



The Ducks Today

Today, perhaps the most celebrated; if not the most intriguing vehicles of World War II, are appropriately found in one of the top travel destinations in the Midwest – Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin. The only battles fought here, however, are about whom gets to sit in the front seat of an "Original Wisconsin Duck." After the last Ducks were withdrawn from military service in 1958, the vehicles, famous for their ability to travel across land and on water, were used in a variety of ways in the United States and abroad.

Although many of the Ducks were eventually bought by municipalities, the U.S. Coast Guard and American enthusiasts, it is estimated that today there are fewer than 300 operational Ducks in the country. The largest "flock" of Ducks in the United States belongs to Original Wisconsin Ducks. Just a short time after the war ended, Mel Flath purchased a Duck and started offering tours in 1946. Flath saw the vehicle as an ideal way to show visitors the unique Lower Dells Scenic Park. By the next season, the operation expanded to 36 Ducks and through time and ownership changes, the fleet has grown to more than 90 vehicles.

The seven-ton Ducks are impressive vehicles, measuring eight-feet wide, 10½-feet high and 31-feet long, with the capacity to seat up to 25 passengers. (Original Wisconsin Ducks carry a maximum of 21 people per tour). On land, the Duck, can travel up to 50 miles per hour. In water, Ducks float like a boat and can be propelled up to 11 knots. Each Original Wisconsin Duck bears the name of a famous military leader, such as General MacArthur, or a famous battle or locations where Ducks participated in war efforts.

Ducks are rarely found in operational condition. Although none of the Original Wisconsin Ducks has been in battle, it usually takes maintenance staff two months to prepare a vehicle to go out on tours. 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. In addition, the vehicles are outfitted with a variety of modern mechanical and safety upgrades to ensure the performance and viability of the fleet. They also get set up with rows of seating and canopies to shade passengers, not standard equipment for Ducks that went into war. Once totally refurbished, a Duck is as new as it was when it first rolled off the GM assembly line ready to transport troops and equipment to the beaches of Normandy and the Pacific.

An Original Wisconsin Ducks tour travels across land and water for a beautiful view of the Dells (derived from the French word "dalles" meaning "flat layered rock") of the Wisconsin River. These sandstone cliffs are the magnificent products of a prehistoric era. The land surrounding the riverbed was carved out by a Cambrian glacier and subsequently shaped by millions of years of changing climate and water conditions -- creating one of the most breathtaking natural geological sites in the country.

The one-hour, 8½-mile Duck tour offers a unique look into Wisconsin's history, traveling the same route loggers rafted more than 100 years ago. Riders pass the remnants of native Indian tribes, such as the Ho-Chunk and the Mound Builders, and ghost towns like the once thriving City of Newport.