



Selecting workshop equipment, services and training to maximise efficiency, market appeal and compliance need not be as challenging as it seems. Steve Banner explains



Lane discipline

Technicians are increasingly familiar with touchscreens so it is no surprise that such technology now features on Stertil Koni's eBright control system. As well as displaying information about the operation of its wireless battery-powered mobile column lifts, the seven-inch colour display enables technicians to control columns individually, in pairs or in sets.

"They can operate the screen with gloves on and it allows them to keep an eye on battery status," says national account manager Simon Laffoley. And he adds that there has been a marked swing in favour of wireless lifts, away from cabled. The reasons are obvious: cables represent a trip hazard and are expensive to replace if somebody runs over them.

"Approximately 75% of the column lifts we sell are now wireless," he says. So why haven't cabled column lifts disappeared entirely? Because they

are around £1,000 a column cheaper than their wireless equivalent. And the plain fact is that price remains a key consideration.

Most of Stertil Koni's columns are either 7.5- or 8.5-tonne capacity, and in wireless guise up to 32 can be coordinated from a single control box. Furthermore, the batteries can power these columns for at least a week before recharging, and can then be replenished overnight using a conventional 230V single-phase supply.

WIRELESS COLUMNS

The ability of wireless columns to handle several days' work without the batteries going flat is a key point for garage equipment distributor JHM Butt, which distributes Ravaglioli lifts. "The HWS series offers 20 full-load lifting cycles between charges," says managing director Fraser Wakerley.

Wireless or cabled, such lifts can be moved to one side when not in use, so

maximising precious workshop space. But despite their virtues, other lifting equipment types also remain popular, including fixed two- and four-posters. And while they can't be as space-efficient as column lifts, they don't have to be wheeled into position and set up, so can be used almost immediately.

Also, there are ways of addressing space limitations without resorting to columns. "We offer the Skylift," explains Laffoley. "It's a half-scissor lift and we sell a lot galvanised so they can be installed outdoors." With a capacity of up to 35 tonnes, this lift can also be recessed into a workshop floor to make it less intrusive. Furthermore, because it has no cross-beams or posts, it can be installed at a width compatible with the space available.

"It's ideal for narrow bays and we reckon a workshop with five four-posters usually has space for up to six Skylifts," states Laffoley. However a Skylift is around a third more expensive than

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Simon Laffoley

an equivalent capacity four-poster, he admits.

Another route to space efficiency is an in-ground lift, such as Steril Koni’s DiamondLift. “This gives you a clear workshop floor and we can offer a cassette-type unit for places with a high water table,” continues Laffoley. Use an in-ground lift with four rams and it can raise vehicles weighing up to 60 tonnes. However, installing one in leased premises can present its own challenges.

“Landlords may not want you to dig a hole in the floor and, if you do, they will want you to make it good before you vacate the building,” he observes. They may, of course, view pits as equally unwelcome. From the workshop’s viewpoint, though, a prefabricated pit costs comparatively little to maintain. It also has an indefinite life, does not require setting up prior to use, and enables technicians to work both underneath and above a vehicle.

There is always the risk that somebody will tumble in and suffer serious injury. Fortunately, electrically-retractable aluminium covers have been available for some time for deploying when the pit is not in use.

BRAKE TESTING

Aside from lifting, though, with DVSA (Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency) expecting evidence that brakes are being tested regularly, prudent operators are acquiring roller brake testers. In some cases, they are doing so because they are setting up an ATF (Authorised Testing Facility). However, demand for such equipment appears to be slackening, according to Liftmaster commercial manager Kevin Howard.

“I suspect the DVSA has become a bit more choosy about the businesses it is prepared to approve as ATFs,” he observes. “Remember, too, that the more ATFs it appoints, the more testers it has to make available.”

Liftmaster has developed a DVSA-approved brake tester that uses rollers, a cabinet and switch gear sourced from Germany, but an electronic control system the firm installs itself. That policy may give it a price advantage given the Brexit-driven drop in the value of sterling against the euro.

Several other companies offer ATF-compatible brake testers, including Gemco, Maha, VL Test Systems and Tecalemit - as well as other equipment required to set up as an ATF. The latter includes play detectors, headlight testers and a variety of signs, tools, etc.

Meanwhile, the growing sophistication of onboard vehicle safety systems means that workshops also need to invest in technology to ensure that these are properly calibrated and working correctly. Workshop equipment suppliers are increasingly making such systems available.

Haweka’s AXIS500 laser-based wheel alignment system, for example, can be ordered with a kit that allows technicians to check ACC (adaptive cruise control) sensors. This enables technicians to ensure they are properly aligned and adjusted if necessary.

But if all you want to do is carry out basic servicing and you’re willing to contract out specific tasks to independent workshops, then spending thousands of pounds on equipment is not always sensible.

If you don’t have the money or space for a roller brake tester, have no wish to become an ATF but still want to test your fleet’s brakes, it may be worth acquiring a decelerometer such as Bowmonk’s portable BrakeCheck. A far cheaper option, it does not have the sophistication of a roller brake tester. However it can still calculate braking efficiency by measuring deceleration from 20mph to rest. And its findings can be downloaded to a PC for inspection by DVSA. [TE](#)

LOLER lessons

Lifts typically need to be serviced up to twice a year and LOLER (the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998) require them to undergo an annual thorough examination by a competent person - a qualified lift technician, for example.

“A thorough examination cannot be implemented as part of a service because this could lead to technicians in effect marking their own work,” comments James Radford, sales and marketing director of Totalkare - best known for its column lifts, but also selling two- and four-posters. Servicing and inspections can, however, be carried out under a maintenance contract.

Incidentally, Radford makes the point that a lift can last for more than two decades - by which time workshop technicians trained in its safe use may have long since departed. That’s why Totalkare is launching a training course for their successors, with both classroom and practical work subject to multiple-choice testing. Those that pass receive a photocard, valid for three years, confirming their successful completion of the course and the models they have been trained on.

