HOW DO THE PIECES COME TOGETHER?

IS YOUR DEALERSHIP A SITTING DUCK?

REPAIR ORDER 101

HIRE THE HEROES

SHOULD ‘LIFETIME FLUIDS’ BE TRUSTED?
As the commercial truck market heats up, many dealers are exploring expanding their commercial vehicle Sales and Service business.

In order to sell commercial trucks, some OEMs require their dealers to first invest in the equipment necessary to properly maintain and repair these large vehicles. This investment often pays for itself through new revenue streams generated by being able to support additional customers, such as municipalities, school districts and local private fleets.

Probably the largest piece of equipment needed to bring commercial truck repair into the dealership's Service Department is a medium-duty lift with a capacity of 25,000 pounds or more. The most popular lift styles in this range are four-post and mobile-column lifts.

**All About Four-post Lifts**

Fixed Operations Managers who are new to the commercial truck world tend to be more familiar with four-post lifts than mobile-column lifts. A medium-duty, four-post lift is just a larger version of the same type of lift many dealerships already have in an alignment or quick-Service bay.

One of the primary advantages of a four-post lift is how easy it is to use. Simply drive the vehicle onto the runways, which are then raised. No lift setup is required. Although the vehicle is initially supported by its wheels, rolling jacks can be added to the lift to engage the vehicle by its axles, so tire and wheel work can be performed.

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Other advantages of four post lifts:
• Can accommodate cars, vans and light trucks, as well as commercial trucks.
• Can be used for most maintenance and repair tasks.
• Available in a variety of lengths and lifting capacities.
• Can be equipped with rolling jacks for brake, tire and suspension work.
• Can be equipped to perform alignments and front end adjustments.
• Can be configured as a drive-through lift to further enhance productivity.
• Fast installation.

Some drawbacks to four-post lifts:
• Need a relatively large area in the shop (Rotary Lift’s SM30 four-post lift, for example, requires a minimum bay size of 16 by 30 feet).
• Can impede traffic flow due to large vehicle approach area.
• Columns and runways limit Technician walk-through space and vehicle access.

Mobile Column Lifts

Although less familiar to car dealers than four-post lifts, mobile-column lifts are the fastest-selling type of lift in the commercial truck market, mainly because of their versatility.

A mobile-column lift consists of two, three or four pairs of lifting columns that work together to pick up and raise a vehicle by its wheels. One column is positioned at each wheel of a vehicle, and then they are all synchronized, using communication cables or wireless receivers to simultaneously raise the vehicle.

After the vehicle is raised to an ergonomic working height, the Technician can put the lift on its locks and get to work or can lower the truck onto a set of jack stands so the mobile columns can be removed and used in another bay.

In this way, a single mobile-column lift can be used to raise vehicles in multiple bays. If the lift isn’t needed, the columns can be stored out of the way, freeing
up bay space. This makes it a flexible choice for dealerships with fluctuating commercial truck business.

Because columns can be easily added or subtracted, mobile-column lifts can be used to service a wide range of vehicles. Accessories are available for some mobile-column lifts to make it possible to pick up smaller vehicles such as work trucks, pickup trucks and school buses by the frame using just two columns, further enhancing the lift's versatility.

Other advantages of mobile column lifts:
• Portable and extremely flexible. Can be moved between bays and even off-site.
• Provides unobstructed access to the vehicle undercarriage — no arms, columns or runways to get in the way.
• Can lift virtually any vehicle configuration.
• A clean floor under the vehicle provides easy access for tools and equipment.
• No installation required.
• Can be used for most maintenance and repair tasks, including brake, tire and suspension work (with the use of jacks stands).
• Available in a variety of lifting capacities, battery-powered or plug-in, with wired or wireless communication.
• Battery-operated lifts can be used in areas without power outlets.

Some drawbacks to mobile column lifts:
• Columns may need to be repositioned for every vehicle.
• Models that are not wireless or battery-powered, or both, will have cables in the bay.
• Must be paired with jack stands for wheel and tire work.

What to Look for in a Truck Lift

As with all major equipment, your OEM has done some of the upfront qualification for you.

Narrow the field by checking out which lifts and lift manufacturers your OEM approves. Next, be sure the lifts you’re considering have been third-party tested and certified to meet the industry safety standard: ANSI/ALI ALC2TV-2011 “Safety Requirements for the Construction, Testing and Validation of Automotive Lifts.”

The International Building Code requires all installed lifts to be certified. Certified lifts will have a gold ALI certification label on them and will be listed at: www.autolift.org/ali-directory-of-certified-lifts/.

Other considerations:
• Does the lift have sufficient rated capacity to lift every vehicle you anticipate servicing? Never overload a lift.
• Can the lift accommodate vehicles with dual rear tires? On a four-post lift, make sure the runways are at least 24 inches wide and adjustable.
• Can the lift accommodate smaller vehicles? If you’re not sure you’ll have enough commercial truck business to keep the lift full of trucks, choose a four-
post lift with runway spacing narrow enough to be used with cars and light trucks, or a mobile-column lift with adjustable forks and fore/aft adapters so you can use the lift for other work.

- Does the lift have the same capacity regardless of vehicle wheelbase? The lifting capacity of some medium-duty four-post lifts actually decreases as the wheelbase of the vehicle to be lifted goes down. Make sure the lift you’re considering has the capacity for all the wheelbase sizes of the vehicles you need to service.

- What productivity and longevity features come standard on the lift? Some lifts are designed with more user-friendly features to help Technicians be more productive. Look at lifting/lowering speed, controls and maintenance features. On a mobile-column lift, can it be controlled from any column? How easy is it to move the columns into place?

- What is the total cost of ownership of the lift? Which items on the lift must be maintained? As with any piece of equipment, don’t just look at the purchase price. A cheap lift may cost you more in downtime over its life than a well-made lift from a reliable manufacturer.

- Who made your light-duty lifts? If you have a shop full of reliable lifts from manufacturer you trust, find out if that manufacturer also makes the commercial truck lifts in the style you’re interested in. You’ll get the quality you’re used to and you won’t have to find a new source of service and support.

A number of accessories are available to make commercial truck lifts even more productive. Consider optional lighting to provide hands-free light under the vehicle being serviced.

Depending on the type and style of lift chosen, you may also want to look at:

- Hose reels
- Wheel dollies
- Mobile productivity lifts/jacks
- Drive-through ramps

- Jack stands
- Rolling jacks
- Cross beams for picking up vehicles by the frame with mobile-column lifts
- Four-wheel alignment kit
- Rolling oil drain pans and accessories
- Internal airline kit

Investing in training and equipment to service big trucks can pay big dividends. Be sure to choose lifts that are rated for the job and built to last.