

So what is “The Ultimate Utility Snowmobile”?



SkiDoo

or



Polaris ?

Because of Winona’s New Vision’s Project grant award, we will be updating our snowmobile arsenal with a brand new 2020 utility snowmobile. This sled will be primarily used to pull a few different size groomers, opening up some of the new backcountry trails for ski, snowshoe, and fat bike, as well as transporting people and materials during Winona events. I quickly learned that this selection is a complicated one, leading me to the question - what is the best utility sled in the market?

Big time horsepower, towing capacity, available options such as special hitches and lighting, wide, long, aggressive tracks, and extreme cooling capability, all play an important role, and all must be present for the machine to do what we are asking it to do.

The search was on, and like most of us do these days, I first turned to the web for information. I googled it! What are other clubs using? What I quickly learned, is that most clubs have turned to UTV’s to groom their “smaller” woodland trails or invested in snocats. Very few clubs still use snowmobiles for grooming their trails. I completely understand this switch, we have done the same, primarily using a tracked Polaris Ranger to set up our ski trails. What separates us from most clubs across the USA, is that we have become a very popular destination for winter fat bikers, and we continue to expand our “single track” trail systems and will continue to do so.

So....we need a snowmobile.

Google “Utility Snowmobile”, and you get a few very worthy options. After scouring industry websites, groomer forums, Youtube, and spec pages, I narrowed my choices down to two - the Polaris Titan, and the Ski Doo Expedition. If you are wondering why I eliminated the Yamaha Viking, The Arctic Cat Bearcat, or the Ski Doo Skandic, these are all solid machines, and capable, but do not, in my opinion, reach the levels of the Expedition from Ski Doo, or the Titan from Polaris.

The Titan sounds amazing. It has some serious horsepower, the largest towing capacity in the industry as of 2020. The Titan sounded perfect, so all my exploration energy went there. I grew up with Polaris snowmobiles, and even though I was trying to be objective, and set brand loyalty aside, I have to admit that the pics, videos, and positive hype I was seeing, left me thinking “this is a no brainer”. Coined “The Swiss Army Knife” of snowmobiles, it was hard to find anything negative. Fast, powerful, and fun to drive, while still being an incredibly capable workhorse. My only hang up, I could not find a single person, or club, using it to groom trails. This left me feeling very uncomfortable.

The Ski Doo Expedition is a very similar machine. It does not match up to the Titan in horsepower, or towing capacity. Still has a 20 inch wide track and adequate cooling system, along with all the necessary accessories.

I needed more info. I spent a Saturday sending out emails to every Polaris/Ski Doo dealership I could find across the USA. VT, NH, ME, NY, CO, WI, MN, WY, MT, UT all received an email from me, describing my dilemma, and my narrowed down 2 choices. I wondered, did they know anyone who used the Titan for grooming? Over the next 48 hours, my email box became loaded with responses, and I even got a phone call (within minutes of sending my email) from a dealership in NH. The sport of snowmobiling is full of very passionate people ready to offer their thoughts and opinions about sled selection. It was awesome.

Boy....did I get some stories. I heard of a Polaris Titan towing a broken down snowmobile in several feet of new snow in mountain terrain in the Canadian wilderness, a hundred miles back to civilization, with ease. "Everyone loves the Titan". The sled is "amazing". I talked to a logging company in NH that uses the Titan to pull trees around. So many stories and examples of how great this sled is....yet still, no one knew anyone who uses it for grooming. This is not hard to explain, I rationalized, as like I said before, very few clubs use snowmobiles for grooming.

So...the decision was made.

I went with the Ski Doo Expedition SE. What set it apart? No one had anything but positive things to say about Ski Doo's 4 stroke 900 ACE engine. The Titan comes with a 2 stroke 800, and while it's seriously powerful, it is also noisier, and possibly less reliable (the jury is still out on reliability). Secondly, the Expedition SE comes with a very handy Air Controlled rear suspension you can adjust easily, right from the steering column. I was able to find a nordic ski club (ABR on the Wisconsin/Michigan border) who has experience with both machines, and just bought a few brand new Expeditions. Their suggestion, go with the Expedition.

This leaves me excited about next winter, to see how the Ski Doo Expedition SE does preparing Winona's trails. If this sounds fun to you, let us know, maybe you can join our team and get out there on this new machine.

Matt Westerlund, President