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Checklist for Choosing Aftermarket Equipment

By Erik Gaspar, Enterprise Fleet Management

Purchasing a vehicle may be easy compared to the choices for upfitting the vehicle with the necessary equipment to meet your needs. Proper upfitting depends on closely examining your payload, annual mileage and lifecycle. For example, if you plan to replace a vehicle after 24 months in service, you'll want to avoid spending thousands of dollars in Aftermarket Equipment (AME) that can't be transferred to the next vehicle. Furthermore, you want to make sure any Aftermarket Equipment you add to your vehicle is designed to handle the weight and physical size of your cargo, and that it also has some way to secure your cargo during transit.

Consider Original Equipment

Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) restrictions should always be taken into account when installing AME. Manufacturers have maximum dimensions that are published in Body Builders Guides that need to be followed because they affect the vehicle's center of gravity and gross axle weight. The center of gravity is affected by the height and width of the body. Properly securing the load on your vehicle will reduce the potential for vehicle rollover. The gross axle weight rating is most affected by the body length. For example, a body that is too short will tend to overload the front axle when loaded, and a body that is too long will do the opposite by overloading the rear axle.

Another common request is to have a dock high truck with a lower Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR). The problem with this is the manufacturers also post a maximum floor height, which ultimately affects the center of gravity because it not only moves the weight of the AME higher off the ground, but it also moves the weight of anything you load into the back of the truck. If you do install AME on a truck in a manner other than that approved by the manufacturer, you face an added liability exposure by producing an unsafe vehicle. In addition, this could void the manufacturer's warranty.

Towing Equipment

If your needs require towing, trailer towing capability needs to be examined when upfitting your vehicle. You need to make sure the vehicle has the capacity to tow the maximum weight you plan to tow and that the proper towing equipment is installed. For instance, make sure the hitch you are using is rated

higher than the max trailer weight you will be towing, and review the manufacturer's guidelines to determine when a trailer brake control should be used. A good rule of thumb to use, is when the max trailer weight exceeds 40 percent of the total weight of the towing vehicle, an electric brake control should be used, and in some cases is required by law.

Power Take Off

Although used in very specific applications and on a limited basis, Power Take Off applications (PTO) should be considered carefully. You need to make sure the vehicle PTO has the torque rating needed along with the proper Revolutions Per Minute (RPMs) at the right time.

Pickup Box Removal

Today, the increase in manufacturer restrictions has made Pickup Box Removal increasingly more difficult. In some instances the AME being installed is limited to a maximum weight that will only allow for a body and bumper, not leaving any additional capacity to install a hitch or ladder rack. In extreme circumstances other manufacturers have forbidden the removal of the pickup box all together.

Suit Your Needs

Ramps lift gates, cranes and winches are examples of additional equipment that can be included in the AME upfit. These items can make your job easier, and in some cases are required to do your job. Customizing a truck properly can also reduce job related injuries caused by a worker loading heavy or bulky products. For example, the cost of adding a lift gate to assist with loading large or heavy objects doesn't come close to a hospital and physical therapy bill from a worker injuring his or her back. Remember, these items also need to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to make sure the upfit meets manufacturer's requirements.

A little prep work will go a long way when upfitting your vehicle. If you take the time to address your needs ahead of time, you will create a more efficient vehicle, incur less down time, save on repairs, and reduce your overall liability exposure while putting a safer more productive vehicle on the road.

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