Norfolk, and has been on the fleet since April. "Due to the increase in size and weight of the mowing equipment, we were pushing the weight limit on our previous carrier. It is important that all the men on the team can drive the transporter without an O-licence, so we wanted a vehicle that gave us an increase in payload but not a higher gross vehicle weight," explains Mr Gardiner.

Built to his specified dimensions, the vehicle is based on a long-wheelbase Ford Transit. In the loading position, the bed is lowered. This action and shape of the bed, which curves downwards behind the rear wheels, enables the integral ramps to be kept short and the vehicle compact. "The design makes loading and unloading the mower quick and easy, and non-removable ramps can't be stolen," Mr Gardiner says.

To increase the vehicle's self-sufficiency, Mr Gardiner also specified a 2.1m wide x 1.1m deep, secure and shelved,

storage box located behind the cab. An additional feature, and one suggested by RoadLoad, is a 40-litre capacity diesel tank and an electrically powered pump and nozzle, belly mounted on the chassis either side of the vehicle.

At £26,500, the initial cost of the RoadLoad was higher than the probable £25,500 for a 4.3m trailer and a short-wheelbase 4x4 capable of towing it. The RoadLoad is probably more fuel efficient, but "not massively", says Mr Gardiner, who justifies the investment in the vehicle on a productivity basis. "It's the smallest possible LT we could get capable of carrying the maintenance team and their equipment," he says.

"Output is increased as the men can do the work in a continuous run and move quickly between sites. And it gives us flexibility in terms of drivers; fewer and fewer are qualified to use trailers on a car licence. The on-board diesel tank also contributes to productivity, it probably saves about 2hrs a week."

Mr Gardiner says the vehicle's only potential disadvantage is, due to the type of work it does, it has limited use through the year. "But," he points out, "the dormant period is getting far shorter, we're now mowing into November. We'll be able to use it during the winter to move machinery such as compact tractors and cultivators." ●

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