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What are marinas looking for in their

FORKLIFTS



In purchasing a forklift, marinas and boatyards should consider factors such as reliability, dependability, and operator friendliness.

BY JEROME A. KONCEL

Paul Turcotte is general manager of Grove Key Marina in Miami and a 35-year veteran of the marina industry. During his more than three decades in the marina industry, he's been involved with forklifts on a regular basis and says that marinas/boatyards employ forklifts for a variety of uses. "It depends on the type of boats you're lifting, the purpose for moving the boats, and conditions at the marina," Turcotte said.

Given these parameters, *Marina Dock Age* decided to interview some marinas that have purchased forklifts, including Turcotte's, to determine what they're looking for in their forklifts.

Site specific needs

As Dan Natchez, a regular columnist for this magazine, is fond of saying, everything about marinas is site specific. Whether its selecting docks, dredging harbors, or adding electrical

"We offer boaters the opportunity to take their boats out of the water and perform cleaning, repair, and other work done either by themselves or by our certified mechanics."

—Paul Turcotte

pedestals, the choice depends on the specific marina site. The same holds true for selecting forklifts.

Turcotte says that although Grove Key Marina has a dry storage operation, it primarily uses the three forklifts at the facility for outdoor storage and full-service and do-it-yourself boat repairs. "We offer boaters the opportunity to take their boats out of the water and perform cleaning, repair, and other work done either by themselves or by

our certified mechanics," Turcotte said.

Turcotte's marina has two forklifts for lifting boats out of and into the water. The size of the forklifts determines which boats it can lift, but so does the boat model, Turcotte noted. "We can lift a 42–43 ft. speedboat with two or three outboard engines because of where the weight is located," Turcotte said. "We can only lift a cruiser boat with inboard or stern drive engines that is 32–34 feet long."

Turcotte said that the larger forklift can lift boats weighing 20,000–25,000 lb., and is used primarily for repair and maintenance work. The other one, weighing about 100,000 lb., can lift boats between 25,000–35,000 lb. "You have to be careful in using the larger machine that your ground foundation can accommodate the weight," Turcotte said. "For example, the big forklift literally rips up asphalt."

Bronson Knapp, corporate harbor-master for Yacht Clubs of America (YCOA), is based out of YCOA's



One of the forklifts at Grove Key Marina in Miami places a boat into the outdoor storage rack.

recently opened Naples Harbour Yacht Club in Naples, Fla. He has been driving motor vehicles since he was eight years old, supervises, trains, and certifies all the forklift operators for YCOA, and has spent time at YCOA's first marina at Sanibel Harbour in Florida. When it comes to forklifts, Knapp said that YCOA's marina in Naples has a winner. "Our 520M forklift is the 'cadillac' of forklifts," Knapp noted.

Knapp said the "52" forklift can lift boats weighing up to 52,000 lb. and 50 ft. in length, has air-cushioned padding for its operators, is a snap to drive, and is very dependable. "When it comes to forklifts, my primary criteria is that they can't be down—ever," Knapp noted. He acknowledged that YCOA customers expect five-star services at the marina, and this means that the forklift must be operating 365 days a year. Although mechanical problems do crop up now and then with forklifts, Knapp says it's a question of how the supplier responds to these problems.

He told *MDA* that he's been at marinas where getting normal service done on forklifts has been a challenge, let alone asking that supplier to provide one-day parts and service.



Bronson Knapp is the corporate harbormaster for Yacht Clubs of America and based out of Naples, Fla.

"You can't be down when you have a full-service marina like we do with YCOA Naples," Knapp said, "but our newest and biggest forklift is so dependable and the supplier so good that we're very satisfied with how it performs."

Rick Cowell, service manager at Coral Bay Marina in Moorehead City, N.C., says his marina has two forklifts, the most recent of which was purchased

last year. "We have an indoor dry storage facility with racks for storing about 200 boats, and we also store larger vessels outside," Cowell noted. He adds that the marina says it can store boats weighing up to 25,000 lb., but the average size fishing boat it puts in its racks is 28 ft. LOA and weighs about 12,000–14,000 lb.

"We use two forklifts for hauling boats into and out of the water around here," Cowell said. "One is a single mast and the other is a double mast, which we purchased last year to accommodate increased demand for boats from dry storage."

Operator friendliness

In purchasing a new forklift, all three marinas cited dependability and reliability as critical factors, but these weren't the only ones considered by the marinas.

"We purchased our newest forklift last year," Cowell said, "and it was a combination of price, timing, and customer demand that motivated the purchase." He added that the marina had been thinking of a purchase in prior years, but the price was right in 2007.

"Probably the most important factor

for us was price,” Cowell said. “We have a tight budget around here, so making capital expenditures is not something the marina takes lightly.”

In addition to price, the marina had experienced an increased demand from its dry storage customers. He noted that the marina was moving about 50 boats in/out of the water/racks on busy days, meaning that the need for quick cycle/interval times was crucial, and the existing forklift couldn't accommodate this demand.

For his part, Turcotte pointed to a lack of available parts, poor construction, and operator complaints as being the primary reasons why his marina began investigating the possible purchase of new forklifts. “Although the forklifts ran OK, getting service was another story,” Turcotte said.

Knapp said that while his marina currently has only around 100 boats to move in/out, he said that number is expected to jump pretty quickly in the near future. “Our total storage capacity is for 680 boats, so when we start to approach that number, we'll certainly need a bigger forklift with quicker cycle times,” he added.

Knapp's marina is a good example of a trend occurring at dry storage facilities across the country. With a finite amount of land available at waterfront facilities, marinas are building more dry storage facilities, and looking to maximize their storage capacity by having equipment working in smaller aisles or putting bigger boats in higher racks. To accomplish both these tasks, today's and tomorrow's forklifts must employ advanced designs in chassis and axles to allow tighter turning radius.

Turcotte notes that while marinas are demanding more from their forklifts, the key to any forklift is operator friendliness. Is it easy to mount and dismount the forklift? Are the seats padded and comfortable? Does the forklift provide an air-cushioned ride? Is it simple to operate the motorized vehicle?

On this last point, Knapp, who has been driving motorized vehicles since growing up on a farm, says that it's quick and easy to learn how to operate the new forklift at Naples Harbour Yacht Club. “You only have two levers on the console, and you can change gears right



The 520M forklift in action at Naples Harbour Yacht Club in Naples, Fla.

Marinas are building more dry storage facilities to maximize capacity by having equipment working in smaller aisles or putting bigger boats in higher racks.

from the enter column,” he noted.

Turcotte echoes Knapp's comments about forklifts being user friendly. “Our operators, bar none, love the simplicity of operating their machines,” he said. He added that the forklifts are agile, easy to move backwards and forwards, and, best of all, comfortable to sit on because the operators will spend 10-12 hours a day on them.

Environmental issues

MDA asked the marina professionals if concerns about noise and emissions were major concerns with their forklifts. The response was mixed.

Turcotte says that noise and emissions are real issues with forklifts, but are not major problems at Grove Key Marina because the equipment is not used inside. “We use them [forklifts] outside on the docks, and there's really no noise or pollution issues,” he noted.

Knapp, on the other hand, said that

noise pollution and diesel emissions are important factors in selecting a forklift for YCOA marinas. He explained that when operators start throttling up the forklift to lift boats out of their racks in the barn, diesel emissions appear on the exteriors of boats just cleaned. “Most people can't see the film, but if you rub your hand across the boat's exterior, you'll feel it,” Knapp said.

As a result, YCOA washes the boat when it comes out of the water, cleans the interior, flushes the motor, preps it, and puts it in dry storage. It does the same washing and cleaning when removing the boat from the rack because the forklift film emissions are on the boat's exterior. “It's like doing the same thing twice, so we made sure our newest forklift had little or no emissions,” Knapp said.

As far as noise levels are concerned, Knapp said that it is an issue for a marina that prides itself on offering five-star service to its customers. “We can't afford to have noisy forklifts, and our newest forklift, the 520M, lives up to that promise,” Knapp said.

Cowell said that his marina didn't think too much about noise levels and diesel fumes when it purchased a forklift last year, but noted that it is part of being an environmental steward. “We're part of the marina industry, which is a service industry, so we need to be leaders in serving our customers and protecting the environment,” he said. ⚓