

A Safe Truck



Gerry Simpson of Barloworld Handling takes a look at the safety features found on fork lift trucks.

Last week, another road user pulled out in front of me in a hatch-back with a sofa protruding from the boot, held in place with little more than a few pieces of string. His vision was obscured and I wondered what would happen if the driver was to brake suddenly or be forced to change direction quickly. The point is, you shouldn't use equipment to perform a task it isn't designed for, especially in the case of fork lift trucks.

Forklifts come in a variety of forms to perform different tasks efficiently and safely. The trouble is, in the heat of the moment many trucks are inappropriately used. A typical example is where someone stands on a pallet and is lifted up by a forklift to access goods. This is common and leads to

the revised specification and safe working load. The truck should never be operated outside its approved rating capacity.

All lift trucks supplied since 5th December 1998 must have Falling Object Protection, (FOPS), i.e. overhead guard, and Roll Over Protection, (ROPS). The Health and Safety Executive accepts that in the vast majority of cases the lift truck must act to prevent roll over of more than 90°. There is also a requirement for forklifts most at risk from roll over to be fitted with an operator restraint, because in the event of the truck tipping, the operator is usually safer if restrained within the confines of the truck.

One of the most crucial areas of fork truck safety is all round visibility. Many manufacturers such as Hyster have made great improvements to their mast and cab designs to give operators better around vision when picking or transporting loads. Hyster has even produced a high cab version of its new Fortens series which enables operators to see clearly when carrying tall/loaded pallets. Forklifts should also be fitted with lights and beacon when working in darker conditions such as a yard or when working in close proximity to pedestrians.

Another safety device that manufacturers have introduced is stability mechanisms. Because forklifts have no conventional form of suspension, they can be susceptible to tipping on rough uneven ground or if

cornered too fast when carrying loads. With a well trained driver this should never happen. However, stability mechanisms can help to reduce the risk.

Other useful features include PIN access systems which prevent unauthorised use of a forklift and speed performance settings which can be adjusted to suit the operator's experience and the application conditions. Automatic braking systems, fitted to many of today's fork lift trucks, act as a safety failsafe if the operator inadvertently forgets to apply the brake during normal operations. This is not uncommon when you consider how many times the operator has to jump on and off the machine during an average shift.

Finally, ergonomic features help to greatly reduce fatigue and therefore improve safety during a long shift.

All the features mentioned go along way to improving forklift safety, but no matter what technology is employed, the most important safety considerations do not change. The truck must be correctly specified and only used for the task it is designed for. It must be regularly and professionally maintained in accordance to the manufacturer's standards, and operators must receive adequate and appropriate training for the equipment they will use.

After all, you can put an idiot in a Ferrari, but it still makes him an idiot.

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many of the 'falling from height' accidents recorded each year. Forklifts, such as order pickers, reach trucks and VNA trucks, are available to fulfil specialist tasks so there is really no excuse for improper use.

By law, every truck should be fitted with a rating plate that clearly shows the safe working load at relevant load centres and lift heights, and reflects the actual specification of the truck. If any of these features are changed, a new rating plate must be obtained showing