

FERRARI FEATURES

"DO YOU NEED A LIFT TODAY?"

Do you live in either an urban or suburban area? Are you limited in terms of the number of fine cars you can own and house on the property where you live? Does your local government frown on you covering your parcel of land with garages in which to keep and maintain your toys? If you answer "Yes" to these three questions, this article is meant for you.

As an FCA member, South Central Region, Houston chapter, late of the San Francisco chapter of the Pacific Region, I encountered all the above problems when we moved to Houston in 1999. A 1997 355 spider, a 2000 Porsche 996 Carrera 4, a BMW 540i six-speed and a Honda Civic EX were our "stable". With the infamous Houston summers, the idea of having two cars "sit out" was unthinkable in terms of the humidity and UV load from the intense sunlight.

What to do? Our 60' x 120' lot gave us no option to build additional garages. Our city fathers and the local planning board frown on double decking garages! A carport extension? Tacky, ugly — not a real solution. How do you get more than two cars into a standard size two car garage?

A possible solution is to purchase and install a lift in the garage to store one car over another. [The idea came from a NEWSbulletin ad placed by a Central States Region FCA member near Chicago.]

Some research was in order. Who makes this type of lift? How much do they cost? Are they well constructed and safe to operate? Was it reasonable and possible for a mechanically adept individual to assemble and install such a lift? Did the inside dimensions of the garage permit a lift, both in terms of headroom [critical] and width/depth? Depending on the height of your garage, a lift may be the solution. From experience, a minimum ceiling height of 9' 6" is necessary to store cars "double decked."

Several automobile commercial lift manufacturers or marketers were found who offered a lift suitable for this use. All are four post-type lifts, with ramps and runways on which to drive and store your car(s). The lifts are powered by an electric motor, usually 110V. 220V is usually an option at little or no extra cost. The decision will be based on access to electrical power. Usually there is a 110V outlet in the garage ceiling to power the garage door opener, so 110V is the easiest solution. Running a 220V line involves the cost of a licensed electrician.

You should several [at least two] lift manufacturers [or marketers] for their literature, which will include installed dimensions and other specifications. With this information, compare the lift quality and features, particularly the safety of the design. Also consider the ease of assembly and installation, including the weight and size of individual parts of the lift. Unless your friends include one or two big guys with mechanical experience who can be motivated by either free food or free beer or both, you may want to have the lift assembled by a commercial installer.

Other considerations include the height of your present garage door tracks relative to the floor and the ceiling. In our case, the tracks had to be extended vertically so the door stored close to the ceiling to provide headroom for the car on top. This necessitated the installation of heavy-duty door lift springs, because the door travel distance increased, and other heavy-duty hardware. This is not a difficult job, however, it should be done by your local Genie or Overhead Door company. Those coil springs hold a surprising amount of energy — particularly the heavy duty ones. One slip can result in personal injury or damage to your garage sheet rock and doors.

Safety features to look for in a lift include a high factor of safety on load rating, frequent lock stops on the columns and heavy gauge steel for the runways, columns and crossmembers. The unit I installed has four cables with a rating of 14,500 pounds each, a total of 58,000 pounds — to lift a 3,200 pound 360 Modena. The 19" wide runways are 3/16-inch thick non-skid steel diamond plate. The columns and crossmembers are 1/8th inch steel. The safety locks are of 9/16-inch steel, the first set at a height of 18 inches and then every 4.5 inches from 33.5 inches up to 69.5 inches. The lock stops are 3/4-inch steel with the limit bars for the safety locks of 3/4-inch steel. The operating mechanisms are fully enclosed, with covers over the exposed cable pulleys. The columns have 12-inch square steel baseplates. The ramps are 37 inches long, to give a low angle of approach for low cars like 355's

and 360's. You should look for specifications like this in the lift you buy as an indication of commercial-lift quality from the manufacturer.

When you have read and compared lift specifications and measured your garage and height of your cars [assuming you are not prepared to convert your Berlinettas into Spiders!] you will know if a lift will allow you to fit two cars in your garage, stored one over the other. Note which lifts have a powder coated finish and which are painted — powder coating is definitely superior. Decide which lift to buy and what options you want/need. Sometimes more than one color is offered as standard, usually black and/or blue. Optional colors are usually available at extra cost.

Ordering the options with the lift has two benefits — the supplier usually discounts options more the more you buy [to his benefit] and the overall price [to your benefit!] And the cost of shipping is much better, particularly if you buy from one of the companies offering free freight.

Options include 110V versus 220V power, aluminum ramps versus steel ones [definitely get the Al ones — the standard steel ones require two people to install and remove them from the lift! You can purchase a heavy duty caster set to allow the lift to be moved on a smooth surface, either loaded with a vehicle or empty, should you want this capability. A commercial-type oil drain unit is offered, with a funnel on a telescoping tube on top of a roll-around plastic oil tank for the used oil. Plastic, galvanized or stainless steel trays are offered, which fit between the lift runways to ensure the vehicle on top does not defecate on the one below! Drop in plates are used to limit how far forward and back the car can move, so it does not fall off. These are usually steel, optional in aluminum. A jack tray is available, which allows one end or the other of the vehicle to be lifted clear of the runways. Very handy if you plan to do brake work or remove wheels for cleaning or tires/wheels for storage [no tire flat spotting]. Some lift manufacturers offer wheel chocks. If you need or want chocks, buy plastic ones locally, as the steel ones are very overpriced.

That's about it for options. Know what you want before you talk to the lift manufacturer sales people. Most four post lifts are priced at \$3,000, plus or minus a little. And negotiate, negotiate, negotiate. Like shopping in a street market or shop in Italy! You will be able to charge the lift to your credit card. Most manufacturers provide a videocassette with full assembly instructions, in addition to a printed assembly manual. Expect delivery by common carrier in 10-14 days. The lift will arrive disassembled, strapped together, with some parts on a pallet. Have a couple of friends available to help — the runways in particular [two], the vertical columns [four] and horizontal crosspieces [two] are heavy and bulky. There will also be several boxes, containing the assembly hardware and the accessories you ordered. Note: The manufacturer provides all hardware needed to assemble the lift.

Have all the lift components sitting in your driveway with an empty garage. Measure and mark the garage floor where you want to place the columns. Assembly of the lift is straightforward — it just takes time. Count on four to six hours, depending on how mechanically adept you are and how many friends you have recruited [which typically is a function of the amount of free beer and food offered!]

Select either the front or rear pair of columns. Lay them down and insert the appropriate crossmember into the top of the columns until the locks hit the first [top] set of stops. Raise the two columns to a vertical position with the crossmember. Do the same with the other two columns and another crossmember. Position these units to the front and rear of your garage at the correct distance to allow the runways to be placed on the crossmembers for assembly. Install the column top plates and bolt them in place, both laterally and transversely. They do a lot of work and must be installed securely. Raise each crossmember slightly in turn, to allow the locks to be swung clear of the lock stops and lower the crossmembers down to the lowest lock position, typically just below knee height. This will make assembly of the rest of the lift much easier.

Moving the runways around and positioning them for assembly is much easier if you use heavy wall plastic pipe or galvanized pipe for rollers under the runways. One runway has a big hydraulic cylinder installed underneath — this unit is very heavy, by far the toughest one to lift and place. Put the runways on the crossmembers and bolt them in place.

Pull the cylinder piston all the way out, so the lifting cables can be installed. Extending the piston can usually be done by pulling on the plate at the head of the piston. Air pressure can be used by installing an airline in the threaded fitting where the hydraulic line will later be fitted. Do not use any type of wrench or pliers on the piston to pull it out.