



Marinas that store boats outdoors don't have the same needs in forklifts as marinas with indoor storage.



A standard method of carrying a boat at a marina.

Dockside equipment may provide a 'supporting role' to marinas

BY TOM SMYKOWSKI

Not all marinas have the same needs, especially when it comes to equipment. This is especially true for marina forklifts, where there's more to consider than the equipment's ability to lift/lower boats. Concerns with issues such as aisle widths, rack heights, climate, safety, and even appearance differ from marina to marina, and the ability of a manufacturer to accommodate those needs can be key in selecting the right equipment.

Time of the season

Many marina forklifts come with an open-air cab that are great for marinas located in regions where it's warm year-round, such as Florida, but what about marinas that have to deal with changing seasons? There are options out there for such marinas.

Marty Flaska, owner of Bedford Park, Ill.-based Hoist Liftruck, says that marinas looking for an alternative to open-air cabs have many options. "The enclosed cab option we offer provides the operator with protection from the elements, while still providing excellent visibility," says Flaska. "The cab can be equipped with air conditioning and heating, depending on what the customer wants."

Oakdale Yacht Service in Oakdale, N. Y., was an early proponent of the cab option on its forklift, and it worked out well for the marina where the east coast weather can be fairly unpredictable. "We operate in all kinds of weather – rainy, sunny, hot and cold," says Tom Crowley, owner of Oakdale Yacht

Service. "The cab is perfect for us and it does not sacrifice visibility or space one bit. Our operators can work in a comfortable environment no matter what the weather conditions are."

For many marinas, such as Pier 37 and Ryders Cove Boat Yard in Massachusetts and MarineMax in New Jersey, the cab option gives its operators the comfort they need in order to work throughout the day. At these marinas, it's not unusual for the marina forklift to handle more than 100 boats on a busy day.

Patrick Ruff, vice president of development and construction for BoatClubs of America, says that marinas have to think of both their customers and their employees when ordering cab options on forklift. "Not only do we strive to create a facility to meet the needs of future boats and the lifting capacities of

future boats, but we are equally interested in creating the finest working environment for our staff," Ruff noted.

Pros and cons

In addition to forklift capacity, determining the proper size and style of the mast is crucial in finding the correct forklift for a marina. Although all manufacturers have the ability to design and manufacture a custom mast, not all of them may be able to incorporate all of a marina's needs.

Marinas with outdoor dry rack storage don't have the same concerns as marinas with indoor storage where the mast needs to fit through a doorway and aisle. Marinas that need negative lift to lower/lift boats in/out of the water, as well as have indoor storage, usually have additional challenges.

"Some marinas, such as Everett



Marinas need to meet the needs of their customers and their employees when selecting forklifts.

[Washington] Bayside Marine (see story on page 46, April 2007 *Marina Dock Age*), need a large amount of negative lift, which affects the size of the mast," says Bob Miller, chief engineer for Hoist Liftruck. "In this case, we had to design a mast to accommodate this and still have the mast be low enough to fit through their doorway. We were able to accomplish this without sacrificing the visibility and capacity they were looking for."

Miller adds that the size of the mast also affects the overall capacity of the forklift, and that current marina owners and operators need to make sure the correct capacity is calculated and components are rated properly. In some instances, customers may not need negative lift and choose not to have it. Flaska encourages customers to keep the negative lift function, even though they may not need it, to sustain the value of the forklift if they ever decide to sell or trade it. "The negative lift function is standard on the forklift," says Flaska. "We're able to still include this function on our [Neptune] and 'lock it out' for customers who don't need it. Then, when it comes time to sell or trade the forklift, we are able to unlock and enable that function to give it full value for the customer."

Looks are everything

The appearance of the forklift is almost as important as its actual operation for some marinas. Some marinas have specific color guidelines for equipment and may request special paint jobs.

UK-based MDL Drystack, part of MDL Marinas, keeps its presence known at each of its marinas by having each of its forklifts painted in the company's standard dark blue and orange. "MDL is Europe's biggest marina owner/operator and many MDL customers enjoy reciprocal berthing and use of MDL facilities at neighboring sites," says Phil Armstrong, project manager for MDL. "Therefore, it is important that MDL customers enjoy



New York's Oakdale Yacht Service uses the cab option on its forklifts.

the quality, familiarity, and consistency between sites where facilities and services are familiar and easily recognizable, making visits as easy and enjoyable as possible, as well as allowing our products and services to be recognized throughout the industry."

Understanding the need for identity and consistency on all of MDL's marina forklifts, the forklift manufacturer worked with Armstrong's staff on a new paint scheme and decal placement for each of their forklifts.

Similarly, BoatClubsofAmerica also has its own identity. When its Ft. Myers BoatClub opens this fall, all its boat handling equipment will be in its hunter green color.

"Our identity and colors are as important to us as our brand," says Ruff. "As we strive to build a nationwide marina brand and product, we strive to associate the color scheme of our product—from our employees uniforms and equipment to our buildings and signage. Neutral colors are relaxing and soothing to a person's eye. The beiges, browns, and greens that we incorporate into our buildings and equipment are designed to make something that is massive and industrial

relate to a person in a more soothing and natural way."

Supporting role

Although most marina forklift manufacturers offer various levels of customization, potential buyers should inquire about service and parts support for non-standard features and equipment.

Customers should find out which options are available on a specific marina forklift, as well as the vendors a manufacturer works with. Customers can usually be assured that the available options have been proven with the vehicle and knowing the vendors will help determine the level of support one can expect, according to Miller.

"If a manufacturer goes to a vendor they don't use on a regular basis in order to fulfill a customization request, chances are the level of support will be fairly low," says Miller. "Unless a manufacturer has established vendors they work with or have manufacturing capabilities, customers should look into the level of support they will receive for any customization and check out references with similar experiences."

In addition to the ability to customize and provide support, customers should find out the additional costs and manufacturing time among manufacturers. Customers may be looking at features or equipment that may cost hundreds, even thousands of dollars, or it may cost nothing.

"Different customers have different needs, and as a manufacturer, we try to accommodate and provide options to as many of those needs as possible," says Flaska. "Many of the optional features we offered last year are now standard to not only give customers the best value for their money, but also give them a high level of support for as long as they own the forklift." ↓

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