

AUTOMOTIVE LIFT - PURCHASE CONSIDERATIONS

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Purchasers of automotive lifts are often confused by claims made by sellers. Such claims are sometimes made in good faith by inexperienced sales people and other times they are made on purpose to confuse the purchaser and obtain an order for equipment that may not actually meet the purchaser's specifications. This list of frequently asked questions will explain some of the claims put forth in this highly competitive market place. Thus the purchaser will have the knowledge to better evaluate claims and make an informed decision.

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What is the Automotive Lift Institute (ALI)?

ALI is an association made up of responsible manufacturers of automotive lifts. ALI's purpose is to promote safety in the design, construction, installation and use of automotive lifts, which benefits the users of automotive lifts as well as the manufacturers.

What is Product "Certification"?

Certification is a system whereby an independent, third party organization determines that a manufacturer has the ability to produce a product that complies with a specific set of standards. Certification further authorizes the manufacturer to use a controlled label on listed products that are certified. Lastly, certified products are periodically checked to ensure that they continue to meet the standards.



ALI sponsors such a "Program of Certification" for automotive lifts.

ALI contracts with Intertek Testing Services (ETL), a worldwide testing organization, recognized in the United States by the Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) as a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory (NRTL), to fully manage the Program in accordance with the Program Procedural Guide. ALI has taken the additional step of obtaining accreditation for this program from the American National Standards Institute (ANSI). This assures absolute independence and unquestionable integrity for the Program.

Key certification considerations:

- ETL is the only NRTL that manages the ALI program,
- There are no conditional, temporary, or partial Certifications,
- The lift is certified or it is not,

- No one is authorized to use the ALI/ETL Certification Label, or reference the Certification Program, on products that are not manufactured in compliance with all requirements of the standard,
- Certification extends to options and accessories,
- Use of non-certified options or accessories on a Certified lift will void the Certification of the lift,
- There is no way to obtain Certification of a lift after it is installed,
- There is a procedure for investigating field reports alleging noncompliance or failure of Certified products,
- The ALI Certification Mark and the ETL Mark are registered with the U.S. Government and vigorously defended (by legal means if necessary) and
- Membership in ALI is not required to participate in the Program.

What Standards Apply to Automotive Lifts?

There is only one current standard in North America that governs the design and construction of automotive lifts. It is ANSI/ALI ALCTV, American National Standard for Automotive Lifts - Safety Requirements for Construction, Testing and Validation.

This standard requires third party testing and validation by an OSHA Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory (NRTL) for compliance. If there is no NRTL testing and validation, there is no certification. It is unlikely, but possible, that a lift manufacturer would choose to use a NRTL different from ETL because another NRTL might be less familiar with the stringent requirements of the standard. Over 95% of all Certified lifts are Certified under the ALI program.

ALI develops two additional standards relating to automotive lifts. They relate to, (1) operation, inspection, maintenance and (2) installation and service of automotive lifts.

What Makes Standards Such a Big Deal?

In order for a standard to be approved by ANSI as an American National Standard, a rigorous procedure must be followed which assures that all affected parties have an opportunity to comment and that consideration be given to any negative viewpoints. ALI must undergo annual audits, by ANSI, in order to maintain its accreditation as an ANSI approved, Standards Developing Organization.

ANSI requires that standards be reviewed every five years to insure that they are still applicable. The standard for design and construction of automotive lifts that preceded ANSI/ALI ALCTV was ANSI/ALI B153.1. This standard became obsolete in 1998 when the new standard was published. ANSI/ALI B153.1 is no longer an American National Standard.

The new, or current, standard requires independent, third party testing to verify structural integrity of all systems and components, proper function of controls and fail safe devices, proper lowering speeds, overload protection, instructional materials and a host of other important factors affecting automotive lifts.

Common Misleading Claims:

- Claims that state "Meets or Exceeds Standard ANSI/ALI B-153.1" are meaningless. This standard no longer exists.
- Claims that state "Meets all ANSI Standards" are meaningless. No other standards apply to lift construction except ANSI/ALI ALCTV. In order to meet ANSI/ALI ALCTV, Certification is required. Look for the Mark.
- Claims that state "Meets all OSHA Requirements" are meaningless. OSHA has no requirements governing automotive lifts, but they do write citations applying to automotive lifts. They do this under the General Duty Clause and recommend to those cited that it would be prudent for the cited party to follow the directives in the various standards developed by ALI.

Other Considerations.

What is ALA?

The claim "This lift is ALA Certified" is interesting. ALA (Automotive Lift Association) is reported to be an organization of lift manufacturers. Apparently, there are a few companies who claim to be members of the organization when such claims suit their purpose. However, attempts to locate said organization have been fruitless. As of the posting date of this document, no ALA Certification organization or ALA lift Certification exists. ALA appears to be purely fictitious and created merely to confuse purchasers, users and inspectors.

What is MAMTC?

MAMTC (Mid-America Manufacturing Technology Center) is a unit of Wichita State University which, in one instance, attempted to certify a lift model. Test Reports on MAMTC letterhead, signed by a Mr. Dave Richards, and stating that a lift complies with ANSI B153.1 – 1990, of course are meaningless because they are not a NRTL, and the standard cited is obsolete. Formal demands have been made by ALI upon Wichita State University that they cease and desist from such misleading activities.

What is CE?

Claims that "Lifts are CE approved" can also be designed to mislead prospective North American lift purchasers. The CE (European Community) lift standard, EN 1493 is not tougher, as some might claim, but simply different than the American National Standard. One of the most notable differences between CE and ALI certification is in the area of electrical safety. ANSI/ALI ALCTV mandates testing to UL201, Standard for Safety for Garage Equipment, which is harmonized with the National Electric Code (NEC). CE electrical requirements are different and in no way ensure compliance with the NEC.

Another important consideration relating to CE approval is that American and Canadian electrical and other inspectors do not accept CE testing. They will "red tag" lifts not listed to North American standards.

What is ISO?

Claims that lifts are built to ISO 9000, or ISO 9001 or some other such claim invoking ISO (International Standards Organization) can also be misleading. Whereas, ISO 9000 or ISO 9001 describes an excellent quality control program, ISO compliance does not mean that the lift is designed in accordance with ANSI/ALI ALCTV, or that the product is independently Certified to meet that standard.

What are CSA and UL?

Claims that CSA (Canadian Standards Association) or UL (Underwriters Laboratories) approval has been obtained should be investigated further. Chances are this means that the electrical components of the lift system have been investigated. This does not mean that the structural and mechanical aspects of the lift have been investigated or Certified. Ask the person making such claim to what standard has the CSA or UL approval been obtained? A lift must be Certified to ANSI/ALI ALCTV to have meaning.

What about Foreign Manufacturers?

There are a few foreign lift manufacturers that are committed to the North American market and have certified products. As members, ALI requires that they have a presence in North America by being a wholly owned and fully staffed subsidiary of a foreign manufacturer of automotive lifts. Some other foreign lift manufacturers or lift importers do not have a presence in North America and are committed only to importing and selling lifts for whatever period proves to be financially beneficial. Remember that machinery does not last forever. Parts are subject to wear and may need to be replaced or serviced. Will you be able to find the seller or manufacturer when parts or service are required?

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We hope that this discussion has been helpful to you and that you now feel better qualified to sort through the claims often heard in the marketplace. No one is able to completely protect you from substandard goods. It requires your own good judgment, and product investigation. The lift is certified or it is not.

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