

# We have liftoff

Insights on installing an automotive lift



Purchasing a lift is much simpler than actually taking delivery, if you're having it sent to a residence. Ours came packaged in such a way that a forklift could lift the entire thing from one end—lifting the columns from the center was expressly forbidden. We're fortunate enough to actually own a forklift, but you probably don't have one at home, and most heavy freight trucks don't have lift gates. You may want to arrange pickup at a loading dock, rather than at your home—it will be easier to get the unit out of a pickup truck, especially if you take it out in pieces.



We started appreciating our Bend-Pak lift almost immediately when the Hemmings '34 Dodge needed driveline work just prior to a rally. Having it is a gearhead dream realized.



Before you purchase a unit, you should verify that your shop floor can handle the lift, in terms of both load capacity and space. Our two-post Bend-Pak specified at least four inches of concrete, so we drilled a pilot hole to check, and then consulted with a concrete contractor for input—better safe than sorry here. It turned out our floor was much thicker and stronger than it needed to be. If you have room, go with the wider two-post unit, as getting in and out of the vehicle will be easier—something you'll appreciate later on. Note that there are also specs for the pitch of the floor, since both columns need to be perfectly parallel.

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**A**mong the top five daydreams had by gearheads has to be having an auto lift right there in the garage at home. Anyone who has worked on cars knows how much more pleasant it is to be able to get under a vehicle and still stand up, rather than rolling around on the floor, working at awkward angles. Not so long ago, the only way to get a car in the air was to have access to a professional shop's lift, but over the past decade or so, the home lift has become a very attainable reality. For about the price of another project car you can have your very own lift to help finish the projects you already have.

We recently went through the process of selecting, purchasing, and installing a lift of our own here at Hemmings HQ, as part of our effort to create a functional shop for producing technical stories for our magazines. Getting it done proved simpler than we'd anticipated, but that was largely because we did out homework and consulted with experienced pros.

First of all, you need to decide what type of lift you want. The four-post lift is a popular choice for home use, largely because they effectively double the car storage capacity of the space they occupy. Also, four-post units usually require less





The sales rep at Automotive Service Equipment informed us that an increasing number of their customers are installing lifts by themselves, and the instructions are such that this could feasibly be done, but after weighing the options, we elected to bring in a professional. Our expert, Dennis Roberts of Northeast Lift Installers, Inc., charged a very reasonable rate and had our lift up and running in one day. He also provided valuable insight and peace of mind. It was well worth it. Here Dennis and crew raise the columns prior to positioning.

Our lift came with seismic-type anchors, which Dennis feels are among the best. The anchor is inserted into a hole, and then the nut is tightened, forcing the arrow-headed wedges against the sides of the hole, providing positive mounting. These need to be tightened with a torque wrench to determine when they are secure. If your lift didn't include anchors, don't cheap out—get seismic-quality bolts even if you'll never experience an earthquake.

of the floor they mount to, with some designs even claiming to be portable. But while the four-post design makes fluid changes and transmission and exhaust work convenient, for chassis work, a two-post unit may be better, as it allows the wheels to hang.

Though many four-post lifts can now be optioned with a jacking tray, which slides between the ramps and allows bottle jacks to be used to raise the wheels off the lift, we knew we'd be using ours primarily for working on cars, and we wanted something of a commercial grade since it would see frequent use by multiple operators. We contacted Automotive Service Equipment to discuss its line of Bend-Pak two-post lifts, and found



Prior to drilling any mounting holes, Dennis gets both columns in precisely the correct position. This includes dialing in the vertical attitude of each column using shims. Our Bend-Pak lift came with a shim pack, but Dennis had a variety of his own. Since each column mounts independently, the pair must be parallel so that the lift arms don't come under stress as the vehicle is lifted.



we could get an asymmetrical-type unit with 10,000lb capacity to fit our narrow bay. In fact, after consulting with ASE, we learned that the narrow unit would not be necessary, and were advised to go with the standard asymmetric two-post.

Our conversations with ASE also covered shop requirements, including floor thickness, ceiling height, electrical power service, and so on. Though we'd been told that installing the unit on our own was possible with the included instructions, we opted to hire a pro, and found it to be worth every dime, between the access to expertise and the installation time savings. Check out photo captions for some insight before realizing the dream for yourself.



Once the columns are right where they need to be, Dennis uses a masonry drill to make the holes in the floor. The dimensions of the holes are another specification that should be verified per the lift manufacturer's instructions, as the anchors are designed for a specific diameter hole. The better the concrete, the longer it takes to drill each hole.



With the lift columns secured to the floor, all that remains is to assemble the unit. Most of the remaining steps are simpler to perform than the actual placing and mounting of the columns, though you'll still need power. Nearly all lifts require a 220-volt source—do not attempt to run yours on 110. We had an electrician handle our wiring, and added a lockable service box next to the lift to shut off the power feed in case of emergency or to prevent untrained users from messing with the unit.

**SOURCES:**

Automotive Service Equipment; 800-229-6218; [www.asedeals.com](http://www.asedeals.com)

Northeast Lift Installers; 518-883-8137; [www.northeastliftinstallers.com](http://www.northeastliftinstallers.com)