Daily Vehicle Lift Checks for a Safer Shop Floor

Why a Daily Check Matters

A vehicle lift is one of the most heavily used pieces of equipment in an automotive shop. It gets cycled multiple times a day, carries loads near its rated capacity, and often operates in a dusty, oily environment. Overlooking a small issue can turn into a costly repair or, worse, a dangerous situation for the person working under it. A short daily inspection takes only a few minutes and keeps the lift reliable shift after shift.

For shops that rely on two post lifts, the mechanical and hydraulic systems need consistent attention. These lifts use a simple but powerful design: two upright columns with arms that reach under the vehicle and raise it by the frame or designated lift points. Because the load is supported from the sides, the alignment of the arms, the condition of the safety locks, and the floor beneath the lift all matter more than many operators realise. A daily walk-around lets you catch worn parts before they fail and ensures the lift stays within its safe working limits.

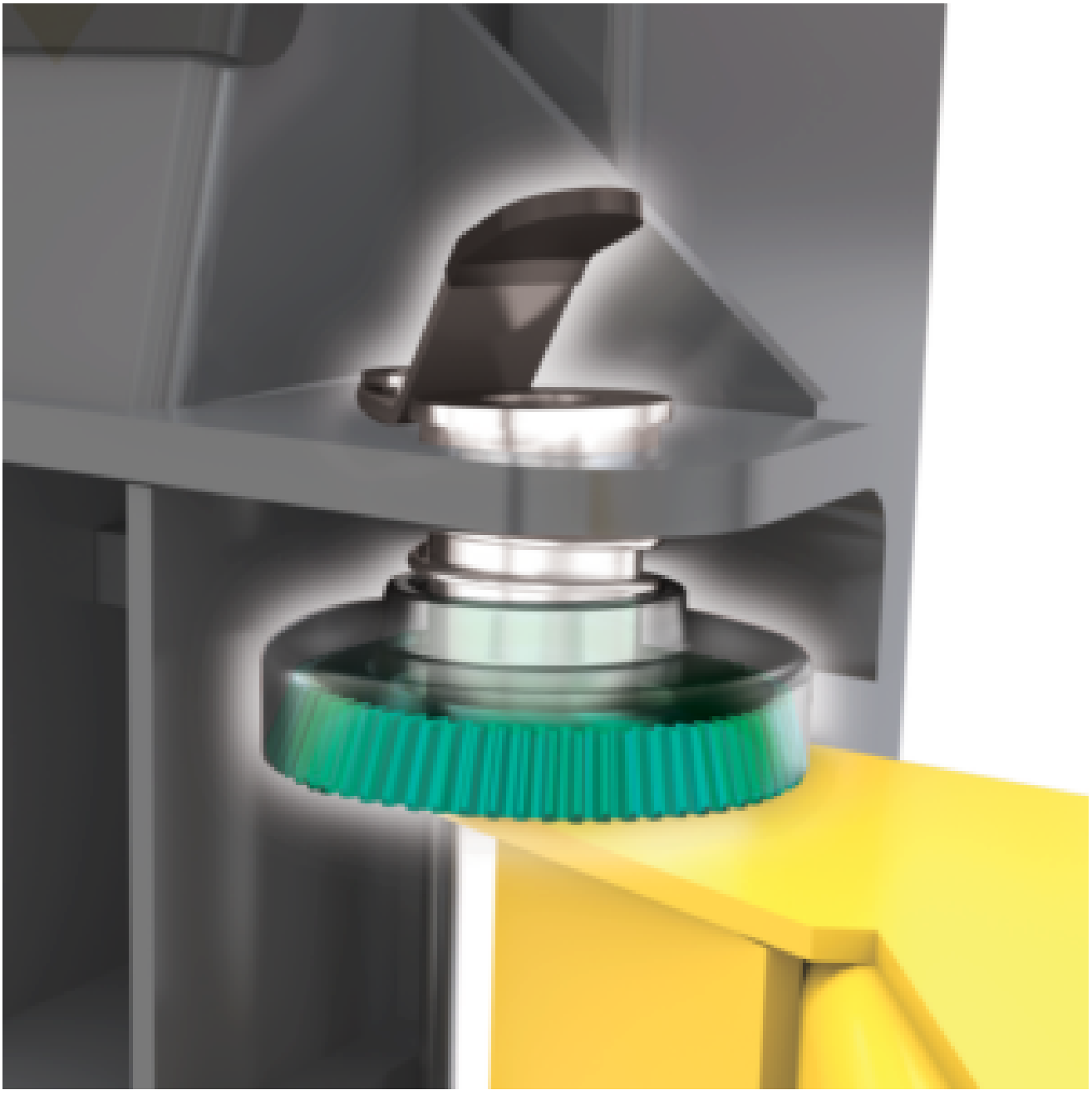
Clear the Area and Inspect the Runway

Before you even touch the controls, look at the space around the lift. Tools, air hoses, oil cans, and debris tend to collect near the base of the columns. Anything that could trip someone or interfere with the lift's movement should be moved. Check the runway length for any obstructions above and around the vehicle. A broom or long-handled tool left leaning against a column can shift during operation and jam a moving part.

Also scan the ceiling clearance. A vehicle on a two post lift rises several feet, and if there is a low-hanging light fixture, a heater, or a storage shelf above, the vehicle could hit it. Measure once with the tallest vehicle you regularly service, note that height on a placard near the controls, and confirm each morning that nothing has been added overhead.

Check the Columns and Floor Anchors

The columns of a two post lift must sit perfectly vertical and be bolted to a floor that can handle the load. Concrete thickness is critical here. If the slab was poured thin or has cracks near the anchor points, the lift can shift under load. Walk around each column and look for new cracks in the concrete within a foot of the base. Tap the anchor bolts with a wrench; a loose bolt will sound different from a tight one. If you find movement or a hollow sound under the column, stop using the lift and call a qualified technician to evaluate the floor and re-anchor the columns if needed.



While you are at the columns, check the condition of the paint or coating. Rust forming at the base often means moisture is sitting there, which can eventually weaken the metal. A small rust patch is not a crisis, but it is worth cleaning and sealing before it spreads.

Inspect the Arms and Safety Locks

The arms of a two post lift swing out to contact the vehicle. Asymmetric arms are common on modern lifts, meaning one arm is shorter than the other to better fit the vehicle's shape. This design provides more flexibility with different wheelbases, but it also means the load distribution changes depending on which arm position you use. Look at the pivot points and

the rubber or polyurethane pads that contact the vehicle. Worn pads can let the vehicle shift during lifting. Replace any pad that is cracked, chunked, or compressed unevenly.

Safety locks are the mechanical stops that prevent the arms from dropping if hydraulic pressure fails. On most two post lifts, these locks engage automatically when the arms reach a certain height. Test them every morning. Lift a light vehicle a few inches, then lower it onto the locks. The vehicle should sit solidly with no sag. If the locks do not engage or they slip, the hydraulic system or the lock mechanism needs service before any work continues.

Hydraulic System and Fluid Level

The hydraulic pump and cylinder are the heart of the lift. A slow leak or a drop in fluid level can cause the lift to settle over a few hours. Check the fluid reservoir with the lift fully lowered. Most lifts have a sight glass or dipstick. The fluid should be clean; cloudy or dark fluid may indicate contamination or overheating. Look for drips around the cylinder seals, hose connections, and the pump body. A single drop on the floor is worth investigating; a puddle means the system should not be used until a technician repairs it.

Listen to the pump as it raises the vehicle. A smooth hum is normal. Grinding, clicking, or a motor that labours and sounds strained could mean low fluid, air in the lines, or a failing pump. If the lift takes significantly longer to reach full height than it did a week ago, that is another sign of trouble.

Verify the Lifting Capacity Against the Load

Every two post lift has a rated lifting capacity printed on a nameplate. That rating is the maximum load the lift can handle, but it assumes the vehicle is centred and the lift points are correct. A heavy truck with an offset load can exceed the safe capacity on one arm even if the total weight is below the rating. Know the wheelbase and weight distribution of the vehicles you work on. If a vehicle's frame does not provide a solid lift point within the arms' reach, do not force it. Use a different lift or a different method.



For shops that occasionally handle lighter passenger cars and also heavier vans or SUVs, it can be tempting to push the lift to its limit every time. Keep a log of the heaviest vehicle you lift each day and compare it to the nameplate rating. If you are consistently near the limit, consider upgrading to a lift with a higher capacity or using portable car lifts for the smaller jobs to take strain off the primary lift. Portable car lifts can handle quick oil changes and tyre work without cycling the main lift as often, which extends the life of the two post lift's components.

Check the Controls and Emergency Stop

The control pendant or panel is the operator's interface. All buttons should feel crisp and return to their neutral position when released. A sticky button that stays pressed could cause the lift

to keep moving after you release it. Test the emergency stop button by pressing it while the lift is rising. The lift should stop immediately and stay stopped until you manually reset the button. If the emergency stop does not work, do not use the lift until the wiring or switch is repaired.

Also check the cable or cord on a pendant control. A frayed cord can short out the controls or give the operator a false sense of control. Replace it if the outer jacket is worn through.

Look at the Vehicle Position and Lift Points

Once you have inspected the lift itself, focus on how the vehicle sits on it. The arms must contact the vehicle at the manufacturer's designated lift points, which are usually reinforced sections of the frame. If the arm pads land on a thin sheet-metal panel or a plastic cover, the vehicle can crumple or fall. Walk around the vehicle after it is positioned and before you raise it. Confirm that both arms are squarely under the lift points and that nothing on the vehicle is hanging down or interfering with the arms.

When the vehicle is a few inches off the ground, give it a gentle shake. A stable vehicle will barely move. If it rocks noticeably, lower it and reposition the arms or adjust the vehicle's position. Never raise a vehicle that feels unstable at low height.

Daily Habits That Save Money

A daily check does more than prevent accidents. It also catches small problems before they become expensive repairs. A loose bolt tightened early avoids a stripped thread. A worn pad replaced promptly prevents damage to the arm. A small hydraulic leak fixed when it starts saves you from a full cylinder rebuild. The five minutes you spend each morning inspecting the lift repays itself in uptime and reduced repair bills.



Keep a simple log sheet near the lift. Write down the date, the results of each check, and any action taken. Over time, patterns will show up. If you find yourself adjusting the same bolt every week or topping up fluid every few days, you have a deeper issue that needs professional attention. That log also helps a technician diagnose problems faster because they can see what has been happening between service intervals.

A well-maintained two post lift is a safe, productive tool. A neglected one is a liability. The daily checklist does not have to be complicated. Walk the columns, check the arms and locks, listen to the hydraulics, and position the vehicle carefully. That routine, done every day, will keep your shop running smoothly and your team working under a lift they can trust.