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Trailing behind



The compact Snorkel TL39

In spite of being one of the earliest forms of powered access, trailer lifts are possibly the most underestimated and ignored product on the market, eclipsed by the many alternatives that have come along since its introduction. Although versatile and ideal for jobs where weight is an issue, they are suited to short term, daily rents for domestic applications, neither of which are favoured by specialist access rental companies. Leigh Sparrow investigates the lower end of the market.

Too many choices

Anyone looking for a platform to reach heights of up to say, 15 metres, is faced with a mind boggling choice of equipment, including a range of different types with totally different specifications and performances. Most contractors are familiar with mini excavators or telehandlers where the choice is comfortably narrow. For example, if you are looking for a six metre/2,500kg telehandler the slightest variations between them all means you rarely face any choice other than which manufacturer to choose from. And if renting, you will probably be given the brand the local company has in stock - most often Manitou, JCB or Merlo.



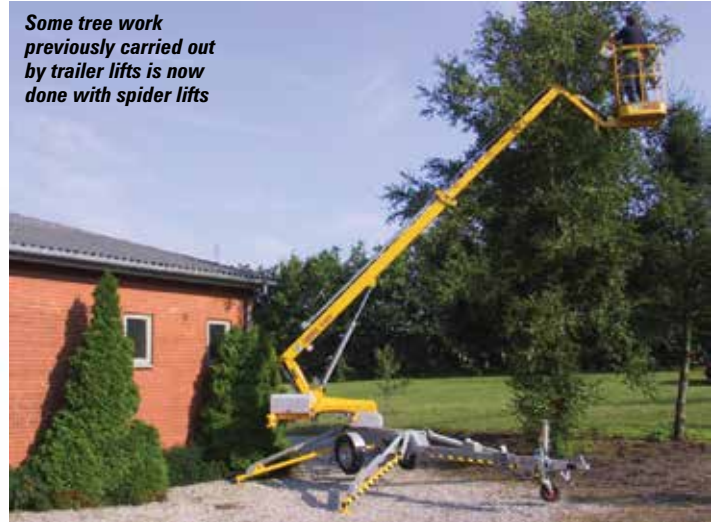
When it comes to powered access however, it's an entirely different proposition. Call up and ask for a 12 metre platform and you might have to choose from telescopic and articulated boom lifts, mast booms and lifts, scissor lifts - narrow, slab or Rough Terrain - truck, van or trailer lifts. Then more decisions are required whether you want electric, diesel, hybrid, bi-energy etc... You get my drift.

Having decided on a trailer lift, you still have a wide variety of choice, although regional variations probably mean that your supplier only offers one of them. In the UK, Ireland and France that is likely to be a 12 metre articulated model, possibly with a telescopic top boom, most likely battery powered. In the Nordic region it is likely to be a straight telescopic with AC or battery, although engine powered units are also widely available.

Choosing a telehandler is simple



Some tree work previously carried out by trailer lifts is now done with spider lifts



Entry level products?

Trailer lifts are one of the earliest forms of powered access, and are still relatively popular, yet often receive the least amount of attention in terms of manufacturer's engineering and development budget, or marketing spend. There are around a dozen manufacturers or so worldwide, offering somewhere in the region of 75 different models, yet volumes are quite low compared to self-propelled lifts. Surprisingly trailer lifts hold their value more than almost any other form of powered access. So why are new models not more popular?

One key factor to a trailer lift is its ability to be towed behind a vehicle, avoiding the need for or cost of separate transport or trailer.

However, many countries seriously restrict, or even prohibit, towing such things behind cars or 4x4s, thus limiting what should be a much larger market. For those markets where this is not an issue, the easy transport comes with a trade-off, of course. Once you arrive on the job, they tend to be long and unwieldy - so not suited for job sites where space is at a premium. So even before we start, we have eliminated a large swathe of the market.

Another factor is that many of the jobs previously carried out with trailer lifts now have attractive alternatives. Spider lifts for example, they can still be towed - albeit on a two axle trailer - but once on site they are more compact and easier to manoeuvre into difficult to reach

Trailer lifts were an introduction to powered access for many users





Repointing brickwork is typically done with scaffold

spots, or travel between adjacent work areas. Another increasingly popular alternative is a small truck or pickup mounted lift, the availability of which has grown way beyond all expectation in recent years.

For many trades people, arborists, house painters or window installers etc... the trailer lift provided an introduction to the powered access revolution. Many of these trades have moved on to more sophisticated, and expensive,

forms of powered access. At the same time the industry has not done a great job persuading small businesses or 'sole traders' to replace their ladders, scaffold or other types of access equipment, with aerial lifts.

Access case study

I have witnessed an example of this in the village where I live, which has seen a mini construction boom over the past couple of years, with new houses going up, while everyone else seems to be repairing, extending and enhancing their homes. None of these projects have used even a single piece of powered access! I have seen dozens and dozens of ladders, and scaffolds of all types – from aluminium towers to tube & clamp facade. All too often used for short jobs where a platform might have been far more suitable. At the same these sites have been inundated with telehandlers, mini excavators and dumpers, all the latest gear - except when it comes to working at height.

An interesting case in point was the repointing of brickwork on the rear of a large house. The builder



Trailer lifts can be a good solution for short term work on domestic housing

rented alloy scaffold towers - two four metre double width towers, complete with extra large outriggers and eight platforms, along with two staging boards to join them up. Fair enough I thought, the three man team might work on different areas of the façade at the same time, and it might take them a couple of weeks or more. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Rather than the three chiselling out the old mortar by hand, repointing as they went, most of the work was carried out by one person at a time, as they worked in shifts using a grinder to rapidly remove the old mortar. It was all done in a few hours. The joints were then sprayed - first with air and then water, and the new mortar applied – this last step did involve two of them working at the same time, although they

tended to work alongside each other, completing one section at a time, rather than working from different ends of the building.

For the cost of the scaffold, they could probably have rented a platform for the week. A small scissor lift would have been ideal but getting it onto the raised patio might have been a challenge, a trailer lift could have reached from the drive. Another example is gutter replacement, a trailer lift would have been a perfect solution, given access around the house was not an issue, and the work took less than a day to complete. When asked, I was told that they had used platforms before, but found them "a bit scary", possibly the wrong machine for that job?

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The Nifty 120T (L) has all the bells and whistles. However, the basic Nifty 120 (R) remains popular

Spreading the powered access message

These observations suggests that work is still required to bring trades people into the powered access market. I notice how builders are not prepared to dig a trench with a spade anymore and rent in a mini excavator for the smallest hole. Several I spoke with had used powered access in the past,

because the job required it, or there was no alternative. And yet returning to lower level work they simply resorted to traditional forms of access, even while admitting that they hated putting up towers. Why is that once they have used the latest digging or material handling equipment, they become converts, and yet the same does not hold true for working at height? Given

the state of rental rates it is hard to imagine that price is an issue?

In spite of this the manufacturers we spoke with reported brisk trade for their smaller or simpler trailer lifts. The popularity of particular products depends however on the country or region. In the UK, basic articulated models are preferred, for example Niftylift's 'no frills' 12 metre Nifty 120 is its most popular, in spite of manual wind down outriggers and no drive assist, while its high specification, more compact 120T has more outreach, hydraulic outriggers, drive assist and all the 'bells and whistles'.

Strong second hand market

Niftylift's diminutive nine metre Nifty 90 model is no longer in production and yet is still popular, and fetches incredible money on the used market, while being a popular

machine to rebuild/refurbish. One used equipment dealer said: "We have sold three Nifty 90s since the start of the year, two 2013 models and a 2012 machine. They sold at between £6,500 and £7,500 + VAT each – probably what they cost when new! I had the last one in stock for two days before it sold. We have just taken another Nifty 120T bi-energy in part exchange and already have three people fighting for it. A 2013 machine at two thirds of the new retail price!"

"We also find the simple Nifty 120MEs sell well at higher than you would expect prices. I have seen people even paying mad money - around £5,000 for 25 year old Aerials and Go Industries machines that haven't seen a LOLER inspection in years. Trailer lifts are not dead here, especially for our customer base."



The Nifty 90 is no longer in production but used ones fetch high prices

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'Mini' telescopics

In many parts of Europe small lightweight telescopic high specification trailer lifts are more popular. Manufacturers like Dinolift, Ommelift, Denka and Hungarian sister company Europelift, are all seeing a steady increase in sales for this type of product.

Denka/Europelift

The Danish built Denka Junior 10 and 12 models arguably kicked off the market for mini 10 and 12 metre telescopics but these are no longer produced. Denka was rescued by Germany's Rothlehner in 2013,



The EuropeLift 13T

when it acquired the manufacturer's product related assets and intellectual property. It restarted production in Germany the following year but has now teamed up with Hungary's Europelift for the smaller models, starting the Denka range at 18 metres in the form of the DK18.

Europelift's smallest models are two 13 metre units, the articulated 13G, and more importantly, the increasingly popular 13T telescopic. The 13T offers up to nine metres of outreach with its three section boom fully extended and 100kg in the platform, while the 220kg maximum capacity is available at seven metres outreach. The machine is just under six metres long - a critical length in some parts of Europe - and weighs just under 1.5 tonnes with its full specification, including hydraulic outriggers and the 'wheel assist' self-propelled drive function to manoeuvre the stowed machine into position.

Rothlehner's Fred Rothlehner said: "We have seen stable demand for trailer lifts over the last couple of years and have sold more than 100 new Denka and Europelift units a year, even during times of crisis. We

are now seeing rise of trailer sales and expect this to continue on the future."

Ommelift

Other companies in this market include Denmark's Ommelift which offers three models in its 'Mini' telescopic range, the 10.5 metre Mini 10.5 E, 12 metre Mini 12 EJ and the 15 metre Mini 15 EXJ. Staying with 12 metre machines, the Mini 12 EJ has a working height of 11.9 metres and an outreach of up to 7.6 metres. The maximum 125kg platform capacity is unrestricted, making this clearly a one man machine, which for most applications for this type of lift is fine. The overall length is a fraction over six metres - due to its two section boom - while the overall width for road travel is 1.5 metres. As with many models in this sector, the axles can be retracted to reduce the overall width - 1.2 metre in this case - for passage through gates or narrow paths etc... While a two section boom makes the machine a longer it does help keep the weight down, the Mini 12 EJ weighs just 1,260kg with full specification.



The Ommelift Mini 12

Dinolift


The other main producer of small telescopic machines is Finland's Dinolift. The Nordic dominance is no accident, historically this part of Europe has always preferred telescopic trailer lifts, while the UK and France have always taken articulated models and Germany buys both types.

Dinolift offers a range of nine telescopic models with working heights from 10.5 to 18 metres, including three 12 metre units and two 13.5 metre models. It also offers seven articulated models to provide a total line up of 16 trailer lifts. The 10.5 metre Dino 105TL weighs just 955kg and yet still offers up to 6.5 metres of outreach

How do they all compare? The following chart compares trailer lift models in the nine to 13 metre range.

Manufacturer	Model	Work height	Outreach	Capacity	GVW	OAL	OAW	TYPE
Comet	X Trailer 12	12m	4.5m	200kg	1,300kg	3.55m	1.82m	TA
Dinolift	105TL	10.5m	6.5m	130kg	955kg	5.45m	1.49m	T
Dinolift	120T	12.0m	7.9m	120kg	1,285kg	5.56m	1.72m	T
Dinolift	120TN	12.0m	7.9m	120kg	1,355kg	5.52m	1.53m	T
Europelift	TM13T	13m	9.0m	220kg	1,470kg	5.99m	1.55m	T
Europelift	TM13G	13.1m	6.1m	220kg	1,540kg	6.35m	1.55m	A
Ommelift	Mini 10.5 E	10.5m	6.8m	125kg	1,050kg	6.06m	1.2m	T
Ommelift	Mini 12 EJ	11.9m	7.6m	125kg	1,260kg	6.02m	1.51m	T
Niftylift	Nifty 120T	12.2m	6.1m	200kg	1,400kg	4.5m	1.50m	TA
Niftylift	Nifty 120	12.3m	5.0m	200kg	1,195kg	5.75m	1.5m	A
Matilsa	Parma 9	9.5m	3.5m	120kg	675kg	4.13m	1.2m	A
Matilsa	Parma 12T	12.1m	6.0m	200kg	1,410kg	4.56m	1.6m	TA
Matilsa	Parma 12	12.0m	4.8m	200kg	1,150kg	5.98m	1.60m	A
Snorkel	TL37J	12.9m	5.6m	215kg	1,568kg	6.4m	1.61m	A
Snorkel	TL39	13.5m	6.4m	215kg	1,680kg	5.1m	1.61m	TA
Thomas	120NWT	12m	6.5m	200kg	1,450kg	4.5m	1.45m	TA
Non-European alternatives								
Goman	P12	12m	4.5m	200kg	1,180kg	5.85m	1.7m	A
Hydro Grubert	BL13TA	11.7m	5.6m	175kg	1,700kg	7.4m	1.6m	A
Haulotte	3522 A	12.75m	6.8m	227kg	1,590kg	5.0m	1.66m	TA
Haulotte	3632 T	13.3m	9.7m	227kg	2,000kg	6.8m	1.66m	T
JLG	T350	12.5m	6.15m	227kg	1,523kg	6.63m	1.45m	TA
Genie	TZ 34/20	13.36m	5.59m	227kg	1,431kg	5.5m	1.45m	TA

Type key T = Telescopic TA=Articulated Telescopic A = Articulated



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The Dino 105TL weighs just 955kg but offers 6.5m outreach

with 130kg platform capacity. The low weight amazingly includes hydraulic outriggers and a wheel drive assist system! The 12 metre 12T is also a one person machine, with an unrestricted platform capacity of 120kg, but offers 7.9 metres of outreach, weighs 1,285kg fully equipped, and has an overall length of 5.56 metres.

This year the company has invested in a major update across its entire trailer lift range to make them more

consistent, with the same control layouts and the same drive assist operation, including a standard wired remote controller.

Matilsa

Getting back to the articulated models, while Niftylift is almost certainly the market leader, it is not without competition. In Spain, Matilsa builds models that are similar to Niftylift's, with seven models, from seven to 17 metres,



Dino 120T

all of them either articulated or articulated/telescopic, which combine a riser with the telescopic boom to provide up & over reach and avoid the complications of a three section boom. Its basic nine metre Parma 9 is proving increasingly popular, thanks to its low towing weight. Chief executive, Amancio Lebrero, says: "Weighing less than 750kg means that the

Parma 9 can be towed with almost any vehicle. In addition, it does not need a road tax, nor to pass ITV (technical inspection/test (MOT)) nor do they require their own insurance, since it is covered by the car insurance."

"The sort of work it is used for includes low rise, camera mounting, alarm systems and minor maintenance etc... It is also interesting for rental fleets due to its easy operation, easy transportation and absence of vehicle registration. Many of the jobs involving small repairs or installations the transport costs a lot more than renting the machine. We have been manufacturing it for seven years now, we did update the original product, moving to folding outriggers, in place of the removable ones, making them far easier to set up and use."



Matilsa's Parma 9 working on a home



The narrow Nifty 90

Niftylift

Although we have already touched on UK based Niftylift, it is worth adding that it now offers five trailer lifts, two 12 metre models along with 15, 17 and 21 metre units. In 2016 it unveiled a heavy duty 14 metre telescopic model - the TM40 - for the US market at the ARA Rental Show, however that unit has not yet gone into production. Managing director John Keely said that plans have not been dropped, but the engineering focus is clearly on keeping up with the development of its growing self-propelled boom lift range. He did acknowledge the ongoing importance of the trailer lift market and confirmed the high prices that used or refurbished machines fetch.

Snorkel

Snorkel has a long history with trailer lifts, having built them at its plant in New Zealand in the past. When the company was acquired by Tanfield in 2007 it was merged with UpRight which built two trailer lift models in Ireland. It also owned UK trailer lift manufacturer Aerial. Today Snorkel is owned by Don Ahern, and offers three models, two 13 metre units and a 17 metre with influences from all three manufactures.



The Chinese built Goman P16

The two 13 metre models - the TL37J and TL39 - are close in terms of working height, but offer different lift mechanisms and features, the TL39 is more than a metre shorter at 5.1 metres, in spite of offering a greater platform height.

The others

Looking at the chart on page 30 you can see that three of the four largest self-propelled aerial lift manufacturers also offer trailer lifts, but only in North America now, where Haulotte has rebranded its Biljax models to Haulotte, reserving the Biljax brand for non-powered access products. While not a key focus, Genie and JLG are both keeping their foot in the market. One point made by several full line manufacturers is that trailer lifts do not generate sufficient margins to justify significant investment in new models. They also take up more space on a production line and can be awkward to ship, given their length.

Palfinger owns Argentina's Hidro Grubert, which used to sell trailer lifts in the USA, but now appears to have switched to small truck mounted lifts, keeping trailer lifts for the local market. Finally Chinese manufacturer Goman has dipped its toe in the water, with the P12 and P16 models. While this may create some local demand, they are unlikely to make it to Europe, given the shipping costs in relation to the selling prices.



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