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THE IDEAL LADDER REPLACEMENT?

The low level powered access sector, as we know it, originated in the UK in 2006 driven by the mythical ban on ladder use in construction by the UK's Health & Safety Executive. This was driven by several developments: the adoption of the European Work at Height Directive in 2005, the subsequent myth that ladders were to be banned and the overreaction of main contractor health & safety managers, reinforced by sensationalistic headlines in the UK press.

At the time, reports of falls from height involving ladders gained extra publicity, and the new Directive meant that instead of rules only applying to platforms or ladders over two metres, it covered falls from any height. The fear of prosecution by the HSE and the 'ladders are banned' myth caused contractors and rental companies to look for alternatives. The first company to market a solution was ladder and scaffold group NSG which launched the PopUp push around scissor lift at the Hire Show of that year.

THE POPUP POPS UP

The tiny Chinese built lift had an overall width of only 700mm, a working height of 3.63 metres an overall length of 1.13 metres and weighed just 270kg with a platform capacity of 240kg. It offered a good alternative to podium steps or small towers and had a list price of £3,500 - discounted to well under £3,000 for volume orders. It took the market by storm, being perfect for internal fits outs and similar work...and kept the main contractors and the HSE happy. What it didn't address - and no product since has either - is the homeowner market, the source of most of the injuries caused by ladder misuse.

With sales beyond expectation and interest in a larger model, PopUp launched the PopUp-Plus, increasing the working height to 4.5 metres by



The original PopUp was launched at the Hire Show in 2006

using an additional scissor stack and swing out outriggers. At this time, PopUp had shipped more than 1,200 of the originals. The larger PopUp-Plus



The new PopUp-Plus offered a 4.5 metre working height

was 60kg heavier, had a similar platform capacity and stowed dimensions, although it was 1.1 metres wide with the outriggers out.

POWER TOWER GOES HIGHER

A few months after the PopUp-Plus in May 2007, CTE launched the Power Tower with a 5.1 metre working height. Developed by CTE's Brian King in partnership with Nationwide Access it was built in Leicester, UK. The design was totally different to the PopUp using an inline sigma lift mechanism rather than a scissor stack. With a 250kg platform capacity in the 1.5 metre by 650mm platform there was enough room for two and their tools. Outdoor use restricted this to one person

LOW LEVEL PLATFORMS

with tools and materials. The overall weight was 310kg and it was 780mm wide for standard single doorways.

Brian King already had form in the sector, having pioneered the push around type lift with the Hop-Up from Go Industries in the 1990s and subsequently designed his own, more sophisticated Power Tower at Access Machines in the late 1990s, which sadly never caught on party due to being over engineered, and partly due to it being aimed at the outdoor builders market with a working height of 9.4 metres. It was handy, though, being road towable. We have covered the history of the low level lift several times over the years, but it is interesting that both of these products are basically still available - the PopUp products are the forerunners of the low level lifts from Snorkel, and the updated Power Tower is now a JLG product, following the acquisition of the company in 2015.



The CTE Power Tower was launched in 2007



The Original Power Tower from Access Machines in the late 1990's



Bil-Jax launched this self-propelled Power Tower derivative - the PT10SP - in 2010

COMPACT INNOVATOR

Another early innovator on the other side of the Atlantic was Steve Kissinger of Custom Equipment in Wisconsin with the Hy-Brid range. He and his wife Lynn started the company in 1981 as a fabrication and welding shop. They began producing the '2-in-1' scissor lift for use in mausoleums, and built their first work platform, the 10ft self-propelled Hy-Brid HB-1030 scissor lift - in 2004 with a five metre working height and an overall weight of less than 500kg. Its introduction was driven not by regulations but by the increasing use of suspended floors that

ruled out the increasingly heavy 15ft scissor lifts. After many successful years a private equity firm acquired an 80 percent stake in the business, selling in 2023 to Turkish company Asko Holding which also owns ELS. Earlier this year Hy-Brid Lifts/Custom Equipment was rebranded as AXCS Equipment.



A Compact Equipment HB-1030

BRAVI PREDATES THEM ALL

The other early European innovator which predates both the PopUp and Power Tower - and also still available - is the Bravi with its Leonardo. The Leonardo - or Lui Mini as it was originally named - predated the 2005 Directive by a good 10 years, having been launched in 1995. However, like many classic designs and products it has evolved over the years. The Leonardo, or Lui Mini, had a maximum platform height of 2.9 metres, and thanks to dual roll-out deck extensions has an extended platform of 1.69 metres, with a 750mm overall width, while weighing 495kg.



One of the very first Bravi Leonardos dating back to 1995

WHAT IS LOW LEVEL ACCESS?

But how do we define a 'low level work platform'? We think of a low level lift as having a maximum working height of up to 5.5 metres, ideally weighing less than 500kg, and can be self-propelled or push around with either a battery powered lift mechanism, or manually operated lift mechanism.

Over the years there have been several designs of low level lift but basically they fall into three basic types - scissor, mast or sigma. From the original designs of about 20 years ago, there have been many copies but few originals. And it may be argued, are any a real replacement for a ladder or are they just smaller, lighter forms of powered access products - scissors and mast lifts?

THE ONE EXCEPTION?

Originally launched in 2007 by JLG Australia, the LiftPod FS80 was a one man portable lift that is closer to a ladder alternative than any other. At the time JLG said that it 'filled the gap between ladders and larger aerial work platforms for one



The original JLG LiftPod in 2007

person lift applications'. It had a working height of 4.4 metres with a 150kg platform capacity and an overall weight of just 70kg.

Made up from three main components - base, mast and platform - each of which weighed no more than 29kg, it was quickly assembled or disassembled without tools in less than a minute and could be loaded into an estate car or van or carried upstairs. Power was either from mains electricity or a self-contained battery power pack. The FS80 featured a 600mm x 500mm platform and included a work tray for tools and materials. It also featured a low platform entry height, single hand interlocked controller and proportional lift and descent.



The original LiftPod disassembled and loaded up

A few years later in 2011 a smaller version - the FS60 - was announced with a 3.8 metre working height that could pass through doorways or ride small elevators without needing to be dismantled. Unfortunately, the LiftPod never really caught on with end users - possibly because of the price,



The smaller 3.8 metre working height FS60 LiftPod

which was way more than a ladder for domestic use or perhaps because professionals would rather have the ease and speed of a 'normal' push around or powered platform for repetitive work on internal fitouts and refurb type work.



NEW LIFTPOD MAY BE THE ONE

Given the lack of interest in the original LiftPod, JLG surprised many last October when it launched a new LiftPod. The radical new design meant it was clearly aimed at a totally different market - the facilities maintenance sector - to carry out maintenance work such as changing light bulbs in offices, hospitals, libraries, government buildings etc. JLG said that its other low level products are used when the building is being constructed, the new LiftPod is used after the building is complete. Its design and aesthetics immediately shout premium product, and you would expect to see it being used in luxury car showrooms, prestigious buildings, hospitals and corporate offices etc. JLG says that it is hoping to sell around 1,000 LiftPods - which are made in the UK at its Leicester facility - in the first year, growing to about 5,000 a year.

Work is currently ongoing with product accessories being added by working in partnership with companies such as tool tethering company Never Let Go, which is working on a pouch for storing ceiling tiles and other add-ons to make working easier, quicker and safer.

SLICK DESIGN

The LiftPod's slick design allows the unit to be easily folded for storage while offering a 3.5 metre working height. It is currently available in two versions - the LiftPod 1.2 with a 3.2 metre working height and the 3.5 metre LiftPod 1.5. A LiftPod 1.8 with a 3.8 metre working height is due later this year. It gains the additional height by mounting the platform 300mm higher and adding an additional step to gain access.



Much heavier than the original LiftPod, the 1.2 has an overall stowed height of 1.6 metres and weighs 180kg, while the LiftPod 1.5 is 1.9 metres high and weighs 205kg. Both units feature a 580 by 400mm platform with a 150kg capacity and tool tray as standard, and both have an overall

working footprint of 970mm x 780mm and can fold into 580mm by 760mm by 1.6 or 1.9 metres high. All use the Power Tower manual system for platform elevation and descent.

BUT IS IT A LIFTPOD?

But do not be confused - the two lifts may still be called a LiftPod, but the new product is aimed at a totally different market from the original, which has been superseded. However, JLG liked the name and branding, and decided to keep it, although it has been suggested that the product needs its own newly named category - the Quick Fold Lift?

Having seen the product in action, it is very impressive but is squarely aimed at the facilities maintenance sector and not industrial/construction. The new LiftPod was developed in Europe and will also be available in North America where JLG is currently talking to rental companies regarding collaboration and rebranding.

GROWING LOW LEVEL MARKET

The UK is probably still the largest market for true low level machines, at least in terms of market penetration levels, but many manufacturers are seeing substantial growth in Germany and Spain, particularly with the data centre market having a big influence. And while increased demand does have safety improvements, the uptake is more to do with productivity gains as the improved safety when carrying out a task. The Middle East has also been a good market in the past, thanks mainly thanks to the number of UK contractors working in the region taking their safety policies with them.

BRAVI
PLATFORMS

Leonardo HD

The perfect unit that adapts to the real jobsite's conditions.

Working height 4.9 mt / 16 ft
Load capacity 227 kg / 500 lbs
Unit weight (CE) 560 kg / 1234 lbs

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Versatility Without Compromises

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Doubled Productivity, Halved Risks

1 operator - 1 platform: unmatched autonomy and speed. Zero seconds to reposition means zero moments of risks. **50% of time saved** compared to ladders and scaffoldings.

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Spare parts in 48 hours. Equipment life of 30 years. 100% long-term after sales support.

ROI 200%

Average payback time of only 2 years, €50-€80 annual maintenance costs per unit and 35-40% residual value after 7 years of use.

JLG BUYS IN

JLG realised early on that the low level access market was set to grow and decided the easiest and quickest way into the sector was through acquisition... adding Power Towers to its growing range of products in 2015.

By this time Power Towers was operating from two facilities in Wigston, Leicester, one for the manually powered Pecolift - launched in 2012 - and the other for the Power Tower and Nano product lines. At the time of the acquisition, it had a working population of more than 12,000 Power Towers.

NANO NANO

The Nano was launched in 2009 with two models, with 3.8 metre and 4.5 metre working heights. Both were push around, mast lifts which provided a stowed platform entry height of 360mm offering a one metre x 700mm platform.

The self-propelled versions - the Nano SP Zero and SP Plus were added in 2011. The Zero had a working height of 4.5 metres - essentially a self-propelled version of the original Nano push around lift but weighing 440kg. The Nano SP Plus offered an extra long two stage, one metre platform extension adding 730mm to its platform length. Capacity was 120kg on the extension and overall the unit weighed a hefty 520kg. The Power Tower Peco Lift appeared in 2012 as a fully manual, 3.5 metre working height push around lift with 150kg platform capacity.



The Nano SP Zero low weight budget machine



The Nano SP Plus with its one metre two stage deck extension

FROM ARM'S LENGTH TO INTEGRATION

For the first five years or so, JLG ran Power Towers at 'arm's length', allowing it to operate independently. However, by 2019 the integration into the corporate structure had reached a level that meant King felt it was time to part company and leave JLG to fully integrate the business. In 2023 it launched the 12ft Nano35 - a push around mast type



In 2023 JLG launched its highest push around - the 5.5 metre Nano35

platform with a working height of 5.5 metres, making it the highest reaching lift in the push around range.

The extra height comes from slightly longer mast sections, although this does result in a higher step in height, while remaining below 400mm. The new model retains its saloon style entry gate. The platform is slightly smaller than the Nano at 840mm x 580mm, and like the latest Nano it now features vertical guardrail supports - eliminating the mid rail that some users tend to stand on to gain a little extra height.

Maximum platform capacity is 200kg and is rated for one person for indoor use only.

The machine has an overall weight of 432kg and runs on two fixed wheels and two castors that can be locked in place. The overall working footprint is just over 1.2 metres by 760mm, while a maintenance free AGM battery is standard.

Today the JLG Power Towers range includes push around manuals with working heights up to 4.2 metres - Pecolift, Ecolift and Ecolift WR - push around electrics up to 5.5 metres - the Nano 25, Nano 35, Power Tower and Power Tower Duo - the self-propelled family up to 4.5 metres including the Nano and Nano SP Plus and the new confined space Nano 30CS and Power Tower CS up to five metres which feature narrow 550 x 500mm platforms to allow access through 600 x 600mm ceiling tiles.



The JLG Confined Space CS machines feature narrow 550 x 500mm platforms

SNORKEL INCREASINGLY LOW LEVEL

JLG claims to retain market leadership for the push arounds while Snorkel claims to be the leading manufacturer of self-propelled low level platforms.

As mentioned earlier the original Pop Up was built in China, however in late 2010 an agreement with Snorkel included the transfer for the on-going design and production of the Pop Up products - including the new Push6, Push8 and Push10 - to the Snorkel facility in North East England. The two companies' combined product lines were marketed as Pop Up products in the UK and Ireland and Snorkel in the rest of the world however the agreement did not last.

Today Snorkel's low level range comprises four machines, three push arounds - the four metre/240kg capacity S3006P, the five metre/240kg S3010, five metre/240kg S3210P



The five metre/240kg Snorkel S3010P

rated for outdoor work without stabilisers and the self-propelled 5.06 metre/215kg S3010E.

ALTREX CO-OPERATES

In 2020 Pop Up Products agreed a new 10 year partnership with Altrex. Both companies had been working together for several years with a joint development agreement for several new products, including a one person tower range - the MI Tower, MI Tower Plus and MI Tower Stairs.

THE ALTREX VARI-LIFT

At the recent Apex show, Altrex launched two manual push around lifts, the 3.5 metre working height Vari-Lift 350 and the 4.2 metre Vari-Lift 420. The new models are built by JLG in the UK based on its Ecolift 50 and Ecolift 70. List prices are just over €5,000 and €7,400 respectively, although as with all of these machines, deals can be done for larger orders. The larger model has an overall width of 740mm, is 1.28 metres long with a stowed height of 1.94 metres, while weighing 319kg. The 3.5 metre version is 700mm x 980mm with a 1.55 metre stowed height, it is also much lighter at 196kg. The Vari-Lift 350 also features a single castor at the front. Both have vertical anti-climb bars in the platform.



Altrex showed its new Vari-Lift at Apex

AXOLIFT ON THE EXPANSION TRAIL

Axolioft/Gromet entered the sector with its own range of mast type low level platforms in 2021, having previously produced fabrications for others. It has had a very successful entry into what seemed to be a fairly crowded market for its size.

It started with the manually operated Manulift 200 and the battery powered push around Elift 350, with working heights of four and 4.95 metres respectively, going almost head to head with the JLG Power Towers' Pecolift and Ecolift 70 manual lifts, along with the 830 push around model.

In the years since, it has added to and upgraded its product line, expanded its production facilities, and is building a solid distribution network with dealers added in the Netherlands, the UK, Ireland, France, Lithuania, Poland, Norway, Spain and,

more surprisingly India, where it hopes to build machines for the local market in partnership with its dealer Gemini. In a relatively short period of time, the company has become an increasingly important player in the sector.

MUNK FLEXXLIFTS

In the past month or two, Gromet agreed a product branding and development deal with German ladder and scaffold manufacturer and supplier Munk Günzburger Steigtechnik, part of the 125 year old Bavarian based Munk Group. The agreement will see Gromet develop low level aerial work platforms under Munk's FlexxLift brand, which Munk will distribute in Germany and Austria. Munk was previously an award winning JLG low level platform distributor for Germany. Its deal with Altrex may well have proved a trigger for the switch?



The first Munk Flexxlift

The range will kick off with custom versions of Axolift's four metre Manulift 200 manually operated push around mast type platforms and may later progress to small self-propelled masts and scissor lifts. Most likely along the same lines as the manufacturer already does for Pop-Up in the UK.

THE P300

Axolift extended its product range to scissor lifts in 2024, when it unveiled its 4.95 metre working height P300 push around scissor lift, which used a 24 volt system for the lift function to reduce costs and featured automatic two wheel braking



The new P300X has a working height of 4.95 metres with its 240-250kg maximum platform capacity and weighs just under 500kg

on platform lift off. A self-propelled version - the P300T - followed with a 240kg platform capacity featuring a 20kg capacity tool tray and an overall weight of 430kg.

Earlier this month at Apex, the company launched its first outdoor rated model, a 4.9 metre self-propelled dual deck scissor lift, the P300X. It features a working height of 4.95 metres with a 240 to 250kg maximum platform capacity and weighing just under 500kg. The overall width is 765mm, overall length 1.29 metres, and stowed height 1.8 metres. The dual 300mm platform extensions take the maximum platform length to 1.76 metres. Standard features include a battery indicator, forklift pockets and an active pothole protection system. The first units are expected to ship in September.

A LEONARDO CHALLENGER?

The P300X is clearly a direct competitor to Bravi's Leonardo HD and from the specification comparison below it performs very well, at least on paper. The key difference is the lift mechanism... Bravi uses a mast while the Axolift has a triple scissor stack which gives it a clear platform while some of the Bravi platform space is taken up with the top box section of the mast. The downside of the Axolift design is a higher lowered platform height of 725mm compared to just under 650mm on the Bravi.

As already mentioned, the Bravi Leonardo HD has been around for many years and has a solid reputation. It was upgraded in 2024, to give a 230kg unrestricted platform capacity across the entire dual extension platform, making it more

NEW

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LOW LEVEL PLATFORMS

The updated Bravi HD now offers an unrestricted platform capacity of 230kg



suitable for larger accessories such as the unique Solo-Gyps plasterboard handler for overhead installation. The rest of its specifications remain unchanged with a 1.7 metre by 630mm platform, 4.9 metre working height and 560kg total weight.

Manufacturer Model	Axolift P300X	Bravi Leonardo HD
Model height	4.95m	4.9m
Platform cap. decks ext.	240kg	227kg
Closed platf. length	1.16m	1.04m
Dual extended platf. length	1.76m	1.7m
Overall width	765mm	760mm
Overall length	1.29m	1.2m
Stowed height	1.82m	1.75m
Lowered platform height	725mm	650mm
Total weight	500kg	560kg
Tilt angle	NG	1.5°
Ground clearance	50mm	87mm
Gradeability	35%	35%

A HIGHER LEONARDO

At the end of last year, Bravi launched another new platform, the Leonardo HD 430. With a 6.3 metre working height - so not really a low-level platform - the HD 430 is very similar in design and look to the Leonardo HD. It has a platform capacity of 180kg rather than the HD's 227kg, and it is 120kg heavier at 680kg.

NEW BRAVI RESIDENTIAL 170

At the same time Bravi also launched the 3.7 metre working height Residential 170 mast type self-propelled platform specifically designed for residential job sites.



Styling is similar to the Leonardo HD, but it only weighs 360kg and has both self-propelled and push around modes. Maximum capacity is 180kg

in the 1.9 metre by 590mm platform. The overall length is just 1.15 metres, overall width a very compact 667mm and the stowed height 1.75 metres, at which point it can be driven at its maximum speed of 3kph, or 0.6kph when elevated. The platform can also be equipped with Bravi's 'Solo-Gyps' attachment for drywall panel handling and installation.

Other updates from Bravi include the Sprint stock picker type platform, which includes a new chassis with reinforced corners and bumpers, while a new wider cargo shelf has been designed to fit both the Sprint and Sprint LP models and includes fold up edges on three sides for improved efficiency.

New accessories include the 'Suction Gun', a pole with a 20kg capacity suction cup on the end to grab hard to reach items at the back of a shelf or rack and thus increase picking efficiency. On the Sprint LP model, the large parcel/cargo shelf has been completely redesigned and is now equipped with a set of rollers on both sides to facilitate the loading of bulkier materials.

ONLY HALF OF ALL INTERNAL WORK IS ABOVE FIVE METRES

Bravi says that the changes have come as a reaction to a market research study, which indicates that 48 percent of general internal building work involves ceiling heights of five metres or less, and yet 92.7 percent of the platforms sold between 2017 and 2023 for this type of work have working heights above five metres.

How many times have you seen a 19ft scissor lift being used while stowed with someone standing on the mid guardrail to reach a little higher? It really is far more common than it should be. At the same time, it is relatively rare to see such lifts working while fully elevated which suggest that the research may be onto something.

NEW ALP LIFT

Apex saw the launch of a new four metre manual push around lift from Dutch material manufacturer and supplier Alp Lift named the Desksurfer LT.



Bravi Residential 170



The Sprint with 'Suction Gun' option



The Bravi Leonardo pipe rack option

Three platform heights can be selected - 1.17metres, 1.44 metre and 1.72 metres - going up in increments of 275mm by manually lifting the platform to the predetermined levels. The aluminium alloy platform has a capacity of 150kg but weighs just 68kg. Stabilisers can be used, the overall width without is 690mm increasing to 745mm with them deployed. Retracted height is 1.91 metres and overall length 1.26 metres. The lift is designed to work above desks as an alternative to ladders. Working heights of about four metres are standard but a six metre version is also available.

A few months ago, the company regained the right to market its products under the Alp Lift brand in Germany, Austria, and a number of other markets where the name was registered by truck mounted crane and hoist manufacturer Böcker. The move follows an amicable and mutual agreement between the companies.

THE NAVIGATORS AND THE RANGER

Also at Apex Alp Lift showed a product called the Ranger, the latest introduction from Navigator Lifts. The product is being distributed by the Alp Lift dealer in the Netherlands. Navigator Lifts is a relatively new, UK based company producing low level lifts. The full product line now includes the Navigator 4.5 and Navigator 6.0, the Explora, the Scout and the latest addition - the 4.2 metre working height Ranger.

The company launched two new manually powered push around mast lifts - the Explora and the Scout with working heights of 4.6 and 3.65 metres respectively - at Vertikal Days last year. These machines use a ratchet type wind up elevation system and join the Navigator 6 and Navigator 4.5. acquired from Metal and Modular in April 2025.

The Ranger has a platform capacity of 150kg and an overall weight of 320kg. When stored it is 1,528mm long, 775mm wide and 1,979mm high. Platform is 772mm x 840mm. Features include anti climb vertical guardrails, anti-surf brakes, a winch point for easy loading and lifting and a low step into the platform.

Navigator Ranger



Alp Lift's new Desksurfer LT








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