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Ever wondered about the powerhouse behind efficient warehouses and bustling construction sites? Meet the forklift, an unsung hero that keeps industries moving. In this article, we're going to take an in-depth look at what a forklift truck is, diving into its various uses, the mechanics behind its operation, and the multitude of types that exist. From warehouses to construction sites, these powerful machines are integral to countless industries, facilitating the movement of heavy goods with ease and precision. What is a Forklift? A forklift, also known as an industrial truck, lift truck, or fork truck, is a powered industrial vehicle designed to lift, move, and stack materials over short distances. It is equipped with two metal prongs (forks) at the front, which can slide under heavy loads for lifting and transporting. Forklifts are commonly used in various industries, including warehousing, manufacturing, and construction. How Does A Forklift Work? The Machine Itself: The forklift is usually powered by either an internal combustion engine or an electric motor. This power source not only propels the vehicle but also operates the hydraulic system that controls the lift. Forklifts use rear-wheel steering, which enhances manoeuvrability in tight corners. The operator controls the forklift using levers and a steering wheel. The Lifting Mechanism: The lifting function of a forklift is controlled by its hydraulic system. When the operator pushes the lift control, it pumps hydraulic fluid into a cylinder, causing a piston inside to push upwards. This action raises the mast (the vertical assembly) and the forks, lifting the load they carry. A pulley system or chain linked to this assembly allows the forks to move vertically while remaining level, ensuring load stability. Additionally, a counterweight at the rear of the forklift balances the weight of the load being lifted, preventing the forklift from tipping over. The front wheels act as a balance point, much like a seesaw. The forklift also usually has a tilt mechanism that allows the mast to tilt slightly backward or forward, assisting in maintaining load stability during transport and accurate placement when stacking. Find Your Perfect Forklift: Compare Quotes from Local Forklift Dealerships: Please select a location from the suggestions. Enter Requirements: We Find the Best Deal: Receive your Quote: A Quick History of Forklifts: The history of the forklift is a fascinating journey that begins in the late 19th century. The first iterations were quite different from the machines we know today. Initial efforts to combine horizontal and vertical motion emerged around the end of the 1800s, with a crude truck capable of lifting its platform a few inches. The real landmark event occurred in 1917 when the Clark Material Handling Company introduced the Tructractor, often regarded as the original forklift. This vehicle, designed specifically for warehouses and factories, was the first seated counterbalanced truck. In 1922, Miag developed the worlds first lift-up forklift, which became the predecessor of the modern forklift. As the years passed, the design and functionality of these machines evolved, leading to the advanced, versatile forklifts we see in industries around the world today. From their humble beginnings as basic lifting machines, forklifts have transformed into indispensable tools in global industry, helping businesses move and manage materials efficiently and safely. The Different Types of Forklifts: Forklifts come in a variety of types and designs, each tailored to serve specific purposes and environments. Here are some of the most common types you'll encounter: Counterbalance Forklifts: These are the most common type of forklift. They have a counterweight at the back to balance the load at the front and can operate on smooth surfaces both indoors and outdoors. Electric Forklifts: These are powered by large, lead-acid batteries. Electric forklifts are perfect for indoor use because they don't emit harmful fumes and are quieter than their internal combustion counterparts. IC (Internal Combustion) Forklifts: These forklifts run on various fuels, including gasoline, diesel, and propane. They are powerful machines that excel in outdoor settings and can lift heavy loads. Reach Trucks: Specifically designed for warehouse operations, reach trucks have extended lift heights and are best suited for high rack loading and tight spaces. Pallet Jacks: Also known as pump trucks or pallet trucks, these are low-lift trucks designed to move palletized loads. They are ideal for loading and unloading trucks, as well as moving goods around warehouses. Order Pickers: These are used in warehouses to hand-pick items from racking and bring them down to ground level. Telehandlers (Telescopic Forklifts): These are essentially forklifts with a boom lift. Telehandlers have extendable arms, making them perfect for reaching into or over obstacles and structures. Rough Terrain Forklifts: With oversized, aggressive tread tires, these forklifts are designed to operate on uneven and rocky surfaces, making them ideal for construction sites. Each type of forklift has its unique advantages and is designed to improve efficiency and safety in its respective applications. We have a full guide on the different types of forklifts which delves deeper into the specifics of each model, their ideal usage scenarios, and safety measures to be taken while operating them. The Different Forklift Power Sources: Forklifts are powered by three main fuel types: electric, diesel, and LPG. Each fuel type offers unique advantages and considerations, playing a vital role in the machines performance, suitability for different environments, and overall cost-effectiveness. We have a great guide on the costs and benefits of different forklift fuel options, that goes into detail about the initial investment required for each type, their running costs, the impact on the environment, and maintenance requirements. Electric Forklifts: Electric forklifts, powered by rechargeable batteries, are a great choice for indoor operations due to their zero emissions and quiet operation. They come with either lead acid or lithium-ion batteries, each with unique advantages and considerations. While the initial investment may be higher, the long-term value can be better due to lower fuel costs. Diesel Forklifts: Diesel forklifts are robust and adaptable to various weather conditions, making them versatile for different operational environments. Despite their high performance, they are generally noisier and less environmentally friendly compared to electric forklifts. However, they are suitable for heavy-duty tasks and outdoor use. LPG Forklifts: LPG forklifts strike a balance between power and cleanliness, making them suitable for both indoor and outdoor use. They offer longer run times compared to electric forklifts but require a dedicated storage area for gas cylinders. The running costs of LPG forklifts should be considered in terms of fuel prices, cost per kilometre, efficiency, and maintenance. The Main Parts of a Forklift: Understanding the physical components of a forklift is essential to grasp how these machines operate and perform their tasks efficiently. Each part has a specific function and contributes to the overall performance and safety of the forklift. In this section, we will delve into the key components of modern forklifts. Forklift Tires and Wheels: The tires and wheels of a forklift are vital components that directly impact the machines stability, safety, manoeuvrability, and even its lift capacity. Forklift tires come in three main types: pneumatic, solid rubber, and polyurethane. Pneumatic Tires: Sometimes called cushion tires are similar to traditional car or truck tires, pneumatic tires are air- or foam-filled, offering durability and excellent traction. Ideal for rough outdoor terrains, these tires also contribute to a higher lift capacity due to their size and air cushioning, which provides better stability. Solid Rubber Tires: These tires are solid, not filled with air, and thus immune to punctures or deflation. While they may not provide as much cushioning or lift capacity as pneumatic tires, they are reliable for indoor use or on smooth surfaces where puncture risks are low. Polyurethane Tires: Press-on tires known for providing a smooth ride, polyurethane tires have great traction and low rolling resistance, making them perfect for indoor applications. They typically don't contribute as much to lift capacity as pneumatic tires but offer efficient operation. The choice of tire significantly affects a forklifts performance and lifting capabilities. Therefore, its essential to consider the operating environment and lifting needs when selecting the right tire type for your forklift. The Different Forklift Mast Types: The mast is a critical component of a forklift, responsible for raising, lowering, and tilting the load. There are several types of forklift masts, each designed to meet specific operational requirements. Standard Mast: Also known as an upright mast, this is the most common type. It has two stages, allowing the forks to lift loads to a certain height. Duplex Mast: A duplex mast, or a two-stage mast, has additional lift height compared to a standard mast. Its ideal for situations that require higher lifting without concern for low clearance. Triplex Mast: The triplex mast, also known as a three-stage mast, offers even greater lift heights. It has three sections, enabling it to reach higher while maintaining a low closed height for navigating areas with low clearance. Quad Mast: or a four-stage mast, provides the greatest lift height of all. Its designed for specialised applications that require reaching extremely high locations. Hydraulic Cylinders and Chain Pulleys: Playing a vital role in the operation and functionality of forklifts, hydraulic cylinders and chain pulleys are integral to the forklifts performance and efficiency. Hydraulic Cylinders: Hydraulic cylinders come in two primary types: single acting and double acting. While the former applies force in a single direction, the latter can exert force in both directions. These devices lend their strength to forklifts, enabling them to lift and transport heavy loads with precision and control. Chain Pulleys: Chain pulleys on forklifts are an integral component that contribute significantly to their lifting capacity. These pulleys, often referred to as chain sheaves, guide and support the lift chain in the forklifts mast. They work in tandem with the hydraulic system, enabling the forklift to lift and lower heavy loads with accuracy and control. Forklift Attachments: Forklift attachments are additional tools or accessories that can be added to a forklift to extend its functionality. While they are not originally part of the base forklift, these attachments can significantly enhance the versatility and efficiency of the machine. They can transform a standard forklift into a multi-purpose vehicle capable of handling various tasks beyond just lifting and transporting heavy loads. Examples of forklift attachments include: Side Shifters: Fork Positioners: Clamps: Rotators: Fork Extensions: The Most Common Uses of Forklifts: Forklifts are an essential tool in many industries, primarily for moving materials. Here are some of the most common industrial uses of forklifts: Warehouses and Distribution Centres: Forklifts are heavily used in warehouses and distribution centres for shipment handling. They are instrumental in loading and unloading trucks and transporting goods around the storage facility. Construction Sites: Another common use of forklifts is on construction sites. Due to the heavy objects and building materials that need to be moved around, forklifts play a crucial role in these environments. Manufacturing and Industrial Operations: Forklifts are also used widely in manufacturing and industrial operations. These can range from small businesses to large complex industrial operations where they aid in moving materials of different sizes and weights. Shipping Ports and Truck Loading/Unloading: Forklifts are essential for loading and unloading trucks. They help move goods quickly and efficiently. Recycling Facilities: Forklifts play a crucial role in recycling operations where they are used to move and organise heavy bales of compacted recyclable load and unload delivery vehicles, and assist with the general maintenance and organisation of the facility. Their ability to handle heavy loads makes them an invaluable tool in these environments. Event Venues and Film Sets: Forklifts are often used in setting up and tearing down events at concert venues, theatres, or film sets. They can move heavy equipment like speakers, stage sets, lighting rigs, and even portable seating. This helps to make the setup and breakdown processes much quicker and more efficient, especially when dealing with large-scale events or productions. The Benefits of Forklifts: Forklifts are a vital part of many industries, offering numerous benefits that improve efficiency, productivity, and safety. Here are the key benefits of using forklifts: Increased Efficiency: Forklifts can move large and heavy loads much more quickly and efficiently than manual labour. This significantly speeds up work processes, particularly in warehouses and manufacturing facilities. Improved Safety: When used correctly, forklifts can make the workplace safer. They are designed to carry heavy loads securely, reducing the risk of injuries related to lifting and moving heavy items. Versatility: Forklifts can be used in a variety of tasks beyond just lifting and moving items. They can also be used for digging, snow ploughing, and even lifting workers to higher areas with the right attachments. Cost Savings: By improving efficiency and productivity, forklifts can lead to significant cost savings. They enable fewer workers to move more goods in less time, reducing labour costs. Ease of Use: Modern forklifts are designed with ergonomic controls, making them relatively easy to operate once proper training has been received. Durability and Longevity: Forklifts are built to last, capable of operating in tough conditions and handling heavy loads for many years when properly maintained. Variety of Types and Sizes: From compact electric models suitable for light indoor work to robust diesel models designed for heavy lifting in difficult outdoor conditions, there are forklifts available to suit virtually any requirement. The Basics of Forklift Safety: Forklift safety is of paramount importance in any workplace where these machines are used. Here are some basic principles that should always be adhered to in order to ensure a safe working environment: Proper Training and Certification: Before operating a forklift, workers should undergo proper training and obtain certification as required by OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration). This ensures they understand how to operate the machine safely and are aware of potential hazards. Regular Maintenance and Inspections: Forklifts should be regularly serviced and maintained to ensure they are in good working condition. Operators should also perform daily inspections to check for any issues before starting the machine. Safe Load Handling: Overloading or improper loading can lead to accidents. Operators should always adhere to the manufacturers load capacity guidelines and ensure loads are stable and evenly distributed. Operating at Safe Speeds: Forklifts should be driven at a speed that is safe for the current conditions, which includes taking into consideration the type of load, pedestrian traffic, and floor conditions. Use of Seatbelts: Operators should always wear seatbelts while operating a forklift. In the event of a tip-over, a seat belt can save the operators life by keeping them within the protective frame of the forklift. Pedestrian Awareness: Forklift operators should always be aware of their surroundings, particularly pedestrians who may not be familiar with the operation of forklifts. Clear communication and designated pedestrian areas can help maintain safety. Remember, the key to forklift safety is a combination of proper training, regular maintenance, and mindful operation. If you want more information on forklift safety read our post on 17 Must-know Forklift Safety Tips to Avoid Catastrophe. How To Choose A Forklift: Choosing the right forklift for your business is a crucial decision. The wrong machine can cause inefficiencies in operations, increased maintenance costs, and potential safety hazards. Conversely, making the right choice can enhance productivity, reduce operational costs, improve safety standards, and ultimately contribute to the overall success of your business. Its all about finding a balance between your specific needs and the features that a particular forklift offers. We have a comprehensive forklift buyers guide that walks you through every aspect of choosing the right forklift for your business. But to give you a quick overview, here are the top six considerations: Load Capacity: Assess your operational needs to determine the required load capacity. Lifting Height: Align the lifting height with your specific requirements. Fuel Type: Choose the appropriate fuel type based on indoor or outdoor usage, space constraints, and environmental considerations. Operator Comfort: Ensure operator comfort to enhance efficiency. Site Specifics: Take into account factors like the narrowest space and daily operating hours. Environment Compatibility: Make sure to match the forklift with its intended working environment and tasks. Conclusion: In conclusion, a forklift is an indispensable piece of machinery in many industries, from manufacturing to warehousing. Its primary function is to lift and transport heavy materials over short distances, making operations more efficient and safe. The versatility and power of a forklift can greatly enhance productivity, but its crucial to select the right one that fits your specific needs and business environment. As we've explored in this article, understanding what a forklift is goes beyond its basic definition its about recognizing its potential impact on your operations! New Flexi Forklift Added - New Arrival This Flexi AC1100 Lite Used Articulated Forklift - 3930mm Lift - Container Spec (#66035) has a lift height of 3930mm and a lift capacity of 1000kg. Comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate. New in stock on 17/06/2025 Truck Warranty: 6 Months Parts & Labour Truck warranty. Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: Electric Year of Manufacture: 2018 Purchase from 16,750 + VAT Weekly price 81.42 +VAT New Bendi Forklift Added - New Arrival This Bendi BE420 Used Articulated Forklift - 8200mm Lift - 1900kgs (#BE420-1) lifts weights up to 1900kg. It comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate and a 6 month truck warranty. New in stock on 06/06/2025 Truck Warranty: 6 months (parts & labour) Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: ELECTRIC Year of Manufacture: 2012 Purchase from 13,950 10,950 + VAT Weekly price 53.72 +VAT New Still Forklift Added - New Arrival This STILL FMX17 Reach Forklift Truck 10500mm Lift - 1700kgs (#6136) has a lift height of 2700mm and a 1700MM lift capacity. Comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate. New in stock on 28/05/2025 Truck Warranty: 3 months (parts & labour) Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: electric Year of Manufacture: 2019 Purchase from 10,950 + VAT Weekly price 53.72 +VAT New Forklift Added - New Arrival This New Greenpower TKC20 3 Wheel Electric 4.8m or 5.5m Lift 2000kgs (#TKC20) lifts weights up to 2000kg. It comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate, a 2 year of 2000 hour truck warranty and a 12 month onsite battery warranty. New in stock on 18/03/2025 Truck Warranty: 2000 or 2 Years truck warranty - Subject to status. Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: Lithium Electric Year of Manufacture: 2025 Purchase from 18,777 Weekly price 91 +VAT New Still Forklift Added - New Arrival This STILL RX50-10 USED 3 WHEEL ELECTRIC FORKLIFT 3200mm Lift (#6020) lifts weights up to 1000kg. It comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate, a 3 month truck warranty and a 12 month onsite battery warranty. New in stock on 11/03/2025 Truck Warranty: 3 months (parts & labour) Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: ELECTRIC Year of Manufacture: 2018 Purchase from 8,750 + VAT Weekly price 43.21 +VAT New Forklift Added - New Arrival This NEW MIMA TKAI15 ELECTRIC Forklift 3000MM LIFT (TK-00) lifts weights up to 1500kg. It comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate, a 1000hr or 1 year truck warranty and a 12 month onsite battery warranty. New in stock on 09/03/2025 Truck Warranty: 1000 HRS or 1 Years truck warranty - Subject to status. Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: electric Year of Manufacture: 2025 Purchase from 9,999 Weekly price 50 +VAT New Greenpower Forklift Added - New Arrival This New MIMA MK20 Lithium Forklift lifts weights up to 2000kg. It comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate and a 2000hrs or 2 year truck warranty. New in stock on 27/04/2025 Truck Warranty: 2000 HRS or 2 Years truck warranty - Subject to status. Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: Electric Year of Manufacture: 2025 Purchase from 13,333 +VAT Weekly price 65.10 +VAT New Forklift Added - New Arrival This NEW MIMA MK30 ELECTRIC Forklift 3000MM LIFT (MK-07) lifts weights up to 3000kg. It comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate and a 3 month truck warranty. New in stock on 23/02/2025 Truck Warranty: 2000 or 2 Years truck warranty - Subject to status. Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: electric Year of Manufacture: 2025 Purchase from 31,950 Weekly price 151 +VAT New Forklift Added - New Arrival This New F300 Diesel Forklift 4800mm Lift - Full Cab 3000kgs (#6029) lifts weights up to 2500kg. It comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate and a 6 month truck warranty. New in stock on 13/04/2025 Truck Warranty: 2000 HRS or 2 Year truck warranty - Subject to status. Health & Safety: 12 Months Loler certificate supplied. Fuel Type: DIESEL Year of Manufacture: 2025 Purchase from 23,950 22,950 + VAT Weekly price 111.04 +VAT New Forklift Added - New Arrival This MIMA MT20 New Electric Articulated Forklift 4.6m to 12.5m 2000kgs (#MT20-03) lifts weights up to 2000kg. It comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate, a 2 year of 2000 hour truck warranty and a 12 month onsite battery warranty. New in stock on 10/03/2025 Truck Warranty: 2000 or 2 Years truck warranty - Subject to status. Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: Electric Year of Manufacture: 2025 Purchase from 29,950 Weekly price 144 +VAT New Forklift Added - New Arrival This ARTICULATED FORKLIFT NEW LITHIUM MIMA MJ30 lifts weights up to 3000kg. It comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate and a 2000hrs or 2 year truck warranty. New in stock on 15/02/2025 Truck Warranty: 2000 or 2 Years truck warranty - Subject to status. Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: electric Year of Manufacture: 2025 Purchase from 39,500 + VAT Weekly price 190.10 +VAT New Forklift Added - New Arrival This ARTICULATED FORKLIFT NEW LITHIUM MIMA MJ30 lifts weights up to 3000kg. It comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate and a 2000hrs or 2 year truck warranty. New in stock on 16/04/2025 Truck Warranty: 6 months (parts & labour) Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: ELECTRIC Year of Manufacture: 2018 Purchase from 14,750 + VAT Weekly price 71.87 +VAT New Still Forklift Added - New Arrival This Still RX70-30 Used Diesel Forklift - 3670mm Lift - Full Cab - 3000kgs (#6137) comes with a 12 month LOLER certificate and a 2000hrs or 2 year truck warranty. New in stock on 06/05/2025 Truck Warranty: 3 months (parts & labour) Health & Safety: 12 months loler supplied Fuel Type: Diesel Year of Manufacture: 2019 Purchase from 11,950 + VAT Weekly price 58.49 +VAT Andover Forktruck Services have hire trucks readily available for long or short-term hire as required and at very competitive rates. Short-term hire can be arranged based on week to week hire on our full product range including access equipment. 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Strategically situated across the UK, we ensure faster response times and minimal downtime. 150+ models of new counterbalance forklifts and warehouse equipment. Over 10,000 specifications in stock ready for immediate delivery. Industry leading engines & components! 48 ton lift capacity forklifts for sale. Look at our product range. We understand your machine is only as good as the service backing it up. Thats why our 60+ local heroes have been carefully selected to ensure the absolute highest levels of service. Our independent and trusted forklift specialists are situated across the UK, ensuring faster response times. UKs largest dealer network. Nationwide service and repairs. UK parts stock. Minimal downtime. Find out everything there is to know about HC-Forklifts-UK in just 2 minutes. Since starting out only 40 months ago, my company has grown to a level I planned after 6 years thanks to HC-UKs excellent mix of stock machines and support. 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