



WHITE PAPER

What to consider when choosing a lift truck

The most important factors when evaluating lift truck equipment for purchase or lease

Consumer demand and tight margins mean warehouses must look to gain process efficiencies wherever they can find them, and lift trucks are often an essential component of these operations. While 41% of companies say the economy or market factors have little to no impact on how they acquire lift trucks, according to the 2026 Lift Truck Acquisition Survey by Peerless Research Group, price continues to be a critical factor, along with characteristics indicative of equipment longevity and uptime, like quality, parts availability and service response time.

In order to maximize the value of lift truck investments, it is imperative that businesses pinpoint and carefully weigh the factors that will help them select the best equipment to suit their needs. Which considerations should operations prioritize when acquiring new lift trucks? Which factors should shape their buying decisions? The survey by Peerless asked responding companies to identify which of 15 characteristics they considered important when evaluating lift trucks for purchase or lease.

This white paper goes into greater depth on several of the top considerations from the survey and provides insights on how operations can use these factors to improve their ability to meet business goals involving profit, employee safety, customer satisfaction and more.

Top 15 key buying criteria

The 2026 Lift Truck Acquisition Survey revealed which factors companies considered “important” when evaluating lift trucks for purchase and lease.

What’s stayed the same and what’s changed for lift truck buyers?

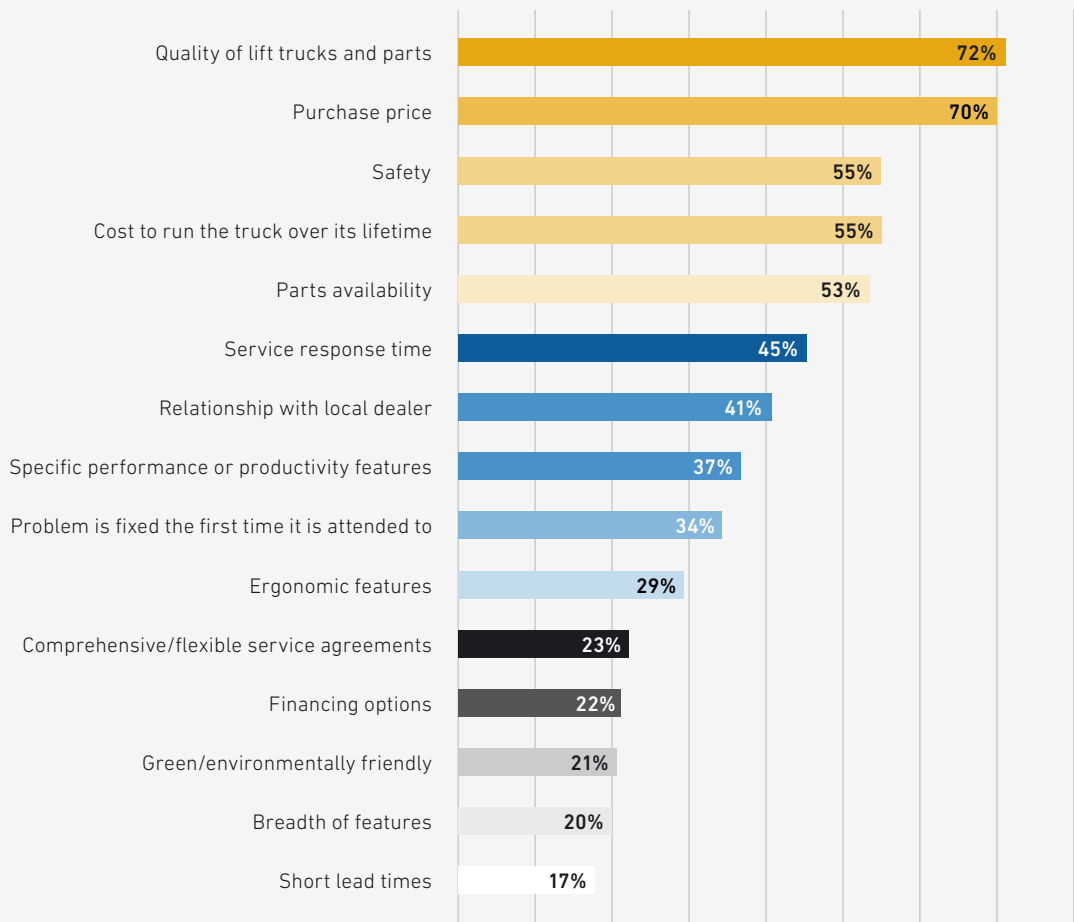
- All three top factors from the previous two years remained in the top three, but quality narrowly eclipsed purchase price for the prime position.
- Cost to run the truck over its lifetime made the biggest leap, gaining 13 percentage points (pp) to tie with safety for third-most cited.
- Relationship with local dealer moved up only one spot but gained 10 pp in the share of respondents ranking it as important.



It makes sense businesses are prioritizing quality, lifetime costs and support associated with maintaining aging equipment, because businesses are keeping their lift trucks longer.

REPLACEMENT & RETIREMENT SCHEDULES			
	2024	2025	2026
Average	Every 7.2 years	Every 7.9 years	Every 8.3 years

FLEET SIZE AND AGE		
	AVERAGE AGE TRUCKS IN FLEET	AGE OF OLDEST TRUCK IN USE
2024	9 years	15 years
2025	8 years	16 years
2026	10 years	17 years



#01 | 72%

#03 (tied) | 55%

#04 | 53%

Quality of lift trucks, lifetime costs & parts availability (tied)

Lower-quality lift truck equipment can prevent an operation from reaching its full potential. For instance, sluggish lift and lower speeds can undermine productivity and throughput. Likewise, equipment with poor maneuverability can make it more challenging for operators to navigate tight spaces efficiently and without causing damage.

Consider the relationship between the quality of lift trucks and parts, and the total cost of ownership. Equipment that is not high quality may be more likely to require replacement parts or frequent repairs, which can quickly become costly. Operations must further account for lost productivity stemming from associated downtime. Both factors become even more important as businesses expect greater longevity from their trucks, without runaway costs.

Reducing that potential service burden can help alleviate expenses, so it's essential to consider equipment durability, maintenance requirements and fuel efficiency when choosing between lift truck options. Trucks with a reinforced frame, more durable components or extended planned maintenance intervals can require less maintenance overall. Also, some equipment is engineered to make service faster and easier, by prioritizing accessibility of serviceable components or enabling service with few or no tools, or without lifting the truck.

Lastly, keep in mind the availability of replacement parts, an acquisition factor deemed important by 53% of respondents. Understand how well the dealer keeps replacement parts from the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) readily available and reasonably priced. Manufacturers who leverage common parts across their lineup may provide an advantage on part costs, due to economies of scale, and availability, due to the reduced number of unique parts a dealer needs to hold in inventory to have on hand when needed.



Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents cited truck and part quality as an important decision-making factor.

#02 | 70%

#07 | 37%

Purchase price and specific performance or productivity features

The importance of the upfront purchase cost is unsurprising considering the extent to which labor shortages, rising customer demands and broader industry and economic conditions are putting pressure on operational expenditures. Warehouses need their equipment to do more to help them meet expectations, but prioritizing high-quality lift trucks can't be at odds with their budgets.

So, what can buyers do to get the best value? Tailor equipment to the operation's unique standards. Custom typically implies expensive, but that doesn't have to be the case. Of the 15 purchasing/leasing considerations surveyed by Peerless, "breadth of features," ranked second-to-last, implying most operations don't care about getting their lift truck fully loaded but instead just want what they need to perform effectively. If an operation carefully considers the essential features and functions it demands from its lift trucks and can allow bells and whistles to fall by the wayside, the company may be able to achieve a better return on its investment. The challenge is, operations don't always have the opportunity to only get what they need, so it's important for potential buyers/lessees to look for manufacturers whose equipment gives customers the flexibility to opt up — or not — based on what their business requires.

Eschewing unnecessary options can also free up wiggle room for customers to invest in the features that provide the most value to their operations. Survey respondents are recognizing the value of these features, with 37% characterizing "specific performance or productivity features" as important. For example, businesses that need operators to pick and place high-value items at height with great frequency may prioritize upward visibility and precision. If these companies have realized savings elsewhere in the truck acquisition process, they may have more to allocate to specialized features that can help support those particular needs, such as a clear glass roof or fork laser level line.



What can buyers do to get the best value? [Match equipment to the operation's unique standards.](#)

#03 (tied) | 55%

Safety

Safety is critical to employee well-being, productivity and profitability — the National Safety Council estimates that work-related deaths and injury cost the nation, employers and individuals \$181.4 billion annually. As the leading contributor to Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) citations within the warehousing and storage industry, lift trucks are an important area of focus. Lift truck safety begins with comprehensive operator training. However, businesses can also prioritize their commitment to safety through equipment with technology.

In fact, a growing share of survey respondents — 24%, up 6 pp from 2025 — reported that they are either using or planning to evaluate or acquire autonomous or semi-autonomous forklift technology. But lift truck technology is not a simple binary choice — there is a broad spectrum of scalable, stackable solutions and the most valuable type and the extent of technology adoption is often specific to the warehouse.

One category, operator assist solutions, encompasses a range of tools with varying capabilities. Real-time alerts help operators avoid accidents by calling out hazards like path of travel obstructions or nearby pedestrians, while active interventions can automatically step in with speed and stability management, collision avoidance and location-based rules adherence. Some solutions, like the pedestrian awareness camera, are configurable, allowing operations to choose alerts only or go a step further and take advantage of automatic interventions as well.

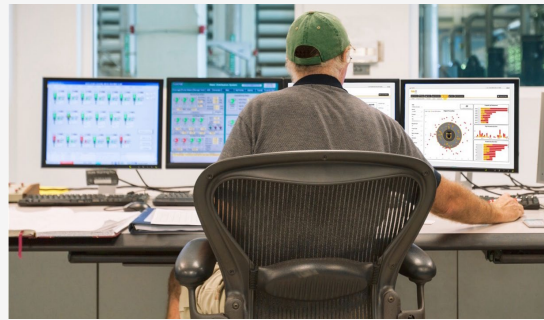
Another technology, telemetry, can help companies by collecting data in the background to shape better operator behavior and decisions. Some telemetry systems can also integrate with operator assist solutions and other technologies, providing managers with even greater visibility through real-time updates whenever an alert or intervention is triggered. Access to this kind of data allows organizations to identify recurring issues, remediate problem areas and reinforce best practices to promote safety.

Awareness aids add another layer of support by helping operators see and be seen. Solutions like lights, alarms, mirrors and cameras help improve awareness of the surrounding environment, while tools like laser fork positioning and load weight displays help operators fine-tune handling and boost fork placement accuracy.

Operational safety requires continuous attention and assessment, including an examination of the available operator assist solutions and other technology.



Automated lift trucks



Telemetry data insights



Real-time alerts & active interventions



Lights, alarms, mirrors and cameras

#05 | 43%

Service response time

While the extent of overlap in terms of which specific respondents selected which factors is unknown, one oft-cited consideration from the survey — service response time (45%) — is inherently aligned with another — the relationship with the local dealer (41%). Service response time is an increasingly critical ingredient for fast-paced warehouse operations working to maintain a high degree of equipment uptime.

In addition to providing replacement parts, in many cases the dealers are the ones to provide local service support, in a relationship that extends far beyond the initial transaction when the purchase or lease is finalized. To avoid buyer's remorse, it's important to be able to draw upon comprehensive local technician support from an extensive network of entrepreneurial dealers who are independent, responsive and effective. This should be accompanied by access to the engineers and industry experts at the OEM, for cases that require additional reinforcement.



Making the right lift truck purchasing decision

Whether it's the addition or replacement of a single truck, or a whole fleet for a new facility, lift truck acquisitions deserve careful consideration. They have a lasting, major impact on warehouse operations that goes well beyond simply moving loads from point A to point B. Many factors influence the buying decision, and the weight of those factors will vary for each operation. A trusted expert can help buyers navigate the process.

For a personalized conversation about matching your lift truck purchases to your operation's needs, contact an expert at your local [Yale® dealer](#).