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By Jim Kneiszel | Cover Story | February 2014 | Appeared in print as "Top Gear"

Bold graphics, a splash of chrome and driver-friendly features are a winning combination for 2013 Classy Truck of the Year winner Woody's Septic.

At one time the Woody's name on the side of the Holly Hill, Fla., pumping company's trucks was nowhere near as big as it is now. Today, 3-foot-tall letters scream the familiar septic service provider's name. Greg Thompson, president of the company – closing in on 60 years of service to the folks of Volusia and Flagler Counties (near Daytona Beach) – says bigger has turned out to be better for marketing purposes.

"I want people to be able to read it from the next county," Thompson says of the hand-painted logo from local company Sign Power. "It's a rolling billboard and free advertising. Where else can you pay \$1,200 (for the paint work) and get a billboard for 10 years?"

The huge block letters and the rainbow graphic capture the attention of customers, but they also caught the eye of judges in the 2013 Classy Truck of the Year contest. The 2010 International 7600 built for Woody's by Lely Manufacturing Inc. has been chosen as the top truck from monthly entries that appeared in Pumper magazine over the past year.

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The truck, first featured in the September issue last year, has been a great marketing tool and a proven pumper for three years cleaning septic tanks, grease traps or anything else customers can throw at it. The truck has worked out so well that Woody's ordered a 2014 model just like it, which will be on display in the Lely booth at the Pumper & Cleaner Environmental Expo International later this month.

The white-on-white Classy Truck winner has simple, good looks, accented with aluminum wheels, a chrome stack and other details, but it is first and foremost a work truck, and was spec'd for pumping performance and driver safety by Greg's father, semiretired Woody's owner Jerry Thompson. The rig has a 4,200-gallon steel tank and is powered by an International MaxxForce II 390 hp engine.

Woody's has been in business since 1955, and Jerry Thompson took over as the third owner in 1984. The company with 20 employees takes on about any wastewater-related job. They're used to taking care of their trucks in-house with a crew of guys who know how to weld and fix most problems. They maintain the fleet of seven trucks and perform about 90 percent of repairs. All the trucks were built out by Lely, including two rigs that recently received tank-off refurbishing.

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Regular maintenance and handy convenience features born out of Jerry's 30 years of experience make the International a great daily driver for technician John Frugoli. And it doesn't hurt that the truck looks attractive on a job site. "It's important to us that our equipment looks good. If it looks good, the customers don't mind it parked out in front of their houses," Greg says.

What are some of the must-haves when Woody's orders a new truck?

A clutch-free experience

Woody's made the switch from manual shift to Allison 4000 automatics in 2006. The result has been fewer burned-out clutches and rarer transmission repair bills. "A lot of drivers don't know how to drive a stick. They tell you they do, but they don't," Greg says. "They don't know the gear pattern and they're harder on the brakes because they don't know how to downshift." In the urban setting and with Florida's flat topography, the auto works great, Greg says. Pumpers in the mountains or those who go off-road frequently might disagree, he allows.

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Suction to spare

With the Classy winner, Woody's switched from using a vane pump to a powerful Robuschi RBDV-65 blower at an additional cost of \$6,000 to \$7,000. The move has translated into more revenue for the company. When a municipal tough job was on the line, Greg said the blower made his company stand out. "Some pumpers couldn't pump anymore at some point, but that truck would draw it all the way down to the bottom. That justifies (the customer) paying us more."

Safety for the crew

A Star 2420 SLDA Razor Light Bar on top of the cab is a smart \$1,000 safety upgrade, and one that goes on every truck now. The bright flashers protect technicians who sometimes work around the clock in emergencies. "We run that light to make people aware of us and slow them down at night," Greg says. "And it looks professional on a busy construction site."

Smart tool holder

Jerry designed a unique upright tool holder that comes off the rear bumper that prevents lost work tools and cluttered hose trays. Four 1.5-inch diameter galvanized pipes are welded vertically across a bar off the bumper. The pipes are placed where the driver can see the tools through the rear-view mirror. "If the tools are in the side trays, you don't know if you have them or not. This way, you see your tools and know you can go on to the next job," Greg explains.

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Painted, not vinyl graphics

When it comes to bringing the Woody's image to the work trucks, the pumper chooses hand-painted artwork over quick-and-easy vinyl for the tried-and-true rainbow background design and bold lettering. Greg says the vinyl "peels off in the heat with the sun baking on it." The company has about 10 phone numbers for customers to call, but it doesn't include them on the trucks.

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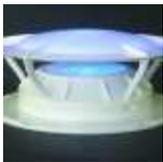
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