



Ducks Maintenance Crew Preserving the Fleet

Playfully referred to as the “Quack Staff,” the crew responsible for maintaining the fleet of more than 90 Original Wisconsin Ducks has one of the most important jobs in the operation. After all, much of the safety and integrity of the business is in their hands. Maintaining these unique vehicles is something that takes great care and skill. It’s an attribute that has been honed over time by those who first began maintaining these original World War II military craft and is being passed down to new generations of Duck “doctors.”

The commitment to a high-quality of craftsmanship is evidenced in Original Wisconsin Ducks’ exemplary safety record. For more than 65 years, this nostalgic attraction has safely carried millions of visitors in and around the scenic trails of the Wisconsin River where it winds through the ever-popular Wisconsin Dells. But getting a Duck into tip-top shape to carry passengers is no small feat.

While these recreational tour Ducks were never in the war, they are rarely found in operational condition. Most were surplus vehicles that remained stateside and were in good shape to start. Over the years, Original Wisconsin Ducks has procured the vehicles from various collectors and operators, sometimes traveling overseas to get them.

It takes a staff of mechanics two months to prepare a newly acquired Duck for its new tour of duty shuttling vacationers. The Ducks often require corresponding parts, which were predominantly packaged from 1950 to 1952 and stored in Europe. Today several parts are custom made because they are no longer available. When finished, the Ducks are essentially like new again, except for some modifications for non-military use such as adding seats and a special canopy to shade passengers on a hot summer day.

Since its inception in 1946, Original Wisconsin Ducks has recruited an impressive crew of maintenance personnel who have truly become experts at preserving this novel fleet. The operation has eight full-time maintenance employees who work on the Ducks year-round. They have a combined 155 plus years of experience working daily on the Ducks and are likely the foremost authorities on these distinct military craft.

The attention to detail on maintenance is a daily task. Every active Duck’s hull is checked daily during the season. All moving parts, driver and rudder shaft are greased daily and bilge pumps are checked weekly. Anytime a repair is made on the water-related mechanics of an Original Wisconsin Duck, the vehicle is tested in the water before being sent out on a tour.

In addition, over the years, the Original Wisconsin Ducks maintenance staff has worked extensively on mechanical, structural and safety upgrades to the vehicles to improve the performance and viability of the fleet. For example, the Ducks are being converting to power steering and have been outfitted with disc brakes for maneuverability. Extensive new safety features have also been implemented, including adding fuel shut-off valves, electrical power shut-offs, additional bilge pumps and breakaway canopies, all of which could aid in an emergency. New sensors for fumes, high-water and fire are also among the new safety equipment.

With this dedication to detail and quality workmanship, Original Wisconsin Ducks has grown to a fleet of 90 Ducks, the largest amphibious tour duck operation in the United States, and likely has earned its own place in the history books.