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LEAN, MEAN, AND FORKLIFT FREE**

Forget about forklifts. That's what Kinetic Technologies LLC (K-Tec), Willoughby Hills, Ohio, is telling shops. And it has a supporter in General Motors Corp., which is ditching forklifts in its new Tonawanda, N.Y., engine plant.

General Motors bought approximately 90 K-Tec KT2 carts, plus scissor lifts, as part of a lean-manufacturing strategy. The automaker needed a simple and flexible material-handling system, and, for safety reasons, it also wanted to eliminate the practice of using forklifts to deliver large pallets of components to the engine line.

At the GM plant, small electric carts will pull two KT2 wagons at a time to deliver twice the number of parts to the lines compared with lift trucks. The wagons will be equipped with rollers, allowing pallets of parts to easily roll off.

Delphi Automotive Systems Corp. has also ordered some prototypes for its brake-assemblies plant in Saginaw, Mich. Reportedly, Kinetic also is making prototypes for another auto-related company. K-Tec's KT2 manual transport lets workers move heavy loads -- up to a ton in weight -- around a manufacturing facility without the need for costly forklifts. Special wheels make it easy for workers to push or pull the wagons. Shops also have the option of using motorized tugs or automatic guided vehicles to move the KT2s.

The addition of the KT2 Mini-Might scissor lift, which packs 2,500 lb of lifting power in a 23x35x4-in. area, adds further worker benefits. The lift adjusts load heights to match with a production line or to bring parts within easy reach of a machine operator or assembly-line worker.

The modular vehicles can be reconfigured in-plant using a selection of "standard special" upper frames that allow loads to be easily manipulated in a variety of ways. The vehicles can also be used in tugged trains using multiple steering configurations to accommodate varying aisle widths and turnaround areas.

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