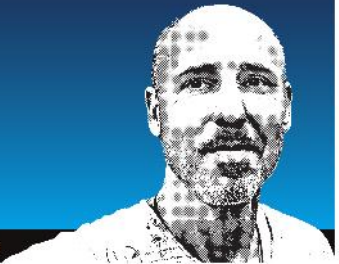


Lift Me Up: Two-Post or Four-Post?

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I've always enjoyed working on cars, taking them apart and putting them back together. There was always that "thing" about figuring out how something works and then assembling it back together so it looked and worked perfect. For me, it started at an early age with bicycles and then moved on to motorcycles and then finally cars. For almost all of us, the images of working on a car and crawling underneath to change the oil or crouching down to work on the brakes is something we have done many, many times. Crawling around a car is probably more natural for some of us, but if you have the ability and space, one of the best tools you can ever own in a shop is a car lift. For me, it's a must-have. Now that I have my own, I would never go back to working on a car on the ground.

Here are several things to decide before purchasing a lift: How will you use it? What type of work will be done? Will it be used to store cars only? What size vehicles? How much space do you have? Those considerations should help guide you in a certain direction.

Generally, there are two types of lifts that the do-it-yourself home shop owners purchase—the two-post and the four-post. Both offer advantages, so again it all depends on your situation as to what fits best for you.

For ease of use and for storing cars (one on top of the other), a four-post lift is probably the best choice. This way, you simply drive the car on the lift and you are done. They make it easy to enter and exit the car, and you don't need to adjust lifting points underneath. You really just drive up on the ramps and raise the car. Done.



If you were using a two-post lift, it would be a little different. You would need to first be able to get in and out of the car without hitting a post. So your ability to twist and turn needs to be pretty good, otherwise your car door will bang against the lift post. Once out of the car, of course, you need to crawl underneath to position the arms under the frame and then lift the car. Again, a four-post lift eliminates this. And then, of course, on a two-post lift, your suspension hangs down the entire time, which in general is not a good thing for cars over a long period of time.



For working on a car, again there are differences for the two lifts. The four-post lift doesn't allow access to the underside of the car as easily and as readily as a two-post lift because the ramps are in the way. And it's more of a challenge to lift the wheels off the ramps on a four-post lift. If that type of work needs to be done, then you need to have a rack jack (pneumatic or hydraulic). Preferably, you'll have two rack jacks. With a two-post lift, you have pretty good access to everything once the car is lifted and up in the air.

Another thing to look at for a lot of us is how much space does a lift take up in your shop when not in use. That can be a big consideration, especially when you don't have a super huge shop and you need to utilize as much space as possible. By far, the two-post lift requires the least amount of space. It is easy to put out of the way when not in use. The four-post lift is a completely different animal when not being used because it requires a bit more space.

Typically, a four-post lift does not need to be mounted to the concrete floor like a two-post lift. You can actually get four-post lifts on wheels so you can move the entire lift assembly outdoors or to a new position as needed. You don't have that ability with a two-post lift as they need to be mounted directly to the floor.

Other factors include the power needed for the motors. A four-post lift generally operates off a 110-power supply, while a two-post lift will generally need a single-phase 220-power supply.

Also, a two-post lift can raise a car higher than a four-post lift. This is because of where you are lifting the car. Since the two-post lift is designed to lift via the frame, the mounting points are higher and gets you more space to work under the car. If you have a 10-foot ceiling, a two-post lift will generally raise the car about six feet off the ground.

Of course, cost is going to be one of the most important factors, but I purposely mention this one last because you should not ignore all the other factors. A four-post lift will generally always be more expensive than a two-post lift—and I'm talking considerably more. The one thing I would mention when looking at cost is to only consider purchasing from a reputable manufacturer who can provide local service if/when needed.

So, after all is said and done, you need to purchase what makes the most sense for you and your situation. But once you have one, you will be forever grateful for that tool.