

FORKLIFT SAFETY: **BUYER BEWARE**



Choosing to buy a used or refurbished truck can be a very wise financial decision, but it does require more caution than if you were buying new from a manufacturer-approved dealer. With money on the line, it's worth investing some time to prepare says Tim Waples, Chief Executive of the Fork Lift Truck Association.

While most of us would prefer brand-new equipment that benefits from the latest technology and has no prior wear, finances are a significant deciding factor for businesses.

Buying second hand can be an affordable way to obtain a fork lift truck, particularly where the equipment will only be used occasionally.

However, it is very much a case of "buyer beware", especially if you are considering purchasing from an on-line retailer (rather than a dealership selling used equipment section on its website).

A forklift is a complex and potentially dangerous piece of equipment and you, as an employer, are responsible for making sure it is safe and suitable for purpose.

To help, we have prepared a checklist.

1. Find out more about your seller:

For example:

- Is the company a member of a reputable trade body?
- Does it work to a nationally agreed Code of Practice?
- Does it employ field service engineers in case something goes wrong?

2. Insist on a site survey

This ensures the truck on offer is suitable for the tasks you will demand of it. Forklift trucks might all seem alike, but they vary enormously – according to how they are kitted out.

Consider...

- Is your truck going to be used regularly?
- Will it be working indoors, outdoors, or both?
- What tasks will it be performing?
- How heavy will its loads be?
- Are there environmental restrictions on noise or fumes?
- How much space will the truck have to manoeuvre?
- Is the mast tall enough to reach the highest shelves?
- Is the mast low enough to fit beneath the lowest doors and ceilings?

A reputable dealer will offer to inspect your site and application to ensure that the truck they provide is appropriate to your needs. Online retailers are far less inclined to do so.

As an employer, the safety of the truck operator is your responsibility. Getting the wrong equipment could end badly

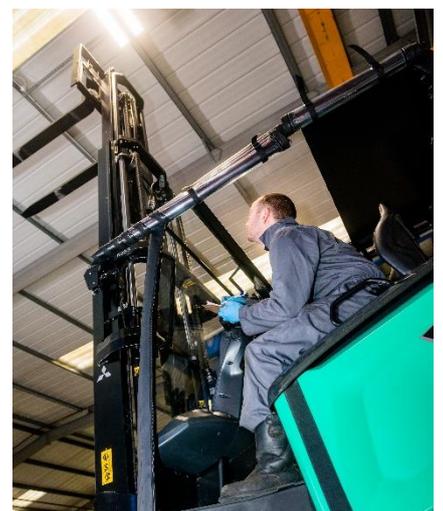
for everyone – with damage, accidents, fines, and even imprisonment.

TIP: Get a reputable dealer* to inspect your site and quote for both new and used trucks. This will grant you a clear picture of what you require and prices.

*One who is accredited to a trade association and works to a nationally approved Code of Practice.

3. Conduct a visual inspection

One of the clear disadvantages of buying online is that you're forced into relying on the seller's images and description.



A visual inspection should look for any rust, damage, or indications of an underlying fault — such as cracks, repair welding, or fluid leaks.

4. Check the Thorough Examination Report

A Thorough Examination inspection ensures vehicles comply with LOLER and PUWER regulations. However, like a car MoT, it doesn't check everything and, as such, shouldn't be solely relied on when assessing a forklift's condition.

Importantly, every truck is legally required to hold a current Thorough Examination Report and, as soon as you take possession, it is your responsibility — so check that it has one! The Report is valid for 12 months.

If in doubt about a truck's health, request an independent Thorough Examination be conducted before you buy.

To ensure the inspection really is thorough, the Fork Lift Truck Association recommends using an examiner accredited by Consolidated Fork Truck Services (CFTS).



5. Inspect the warranty

A good warranty is crucial when buying a second-hand truck. It's important that you know how long your warranty period lasts, what it covers and — significantly — what is excluded.

If a truck is sold while still within a manufacturer's warranty, contact the company to ensure the warranty is transferred. Please note that, while some can be transferred, others are exempted upon resale.

6. Ensure it is not a dodgy import

There are a growing number of rogue imports on the second-hand forklift market and it's vital that you avoid them. Not only are they hard to source parts for and hard to sell but, in the event of an accident, such a truck could even invalidate your insurance.

Ensure the truck you're looking to buy has a genuine CE mark. Additionally, make sure that the identity plate, operator manual, CE Certificate, and all labels and warnings, are in the correct language.

7. Take it for a test drive

Buying a second-hand forklift is more serious than buying a used car. That's because it is a potentially dangerous and quite complex piece of equipment and, as such, it is governed by strict legislation.

You'd be foolish, therefore, to hand over the cash without ensuring it works first.

So, give it a test run or, if you're unqualified, have an operator do so for you. You should always ensure that the truck's functions work as they should.

As with a car, it's important to ensure that an engine-powered forklift starts from cold, since many problems will not be apparent on a warm engine.

TIP: Conduct your tests over a clean floor. Afterwards, check for tell-tale drips which will indicate potentially costly leaks from the hydraulics or transmission, and check the colour of the exhaust fumes.

8. Assess batteries on electric trucks

It's crucial that there's plenty of mileage left in the cells of any truck you're looking to buy.

As a rule of thumb, the average industrial truck battery will last 1200 charges and each charge provides approximately 5 hours of run-time. So, by dividing the equipment's clocked hours by five, you can get a rough idea how much life the battery has remaining.

TIP: Don't forget to visually inspect the battery. For extra peace of mind, get separate warranty cover for your battery and consider asking a battery supplier to test the battery for you.

9. Confirm the mast is fit for purpose

First and foremost, it's critical that the mast of your truck is appropriate for your application.

Of course, it's crucial that your new truck be able to reach the heights required but, just as important (yet often overlooked) is whether it will fit under doorways and the lowest ceilings in your operating area.

For low-ceiling and trailer work, you'll need to consider the mast type and how much free lift it provides — the distance the forks can raise before the next section of mast extends.

Equally, the mast must be inspected for costly wear and tear. Flaking residue is a sign that wear is occurring.



Lubrication — not usually required of a healthy forklift mast as it attracts detritus — could be a sign that the owner is compensating for a fault.

Make sure you watch the mast in operation and ensure it all extends smoothly. Check the rollers and ensure that they run true and don't stick (a sign of missing or worn bearings).

10. Double check your clock readings

Whereas a car's working life is assessed through mileage, a forklift's is judged through operating hours.

Forklift experts estimate that one hour of truck use is the equivalent to driving a car for 30 miles.

By this reasoning, a truck that has done over 3000 hours is nearing the car equivalent of 100,000 miles.

Unfortunately, like cars, clocks can be tampered by unscrupulous dealers. As such, it is advisable to check the stated hours against the service history.

11. Check the rating plate

The rating plate is a crucial feature of any lift truck as it tells you how much your truck can safely lift. As such, it plays an important role in the safety of your workplace.

When buying a used truck, you must ensure that the data contained on the plate is filled in, legible and correct.

Additionally, when buying materials handling equipment, ensure the rated capacity is slightly higher than the maximum load you expect to carry.