



Operators need to be aware of the pros and cons of different types of tail-lifts

As technology and engineering design march on, some operators are reviewing their tail-gate preferences, as Steve Banner discovers

Many supermarkets that previously fitted column tail-lifts to their trailers are now switching to sliders. Why? Mostly to minimise the risk of tail-lift damage if drivers are careless when reversing up to loading docks. But also to gain the advantage of greater load handling, afforded by their hydraulic power.

As Paul Kelly, product manager for Zepro, and also South West and Wales manager for DEL Equipment, says: "A slider-type lift sits safely underneath the trailer - there's usually plenty of room, given the rear overhang. But columns project out, and can get hit. They also typically lift a maximum 1.5 tonnes, while sliders can handle 2.0 tonnes or more."

That said, although sliders require no more maintenance than columns, they are not without drawbacks. "Whereas a 1.5-tonne column lift usually weighs around 500kg, a slider with the same capacity will weigh 700kg," he concedes. That 200kg cut in payload is not too much of an issue for supermarkets, though, because they cube out long before gross capacity is reached.

DEL Equipment took responsibility for Zepro in the UK last year - both being part of Hiab, in turn owned by Cargotec. "It means we can now offer an entire family of tail-lifts, including tuck-unders and cantilevers, as well as sliders and columns," says Kelly. "We'll soon have a new 1.5-tonne capacity Zepro tuck-under available with a folding cantilever-style platform."

"My personal view is that there is a trend in favour of sliders and tuck-unders, and away from cantilevers because the former can be stowed away completely when not in use," he continues. "There's still a need for cantilevers in some operations though [because] you can specify them with a 2.5m or more platform."

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He's not saying it's all over for column lifts either. "One thing we've developed is a 500kg column lift for a 3.5-tonne box van, which uses the lift platform as the rear closure," says Kelly. The gap between the stowed platform leading edge and the body's roof is bridged by a flap with gas struts. "It can help shelter the tail-lift operator and whatever is being loaded or unloaded when the lift is in use," he says. And losing the roller shutter door chops 60kg off the weight.

Vehicles at this end of the scale are usually fitted with alloy platforms so as not to compromise tight payload capacity. However, 18-tonners and trailers tend to go for

Upwardly mobile

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Paul Kelly

galvanised steel to handle the heavier duty typically involved.

Column lifts can have a useful role to play with 3.5-tonne tippers, with DEL, for example, producing both dump-thru and dump-over models with capacities up to 1.0 tonne. With the former, all the operator does to discharge a load is remove the platform pivot pins so the platform hangs vertically when the body is tipped. Meanwhile, with the latter, the platform folds away beneath the vehicle's floor and poses no obstruction as the load tumbles out. An aluminium platform is standard for both.

But DEL and Zepro are not alone, with Palfinger (better known as Ratcliff in the UK) and Dhollandia among fierce rivals. Smaller scale suppliers, such as Penny Hydraulics and Tipmaster (with


the Tommy Lift) are making sales, albeit mostly in specialised applications.

Penny's portfolio encompasses the LoadLift cantilever for panel vans, with variants intended to raise everything from oil drums and truck tyres to the York wheeled cages employed by Royal Mail. They all fold away inside the van's cargo area when not in use. As general sales manager Jessica Penny explains, these can be stowed against the vehicle side to minimise space. “We offer alloy as standard but a mesh platform is available, too,” she says.

Meanwhile, the Tommy Lift line-up includes internally-mounted cantilever tail-lifts for panel vans, and others for 1.0-tonne payload pick-ups. “The former will lift 300kg, the latter 500kg and has an installed weight of 130kg,” says

Tipmaster managing director Matthew Terry. Replacing the factory-fit tailgate, its alloy platform is set in a steel frame and, at 1,130mm, is narrow to match the pick-up's rear curves. One size fits all 1.0-tonners on the market, says Terry.

Eager to exploit any and all business opportunities, mainstream tail-lift makers are involved in some of the more-specialised sectors of the market, too. Dhollandia, for example, has come up with a column lift designed for bottled gas distributors, as well as a cantilever lift that will raise a car weighing up to 3.0 tonnes. The latter comes with a 3-metre platform, aluminium folding ramps and reinforced stabilising legs.

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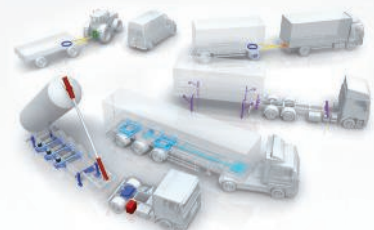
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