

These carts get around

Business run by grandfather, grandson serves diverse clientele

By David Berlin

January 14, 2007

You may have seen the Discovery Channel show "American Chopper," in which a father-son team builds custom motorbikes. In San Marcos, a grandfather and his grandson are doing something similar – only with golf carts.

Ben Bellman, 88, and his grandson Brian Rott, 33, are president and vice president of Cart Mart in San Marcos, one of the largest new and used golf cart dealers in Southern California.

Like any car dealer, Cart Mart has a showroom and a garage for servicing vehicles. But instead of cars, the showroom is full of golf carts and in the garage, much more than engine servicing goes on.



SEAN DUFRENE / Union-Tribune

Welder Lorenzo Flores, 46, works on restoring a Taylor Dunn cart inside the mechanical shop at Cart Mart, the oldest golf cart dealership in San Diego. It's customers include Qualcomm, the Chargers and the Padres.

Recently, one cart in the garage was being transformed into a portable food-vending cart for the San Diego Convention Center; another was being painted with racing flame decals for a wealthy client in Rancho Santa Fe.

Cart Mart, which has 31 employees, has been in business since 1972 and serves companies of all sizes throughout San Diego County.

The diverse client list includes Qualcomm, both the stadium and the corporate campuses, the University of San Diego, the city of San Diego, the Navy, NASSCO, the Chargers, the Padres, the Aztecs, the San Diego Symphony and Science Applications International Corp.

And some carts even make it to golf courses.

"If you have a need for transportation really from A to B in your business or in your neighborhood or wherever, these little carts are perfect," Rott said.

Rott's grandfather has been in the golf cart business since the 1950s. He was attracted to them when he realized they were a great way to be around influential people, he said. As proof, Bellman still keeps a photo of President Eisenhower on one of his carts.

Bellman sold carts in Texas before moving to San Diego and opening Cart Mart in 1972. He still goes to work six days a week, selling carts on the showroom floor.

"I've loved every minute of it. A lot of people would be retired or dead or whatever, but I love it," Bellman said.

Rott started as a salesman after college, having paid his dues at Cart Mart in high school pushing a broom and cleaning toilets. He also worked on cars, cleaned them and delivered them, "whatever it took," he said.

"I love what I do," Rott said. "It's not a glamorous job, but the business is really interesting. I mean I've been places that people would never imagine – in one day I could be in the tunnel at Petco Park and walking out onto the field, to inside the Hyatt hotel in the back engineer boiler room, to sitting at the Four Seasons Aviara in their golf shop."

Cart Mart is the oldest golf cart dealership in San Diego, according to Rott and his grandfather, and it rents carts to some of the largest events in the county, including the San Diego County Fair and Miramar Air Show.

The company also may rent up to 40 carts at a time to some of the biggest events in the country, including last year's Super Bowl in Detroit and the NBA All-Star Game in Houston.

"They buy a phenomenal amount of used carts from us," said Stan Miser, a sales and marketing division manager with Yamaha. "Three or four hundred a year, easy."

Miser has been working with Cart Mart for 15 years and said the company has developed a reputation for quality carts.

Cart Mart carries two types of carts, a Yamaha golf cart and a line of Taylor Dunn industrial vehicles. A used cart costs about \$4,000 and a new "Corvette" replica golf cart costs up to \$15,000. An average new cart sells for about \$6,000.

Like cars, golf carts require periodic service and Cart Mart sends trucks throughout Southern California to service carts.



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Business is a family affair for Cart Mart vice president Brian Rott (left) and president Ben Bellman. Bellman started the company in 1972 and grandson Rott has done everything from cleaning the floor to sales.