



## Original Wisconsin Ducks 73 Years of Fun and Adventure 1946 – 2018

### Timeline:

- 1942-1945 A Prequel: General Motors manufactures about 21,200 amphibious ducks (DUKWs) for World War II.
- 1944 Legacy Established: Touted as the greatest amphibious operation in history, the D-Day invasion on June 6, 1944, was the Ducks finest hour. More than 2,000 Ducks shuttled troops and supplies to hard-to-reach beaches of Normandy, France.
- 1946 Only a year after WWII ended, Wisconsin Dells' first Duck tour is started in August by Melvin Flath and Bob Unger, a war veteran who owned a Duck and brought it to the area to begin a tour with Flath. Local philanthropists Helen Raab and Herman Breitenbach offer use of their scenic land along the Lower Dells of the Wisconsin River and Lake Delton for the tours. After the inaugural season, Unger leaves town with his Duck.
- 1947 Melvin Flath continues the tour with an expanded fleet of 37 vehicles.
- 1952 Following the 1952 season, Melvin Flath sells the original Ducks business and the entire fleet to Dr. R.O. Ebert, who also owned the Lost Canyon horse-drawn carriage tours. The attraction takes on the name of the Original Duck Tours for the following season.
- 1953 Canopies are added to the tour Ducks to shield passengers from the elements.
- 1954 Helen Raab purchases the old Chicago Board of Trade gargoyle statues and decorative columns from the estate of Dells businessman W.J. Newman and moves them to the exclusive Duck trails where the granite sentinels become a permanent part of the tour.
- 1955 Following the 1955 season, Dr. R.O. Ebert sells the entire Original Duck Tours operation and fleet to Wisconsin Ducks Incorporated.
- 1956 The tour becomes known as Original Wisconsin Ducks. Ownership of the Lower Dells Scenic Park land is transferred to Dells Boat Company, part owner of the Ducks, to continue to preserve for future generations. This is the area on which the Original Wisconsin Ducks operates its tours using existing trails and stagecoach runs that have been developed through history.
- 1958 After assisting in the Korean War effort, amphibious ducks are retired from military service.

- 1960s Original Wisconsin Ducks take on various paint schemes over the years, but by the late 1960s the Ducks are decked out in the Green and White branding that the nostalgic fleet is still known for today.
- 1967 Original Wisconsin Ducks purchases a second start-up duck company from Mel Flath (Dells Spring Park Duck Tours) acquiring five tour ducks and all of the company's equipment.
- 1977 Original Wisconsin Ducks expands its fleet with the purchase of 17 vehicles from a former tour operator, the Aquaducks, which operated on Mirror Lake. The OWD fleet grows to over 60 Ducks.
- 1988 Spurred by rising fuel costs, our handy mechanics outfit the first amphibious Duck with a diesel engine. To date about 70 percent of tour Ducks have been converted to diesel.
- 1991 Original Wisconsin Ducks expands its trail system by one mile winding through Black Hawk Gorge and Turkey Hollow, allowing visitors to see more wildlife and plant life of the region.
- 1992 Original Wisconsin Ducks begins an ambitious expansion program to secure more amphibious vehicles for the fleet. From 1992 to 2001, a total of 23 Ducks are purchased from private owners in the United States and overseas.
- 1994 The green-and-white Original Wisconsin Ducks are invited to participate in Chicago's St. Patrick's Day parade, a nod to the popularity of the tours with visitors from the Chicago market. This begins an era to take the Ducks on the road to spread goodwill about Wisconsin Dells and advance the Original Wisconsin Ducks effort to preserve the legacy of the unique WWII military vehicles.
- 1995 All tour Ducks are outfitted with disc brakes to improve maneuverability of the vehicles. Work also begins to convert the entire fleet to power steering.
- 1998 With a growing fleet, three new members are added to the year-round maintenance staff at Original Wisconsin Ducks, bringing the maintenance crew total to eight. At the time, their combined experience totals more than 125 years, bolstering the operation's legacy of being the foremost authorities on these distinct military craft.
- 2000 Seizing on opportunities to share the Ducks' story, Original Wisconsin Ducks offers a Duck to transport ABC's "Monday Night Football" personnel around Green Bay to get unique video footage to use during the Green Bay Packer's Nov 6 televised game against the Vikings. Video of the Ducks are shown throughout the broadcast reaching 40.5 million viewers worldwide.
- 2001 Original Wisconsin Ducks managers travel to Italy to purchase three Ducks that were left overseas after the war. The Ducks are shipped to Wisconsin Dells to be added to the fleet.
- 2002 Original Wisconsin Ducks are invited to Madison to provide land-and-water tours for attendees of the US Conference of Mayors. A small fleet of Ducks carry the nation's mayors in and around the city, UW campus and Lake Mendota.

- 2008            On June 9, 2008, the Wisconsin Dells area is dealt a blow when torrential rains swell the manmade Lake Delton forcing it to breach its banks and drain into the Wisconsin River in less than three hours. Original Wisconsin Ducks business is impacted as tours have to be re-routed with the lake portion of the excursion not available for the rest of the season.
- On June 12, 2008, just a few days after the Lake Delton breach, Original Wisconsin Ducks are called into action by local authorities to help rescue people stranded by flood waters in nearby Baraboo, Wis. Seven Ducks and 19 personnel help rescue 200 stranded residents during a five-hour operation.
- During this same week, Original Wisconsin Ducks are called into action to shuttle state and federal officials on a tour of areas on Interstate 90-94 that were closed off by floodwaters.
- 2009            After a year of vigorous, fast-tracked engineering and reconstruction work, Lake Delton is re-opened for recreational use. Original Wisconsin Ducks are among the first to make a splashdown into the newly-filled lake on April 16. The rebirth of the lake is celebrated with fanfare on June 9, 2009, the one year anniversary of the near catastrophic event.
- 2014            The world remembers D-Day, 70 years later. Original Wisconsin Ducks bring an authentic DUKW to the State Capitol for ceremonies to mark the historic event.
- 2015            Original Wisconsin Ducks celebrates the operation's 70<sup>th</sup> season in Wisconsin Dells. More than 600 former Duck Drivers are invited back for a June special reunion to mark the historic occasion.