PRODUCT TEST

JAMES STANBURY explores cheaper and more portable alternatives to four- and two-post lifts. This month we look at SIX offerings.

BIG RAMPS

PART ONE

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

HANDLING & STORAGE: Anything that's going to lift a car high is going to be pretty big. But few of us have huge amounts of garage space to dedicate to a new lifting device. Consequently we look favourably on systems that can be stored easily – due to perhaps low weight, small size, or very modular construction. It's important, though, that the system can be re-assembled easily, otherwise you simply won't use it. Similarly, it should be easy, once assembled, to get your car on it and lifted. Ideally both assembling and using shouldn't need the assistance of an extra person.

VERSATILITY: A ramp or lift should be as compatible with as many different cars as possible. Two particularly important factors are the systems' max weight capacities and – if ramp based – their gradient or maximum drive-on height. Bear in mind that even modest cars are now fitted with deep spoilers than can make ramp use tricky.

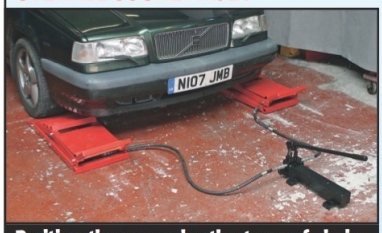
HEIGHT: You might think that the higher these systems lift, the better. But that's not necessarily true. None lift to a height that you can comfortably walk under, so is there really much advantage to the car being a metre up in the air rather than half a metre? In fact some would argue that half a metre is better as it allows comfortable creeper usage, and you can easily get above and below the car. We feel that having a range of heights is more important than all out maximum lift. It's also best if a system lifts the entire car, rather than having to resort to stands and jacking for one end.

SUITABILITY: We consider how suitable each system is for a selection of common jobs. Changing an exhaust is one – which requires almost all of the length of the underside to be free, and enough clearance to thread the pipes around axles and obstructions. Test job number two is brake/suspension work. This is usually carried out from outside the car, preferably with the wheel at stool height. Obviously the wheel must be removable too. Our final test task is the classic car favourite of sill welding. To do this easily, it must be possible to access the sills from both sides, and there should be enough clearance to use power tools such as welders and grinders.

CJ Hydraulic Drive On Ramps

BEST CAR MECHANICS BUY

PRICE: £399.00 **CONTACT: 01706 367649**
MAX LOAD: 2 Tons per pair
TRACK AND WIDTH LIMITS: None
WHEELBASE LIMITS: None
MAX LIFT HEIGHT: 40cm to bottom of tyre
PERFORMANCE: 9/14
IS IT WORTH THE MONEY? 5/6
OVERALL SCORE: 14/20



Position the ramps by the tyres of choice (fronts, rears, or both on one side).

Drive or push the car up them, and pump the ramps to full height.

When the ram is fully extended...

Flip down safety catch, which prevents ram retracting should the hydraulics fail.

Quick release connectors make it possible to remove the hoses and pump, if required.

PROS: Brilliant whether used as ramps, or as a very fast way of getting a car raised enough to be lowered onto high stands. When lowered, the ramps' 14cm max height makes pushing a car onto them possible, and most low slung cars will manage the shallow 16 degree slope. Used with stands, these products give outstanding underbody access with minimal effort. Handling and storage are amongst the easiest here too.

CONS: Hmmm, not many! Okay, to make the best of these you'll need to buy a set of high axle stands as well. Whether that's for raising the whole car, or supporting one corner when removing a ramp – such as during brake or suspension jobs. Also, although the ramps are fully adjustable in height, the safety catch only operates at the maximum setting.