

# Lifts Rise to New Levels



*There it sits, empty. A vision of pristine pilings and pressure-treated perfection, your new dock represents the culmination of a dream. No more driving to the marina, or towing the boat to the local ramp. Now a simple stroll down that planked pathway to your boat is all that stands between you and a day on the water.*

*Of course, now, you need a lift.*

Fortunately, the last decade has seen a burst of innovation in the boat lift market, with new technologies and styles becoming available to suit practically every type of boat, tidal range and dock configuration. All of these choices mean you have to answer a few questions about your preferences and how you intend to use the boat now and in the future. A little thought and careful planning can make a boat lift a worthwhile investment.

Boat lifts can pay for themselves over time by increasing the resale value of your boat as well as by reducing annual maintenance costs, such as eliminating the need for annual or semi-annual anti-fouling coatings.

It is difficult, but not impossible to sink a boat on a lift and perhaps equally difficult to steal a boat stored on a lift, provided the lift control mechanisms are adequately secured.

Lifts are often categorized by weight capacity, but several other factors need to be considered including the length of your boat, the type of propulsion (outboard,  $\frac{1}{0}$  or inboard) and the depth of the water in the slip. Other considerations have more to do with personal preference and long-term plans such as: drive-on or float-on, expandable or fixed, permanent or transportable and the aesthetics desired. Considering you could be investing between \$4,000 and

\$22,000 for a 10,000-pound lift, thinking this through beforehand would be a good idea.

If you are the nomadic type, you might want a transportable lift that can be towed to a new destination should you move, or hauled for the winter if you live somewhere where ice might damage a lift. Or, if you're the type that suffers from "four-foot-itis" every few years, you may want to consider an expandable lift. Another important consideration is how much access you want to your boat when it is on the lift. Is it enough to be able to climb in and out or do you want to walk around every side and have access to



maintenance points? And finally, the aesthetics of the lift should be considered, as your boat and its lift will be part of your water view.

## From Vertical to Horizontal

One of the best looking lifts doesn't look like a lift at all. No Profile Boat Lifts made a big splash in 2007 when the company won a National Marine Manufacturers Association Innovation Award at the Miami boat show that February.

"The whole reason for us inventing and building the No Profile Boat Lift is to take the boat lift out of the stone age," says Way Marine Design president Chris Way. "It's designed to enhance the look of your waterfront property, not detract from it. The other main focus of our lift is to allow you safe access to the boat to clean it, enter it and service it."

The No Profile Lift is essentially a large platform with a docking cradle that raises and lowers as a level unit. Hydraulic rams play out and gather cables to drive the platform up and down, the cables don't wind on a shaft or drum like those found on a more typical elevator-style lift powered by electric motors. The motion of the hydraulics is hori-

zontal, not vertical so the lift doesn't stick up above the dock more than the height of the cradle.

The platform can be made out of synthetic decking material, so the lift platform can match the rest of the dock perfectly if desired. This clean look comes with a price; No Profile Lifts are among the most expensive on the market, but are meant to be a permanent part of your dock. A 10,000-pound lift will cost around \$21,500.

In contrast, one of the least expensive lifts on the market is also highly portable.

## Floating on Air

Lifts built on fixed pilings have a limited range and your boat can be left high and dry if water levels drop. Floating boat lifts offer the flexibility to deal with extreme tidal ranges or locales where the water levels change regularly or seasonally due to water releases. Air Dock Boat Lifts offers a simple, straightforward design that cradles your boat on three or more cushions of air. These durable, low-pressure inflation chambers are anchored at the corners of your dock or anchored to the bottom.

"It's an inflatable mattress that your boat glides onto," says Ken Moody, president of Air Dock Boat Lifts. "Then you add



Top left: An Air Dock can float a boat in water equal to its draft, allowing its use in very shallow water. From top to bottom: A) No Profile Boat Lift's platforms raise and lower your boat while providing a clean look. B) FloatLifts can be attached to an existing dock, or work as a stand-alone unit on a mooring. C) The optional cover raises automatically when the boat is lowered, making it quick and easy to get on and off. D) Using a lift eliminates the need for bottom paint, which saves money and for the speed conscious, reduces drag.

air to the air chambers to float it up out of the water." A vacuum cleaner motor supplies the air for the chambers. Adjusting the relative pressure of each of the air chambers allows you to trim the boat in the up position fore and aft as well as side to side.

Air Dock's portability and design make it extremely useful in areas where drought effects water levels. Many boat lifts require a water depth greater than what the boat draws to allow for clearance between the bottom and the lift cradle. Air Dock air chambers collapse almost completely flat and therefore don't require a water depth greater than the draft of the boat. An Air Dock rated at 10,000 pounds will run around \$4,300.

An Air Dock lifts the boat by adjusting buoyancy as does another popular brand of lift, the HydroHoist. However, both require a motor to pump air or water in and out, which can be time consuming. But what if you could change a lift's buoyancy with the flip of a switch?

## Gone in 30 Seconds

"I wanted to make using a boat as easy as using a car," says Sunstream Boat Lift founder and CEO Ken Hey. "We believe boat lifts are for using your boat, not storing it." Hey's inspiration was the slow launch time



**A No Profile Boat Lift allows you to walk completely around your boat, providing access as though it was stored on land.**

necessitated by a more traditional elevator lift that came with his waterfront home. He loved to boat, but he hated waiting for the lift to raise and lower. So he built a better mousetrap.

His goal was a lift that would raise or lower your boat in about the same time it takes your garage door to open.

The FloatLift is a fully self-contained lift that is held in place with docklines. It has a transmitter that you attach to your keychain which controls the action of the lift. It is solar powered, using DC electric hydraulic pumps to raise and lower the boat, which takes less than 30 seconds.

Two large, foam-filled, unsinkable floats

make up the platform supporting the cradle on which the boat sits. In the up position, the floats are wider than they are tall, providing a large amount of buoyancy and a stable catwalk so you can walk along the sides of your boat. To lower the boat, the floats rotate 90 degrees while sliding outboard. In the down position, the floats are taller than they are wide, providing less buoyancy, which lowers the boat into the water.

Since a FloatLift is fully self-contained, it can be used at a mooring rather than at a dock. They are also available with a cover that rises automatically

when you lower your boat, to make boarding easy. In the up position, the cover settles just above the boat, keeping the sun, rain and other debris off the boat. This eliminates the need for a custom cover and the hassle of unsnapping and stowing such covers before you hit the water. A FloatLift rated at 10,000 pounds starts at \$18,899.

"People with FloatLifts tell us they use their boat more because of it," says Hey. "Boating is changing as people's lifestyles are changing; people aren't treating boating as an all day excursion anymore, people are going out on the water in short segments. Our lift enables them to do that." ■

— By Michael Vatalaro

## Jet Dock

An alternative to a mechanical boat lift is a drive-on docking system like those offered by Jet Dock.

"It works like a boat lift and a dock all in one," says Bill Beatty, director of sales for Jet Dock. "You get a full, 360-degree walk around so you can wash your boat, flush the engines or put the cover on. And the boat is at water level so we are preserving your view."

Jet Docks are made up of modular 20 inch squares, which allow each one to be custom built for your needs and can be changed later as necessary. The units are made from high-density polyethylene (HDPE) a tough plastic, and come with a lifetime warranty. The only variation in the squares is in the thickness, which changes the amount of buoyancy they provide.

Thinner, less buoyant squares are used at the rear of the Jet Dock so when you begin to power on with your boat, the squares dip down underwater. The whole Jet Dock gently flexes under the weight of the boat. As more throttle is applied and the boat climbs the dock, the more buoyant squares further up the dock start to lift the boat and the stern rises. This reduces the bite of the prop and prevents you from driving on too far. A winch mounted at the front of the dock allows you to fine tune the placement of your boat.

A Jet Dock with a 10,000-pound capacity would cost between \$12,500 and \$17,500 depending on the length of the boat.

