

## A small lift for Bay Area drivers

SHELF-LIKE PARKING GETS MIXED REACTION

By Tracy Rappin

San Francisco

Pushing is an unflattering experience for David Spangler. He let us go that is.

Earlier this year he took Ford Escort to a car wash for a year, the Berkeley computer consultant, sign into his apartment's garage, legs out and wheels on a hydraulic lift that stacks his car above his neighbor's.

"The only bad thing is the lift rises a little too slowly," Spangler said of the 40-second wait for the lift to arrive. "But it's better than trying to find parking on the street."

From San Francisco to downtown Oakland to Monterey, lifts are popping up wherever it's feasible to fit in a garage. Part of the challenge is that you can't use concrete and steel up front for housing in prime parts of the Bay Area where every inch of real estate counts.

"Land prices are so high that people are thinking vertically rather than horizontally," said Bill Holzman, chief market director for Mustang, which approved a 250-unit residential development



The new parking system in the Berkeley apartment building helped developer Patrick Kennedy add 250 more units.

# PARKING | Lifts aim to save money, land for housing

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with the parking lifts.

Even homeowners with multiple cars are beginning to reap their lift.

"It's a whole level of a lot cheaper than trying to save space with a three-car garage," said Redwood City resident Benjamin Trepan, who bought a two-car lift from Klauz Parking Systems, which is based in Germany and has local offices.

The lifts are particularly well-equipped with built-in generators to cut off power failures and use the same amount of power as running a 1,000-watt hair-dryer for 25 minutes, according to San Diego-based American Custom Lifts.

Resistant to approve

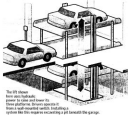
But don't let your "good neighbors" be the region's parking problems just get. They cost about \$5,000 to \$7,000 apiece and are too small for sport-utility vehicles.

Some cities hesitate to approve them, partly because they are entirely new to the West Coast.

Italian and German motorists have been parking their cars since the 1950s, New York since the 1970s. They're also caught on in parts of Asia, said Phil Harding of Phoenix-based Harbor Blvd, Inc.

## Parking lifts

Parking systems that stack cars vertically have been used in Europe for decades, and are now becoming more common in large metropolitan areas as land becomes more expensive. There are a number of systems available for commercial and residential use.



The lift above from American Custom Lifts comes in one and two-car three-platform, three spaces of three-car-mounted models. Installation system like this requires excavating a pit beneath the garage.

PHOTO COURTESY OF AMERICAN CUSTOM LIFTS

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But they've been getting a mixed reaction in the Bay Area.

Five years ago, developer Patrick Kennedy installed the first lifts in the East Bay, in Quigley's apartment building. By reducing the amount of land for parking spaces, while still maintaining the parking capacity, Kennedy was able to add 28 more apartments, and a cafe and other businesses on the ground floor.

But it wasn't easy to overcome city planners' reservations. In fact,

Fans of parking lifts say they can save money and free up land for housing in parts of the Bay Area where every inch of real estate counts.

"We had to get letters from three fire departments in Berkeley to convince the Berkeley Fire Department they're safe," Kennedy said. "Now, anyone can put them in Berkeley."

San Francisco recently amended its planning code to allow stacked parking spaces to count toward the city's parking requirements for residential developments — generally one space per living unit. Thousands of parking lifts are in the planning stages.

In Oakland, 144 lifts will be installed in an 80-unit apartment building that includes retail businesses. A valet service will be hired to park the cars.

But few show signs of being in municipal parking garages because most of the collapse in the

elder structures are too low. City officials also are concerned that it would take heavy materials longer to get in and out.

"It would be useful in situations where the traffic activity doesn't happen all at once, like at a car rental agency," said Bill Maghauer, parking program coordinator for San Jose's redevelopment agency.

In San Jose, parking lifts were installed 10 years ago — or so the city thought. The city allowed a building owner to put in

more conventional parking spaces than the municipal code required because he promised to install the lifts.

But when the owner applied to the city to expand in the 1990s, officials dis-

covered the machines had been removed years before.

**Caution approach**

City planner Meg Monroe said the city cannot afford to check regularly if the lifts are in place or removed by unscrupulous owners unless someone complains.

"They experience here's been good," Monroe said. "Besides, those places aren't exempt larger cars and that's what people are driving."

In the Livermore-area city of Roseville, officials are far more approving of projects. They're taking a cautious approach because they fear residents may find it inconvenient to use the lifts and end up clogging nearby streets.

"We're waiting before we en-

ourage their widespread use," said Patrick O'Brien, the city's economic development director.

The lifts work in different ways, depending on the size. Lift

Typeset's uses a top ramp that lifts down to ground level. He puts parking into the garage, slides out of his car, pushes a button to the ramp, they drive onto the ramp. He disembarks for the final time and pushes the same button to raise the ramp.

**Lifts are elevator**

In contrast, the conventional model in Quigley's building works somewhat like an open-air elevator. To park on the top level, Quigley pushes in the garage, hops out, momentarily and turns a switch on a nearby post to lower the top platform to ground level. The hoist or platform disappears into a pit they're below the garage.

Quigley then parks, gets out and turns the same switch to raise his car, which also returns the bottom car to ground level.

Similar lifts will be installed in a 27-unit apartment house near the downtown Walnut Creek BART station. The small, triangular-shaped site was zoned for 10 years because it did not have room for both conventional parking and enough units to make it profitable, said architect Tom Jeff.

"These lifts make projects feasible that otherwise wouldn't be," Jeff said. "As land prices go up, it's going to be more and more viable kinds."

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