

LIFTS 2014: IS THAT ALL THERE IS?

Aerial lift sales hit an all-time low in 2014.

BY RICK KAHL

The past year saw the fewest number of aerial lifts installed in memory—16. Is this the new normal?

Perhaps, perhaps not. “It was just an unusual year,” says Mark Bee, president of Doppelmayr USA. “Next year will be better. There are a lot of significant, solid projects on the radar.” Leitner-Poma’s Jon Mauch had a similar reaction: “It looks good so far for next year. We’ve had more inquiries for bigger machines, six-packs and gondolas.”

Jan Leonard of SkyTrac is not so sure. “Look at the Kottke [economic] report. Resorts do not have big spending plans,” he says. He sees scarce capital going into summer operations and snowmaking.

With so many demands on capital, resorts are squeezing more efficiency from their lifts, new and old.

Instead of purchasing new machines,

Stratton, Stowe, and Whistler put new cabins on major gondolas. Triple Peaks replaced a detachable quad at Okemo and relocated it to Mount Sunapee.

Loading conveyors are another option for efficiency. Chairkit installed six, serving more than a third of all new lifts—four on fixed-grip quads, two on detachable six-packs—plus one retrofit.

“With detachables, the loading conveyor provides a realistic opportunity for the lift to achieve higher design capacities,” says Chairkit’s Marc Wood. “On fixed-grips, it is more about consistent

(Note: VTFH measures the number of skiers and riders who can be transported 1,000 feet vertically in one hour. It is arrived at by multiplying the vertical rise in feet by the capacity in people-per-hour and dividing by 1,000.)

and easy loading, which minimizes stops and keeps operating capacity up.” With nearly 50 installations across North America, their utility is well established.

AERIAL LIFTS

Leitner-Poma installed four detachables, plus a pulse gondola at Royal Gorge, Colo. The detachables include a six-pack at Breckenridge with a loading conveyor and a capacity of 3,600 an hour, and a heated, bubble six-pack at Okemo that can move 3,000 an hour. “Those creature comforts are becoming more important,” says Mauch.

Doppelmayr put in six lifts, including an unusual combination gondola and chair at Beaver Creek. The Centennial gondola-chair (25 10-passenger cabins and 125 six-person chairs), 7,800 feet long, with 2,100 vertical and a capacity of

NEW LIFTS BY REGION

Region	New VTFH	Gondolas/ Trams				Total
		Surface	Chair	Funiculars		
East	11,285	-	5	-	-	5
Midwest	1,713	-	2	-	-	2
Mountain	16,143	-	4	1	-	5
Pacific	2,599	-	2	-	-	2
Canada	1,417	-	2	-	-	2
TOTALS	33,157	-	15	1	-	16

LIFT COMPARISON WITH PRECEDING YEARS

Region	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
East	8	8	5	9	7	7	9	6	2	5
Midwest	0	1	0	2	0	2	3	5	4	2
Mountain	17	11	22	11	4	5	7	10	9	5
Pacific	3	5	6	5	3	3	4	2	4	2
Canada	5	6	8	11	7	6	6	7	7	2
TOTALS	54	34	31	41	38	21	23	30	26	16

NEW LIFTS BY MANUFACTURER

Manufacturer	Gondolas/ Trams				Total Lifts	Total VTFH
	Surface	Chair	Funiculars			
Doppelmayr	-	5	1	-	6	12,603
Leitner-Poma	-	4	-	-	4	12,424
SkyTrac	-	6	-	-	6	8,130
TOTALS	-	15	1	-	16	33,157

VTFH (000) COMPARISON WITH PRECEDING YEARS

Region	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
East	10,367	11,533	7,610	15,436	5,801	9,497	17,927	2,859	2,247	11,285
Midwest	0	638	0	1,228	0	1,855	1,474	5,181	3,917	1,713
Mountain	35,849	29,785	39,455	22,994	6,719	15,665	14,934	20,744	16,990	16,143
Pacific	4,250	9,998	16,718	5,209	960	4,707	7,259	4,079	8,248	2,599
Canada	6,533	11,767	21,610	11,777	12,601	11,242	7,629	4,649	17,094	1,417
TOTALS	56,999	63,661	85,393	56,644	26,081	42,966	49,223	37,512	48,496	33,157

EAST

Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed HP	Length	Vert.	Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH
MASSACHUSETTS									
Berkshire East	4C	SkyTrac	400	3145	936	2400	2400	500	2246
NEW HAMPSHIRE									
Ragged Mountain	4C-Det.	Doppelmayr	400	4215	1000	1800	1800	1000	1800
NEW YORK									
Gore Mountain	4C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	700	7079	1494	2400	2400	1100	3586
VERMONT									
Okemo Mountain	6C-Det Bubble	Leitner-Poma	900	6617	1670	1670	3000	3000	2789
Stowe	4C	Doppelmayr	200	1734	432	2000	2000	400	864

MIDWEST

Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed HP	Length	Vert.	Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH
MICHIGAN									
Pine Knob	3C	SkyTrac	100	1045	255	1700	1700	435	434
WISCONSIN									
Granite Peak	4C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	300	2365	492	2600	2600	1000	1279

MOUNTAIN

Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed HP	Length	Vert.	Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH
COLORADO									
Beaver Creek	6/10 Chondola	Doppelmayr	1833	7876	2102	3400	3400	1000	7147
Breckenridge	6C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	900	6194	1325	3600	3600	1000	4770
Royal Gorge*	Pulsed Gondola	Leitner-Poma	150	2105	110	300	300	1000	33
NEVADA									
Las Vegas Ski & Snowboard	4C	Doppelmayr	264	2916	684	2010	2010	450	1375
NEW MEXICO									
Taos Ski Valley	3C	SkyTrac	300	2330	1095	1500	1500	500	1643
UTAH									
Powder Mountain	4C	SkyTrac	200	1955	575	2100	2100	450	1208

PACIFIC

Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed HP	Length	Vert.	Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH
WASHINGTON									
Crystal Mountain	2C	SkyTrac	150	2510	920	875	875	510	805
The Summit at Snoqualmie	4C	SkyTrac	350	3030	780	2300	2300	500	1794

CANADA

Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed HP	Length	Vert.	Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH
BRITISH COLUMBIA									
Panorama Mountain Village	4C	Doppelmayr	150	812	165	1000	1000	400	165
ONTARIO									
Antoine Mountain	4C	Doppelmayr	200	2644	626	2000	2000	450	1252

* Not included in totals.

SLOPESIDE ELEVATORS

Hilltrac 2 **TOTAL 2**

TOWS: ROPE, HANDLE, WIRE ROPE

Star Lifts 3 **TOTAL 3**

CONVEYORS

Chairkit 7 Star Lifts 20
 Magic Carpet 23 **TOTAL 50**

SIX-YEAR CHART OF CONVEYOR INSTALLATIONS



3,400, was the biggest install of the year.

SkyTrac delivered three quads (two with loading conveyors), two triples, and a double. “With the cost of detachables, resorts are looking at a fixed-grip quad and loading conveyor as an alternative,” says Leonard.

All three of the aerial lift companies are also doing more renovations of existing lifts. And not just their own. There are hundreds of orphan lifts across the country, “and we’re doing more refurbishing of them,” says Bee. “It’s work we are happy to have.” Both SkyTrac and Leitner-Poma echo that sentiment.

CONVEYORS STAY STRONG

Another place resorts are putting their capital: conveyors.

Magic Carpet saw an increase in installs. Jennifer Kelly attributes that to the popularity of Carpets for tubing, with several installations in the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic.

Star Lifts’ 20 installs were in line with its long-term numbers. Pete Kavanaugh reports two trends: more installations for TBL areas, and more surface lifts for learning areas—they are a step up from conveyors for skiers and riders who have gained more skill and want a faster way up.

BEYOND WINTER SPORTS

Increasingly, the aerial lift companies are finding projects outside of winter sports. Leitner-Poma is building a small aerial tram at the Salesforce tower in San Francisco, as part of a transportation center. The 30-person cabins will operate on demand, like an elevator.

In that same vein, Doppelmayr has completed a major project with Universal’s Harry Potter World, building major components of the two-train, four-car Hogwarts Express. The company also built components of a three-mile-long connecting train at the Oakland airport.

SkyTrac’s HillTrac division manufactures versatile, four- and eight-passenger “inclined elevators” that serve hard-to-access Utah real-estate locations. These also operate, elevator-like, on demand.

In short: Lift companies, like winter resorts themselves, have been looking beyond their traditional customers for growth opportunities.



TOP ROW: Left: Beaver's Creek's new Centennial combo gondola/chair lift, from Doppelmayr, is the longest such lift in North America. Right: Okemo installed a heated, bubble Leitner-Poma six-pack. Shown here is the lower terminal with its wood siding—a final, deluxe touch. SECOND ROW: Two SkyTrac installations: the top terminal of the dramatic Kachina Peak chair at Taos, N.M. (left), with a length of 2,330 feet and a vertical rise of 1,095 feet; and the top terminal installation of Chair 6 at Crystal Mountain, Wash., which replaces a lift that was swept away by an avalanche. THIRD ROW: Two Magic Carpets, one 280 feet long and installed (and now enclosed) in the beginner area at Loveland, Colo. (left), and the other installed on the tubing hill area at Montage Deer Valley, Utah (right). BOTTOM ROW: Star Lifts installed these two SunKid conveyor lifts at Hunter Mountain, N.Y.; they were specifically designed for Hunter's children's learning programs. The carpets are 50 feet and 120 feet long, respectively.

