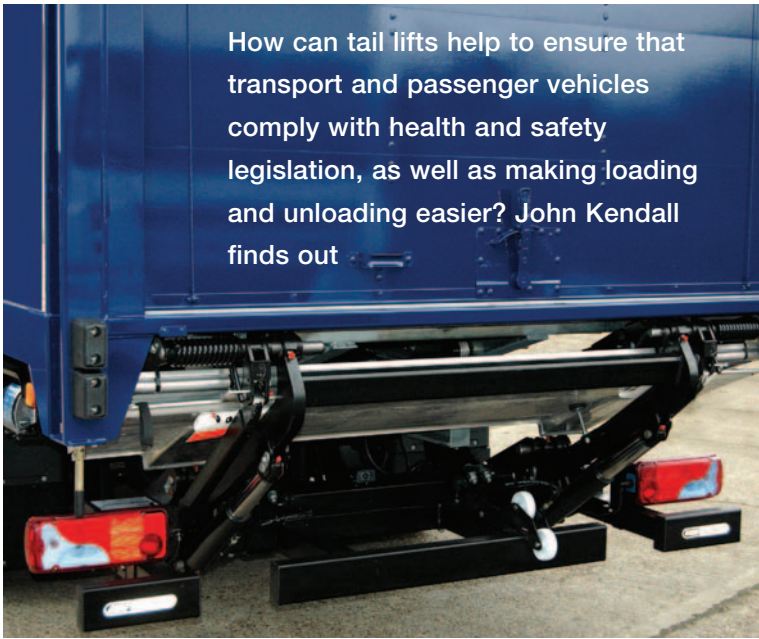


# Going UP

How can tail lifts help to ensure that transport and passenger vehicles comply with health and safety legislation, as well as making loading and unloading easier? John Kendall finds out



**W**hile tail lifts help to ensure compliance with legislation, they are also subject to regulation. As items of lifting equipment, there is a range of legal requirements relating to their safe use and maintenance, which applies directly to the operators of the equipment.

For vehicles under 7.5-tonnes gvw, there is a variety of types and sizes. Most lift manufacturers have developed specialist products designed for panel vans and light CVs in the 3,500kg gvw weight range. Typically, these can carry loads between 200 and 500kg. Larger lifts for heavy vehicles typically carry up to around 2,000kg.

Demand for light vehicle lifts has risen greatly recently, partly to satisfy legislation, such as manual handling regulations, and partly to offer versatility for operators seeking dual use on vehicles such as 3,500kg tippers. Local authority fleet managers, for example, might want tippers to carry bulk loads, but also items such as grass-cutting equipment.

There are two basic constructions of tail lift – column and cantilever. A column lift only moves up and down, usually in a track. For light vehicles, lifts may use a single-column design, which restricts the weight and size of load that can be lifted.

Cantilever lifts move towards and away from the vehicle body, as they rise and fall. The advantage for light vehicles is that they can be used with a tow hitch fitted, because the lift moves clear of the fitment. The disadvantage for panel vans is that the lift will probably obstruct one or both rear doors.

There are variations on these themes, and these include cantilever-type lifts, designed to provide a continuous horizontal ride. As explained above, cantilever lifts can replace the need for a rear closure, but column lifts still need one, even if it's a shutter covering just the top section. When not in use, cantilever lift platforms fold flat against the rear of the vehicle and can be locked in place.

Column lifts of this design may pose a problem for dock loading with light vehicles, because it may not be possible to move the lift low enough to clear the vehicle loading



floor. But this is not usually an issue for larger vehicles with higher load floors. An alternative may be a lift that will fold away underneath the rear of the vehicle, enabling it to be backed up to a loading dock without obstructing the rear opening.

Examples include Ratcliff Palfinger's Tukaway or Level Ride Retractable, DEL's Tuckunder, and Ross and Bonnyman's Slideaway and Easistow versions.

Regulations require side guards all round, or safety gates, for lifts that can be raised above 2m from the ground. In practice, many operators specify safety gates for lifts working below this maximum height to guard against either operators or loads falling off.

Manufacturers also offer other safety equipment, such as roll stops to prevent roll cages from rolling off the platform. These may also double up as ramps to help access to the platform from the ground, before being reset vertically to act as roll stops. Anti-slip finishes can also be applied.

### Tail lift regulations

Tail lifts are covered by both LOLER (Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998) and PUWER (The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998). Failure to comply with either set of regulations is a criminal offence.

Key requirements of PUWER are that employers must ensure all work equipment provided is fit for purpose. A risk assessment is seen as desirable, but employers are obliged to consider ergonomics, and allow only competent and trained people to operate, repair and maintain equipment. They must also ensure that all equipment is in a good state of repair and follow documented, suitable maintenance schedules. Information on controls, emergency stop buttons etc is



## Tail lift publications

SOE has published a number of guides and these can be downloaded from the SOE website

<http://www.soe.org.uk/publications/>

**Tail Lift** – Specification guide for road vehicles, with relevant information on tail lift regulations.

### Tail Lift Operators – a simple guide

Preventing falls and falling loads from tail lifts.

In addition, several manufacturers produce guides to legislation and regulations, including Ratcliff Palfinger, DEL Equipment and Penny Hydraulics. These can be downloaded from the company websites.

also contained in PUWER guidance notes.

LOLER places obligations on employers specific to lifting equipment and its operation. Employers must ensure that tail lifts and their mountings are strong enough and that loads are secure.

Fleet operators should satisfy themselves on the installation of lifting equipment, but also ensure that safe working conditions apply in use. Safe working loads should be marked on the equipment and, where intended to lift people, tail lifts must be marked as such. Other requirements specify that usage should be planned by a competent individual to address hazards identified in a risk assessment.

LOLER Regulation 9 requires the equipment user to have it 'thoroughly examined' by a 'competent person' at various stages in the life of the equipment. This individual must be impartial, independent and have the necessary technical skills. A distinction is made in the regulations between persons competent to operate the equipment and those competent to examine and maintain it.

### Thorough examination

LOLER requirements cannot be satisfied solely with a weight test or service inspection. While there are similarities with an MoT test, the statutory thorough examination (STE) is different. To satisfy the regulations, not only must the STE be carried out by a 'competent person', but also he or she must perform an in-depth investigation, extending well beyond overall equipment condition.

The investigation may cover inspection and testing, including of internal parts. Competent persons are required to have knowledge of how the lift works, relevant fault conditions, and an ability to diagnose early signs of failure and misuse.

An STE must not be combined with any repair work; it should be carried out as a separate exercise. The STE findings must be fully documented, as laid out in Schedule 1 of the regulations. And both PUWER and LOLER put responsibility for equipment use on the user, not the manufacturer. **TE**