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TECHNİCAL GUİDE

Lift Axle Valve: Faults, Replacement and Maintenance Guide

Lift axle valve guide for trucks and trailers: how it works, fault symptoms, pressure diagnosis, step-by-step replacement and maintenance checkpoints.

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When a complaint comes in on a three-axle tractor unit or a multi-axle trailer — "the lift axle won't raise", "it drops by itself on the road" or "the axle stays down even when empty" — one of the first components questioned in the field is the lift axle valve. This valve exhausts the load-carrying suspension bellows of the auxiliary axle and pressurises the lift bellows to raise the axle clear of the road; when load is applied or a command is given, it lowers the axle back onto the ground. In the workshop it is commonly called the "lift axle valve", the "axle lift valve" or simply the *lift valve*. A malfunctioning lift valve is not only a tyre and fuel cost issue; it creates a direct risk in terms of axle load distribution, traction and regulatory compliance. This guide covers the valve's operating logic, its faults, diagnosis, and replacement/maintenance practice in plain workshop language.

Editor's note (E-E-A-T): This technical guide has been prepared by the VADEN technical team based on field experience with heavy commercial vehicle air suspension and pneumatic control systems, together with OE manufacturer documentation practice. The values in the text are typical reference ranges; for vehicle-specific exact pressure, torque and raise/lower threshold values, the current OE service manual of the relevant vehicle must always be taken as the basis. When using a liftable axle, the maximum axle loads stated on the vehicle registration document and the lift axle usage conditions defined by the manufacturer are binding. *Last updated: September 2026.*

Heavy commercial vehicle air brake systems are designed within the framework of ECE R13 (UN/EU braking regulation) and ISO 611.

What Is a Lift Axle Valve? Function and Operating Principle

The lift axle valve is a pneumatic control valve that, on air-suspended heavy commercial vehicles, exhausts the air from the load-carrying bellows and sends pressure to the lift bellows to raise the auxiliary (lift) axle clear of the road, and lowers the axle again in response to load or a control signal.

Its operating principle is based on feeding two bellows groups in opposite directions. With the axle down, the load-carrying bellows are pressurised and carry the load while the lift bellows are empty. When a command is given, the valve reverses this state: it rapidly exhausts the load-carrying bellows through the exhaust port and at the same time routes supply air to the lift bellows; the bellows inflate, pull the axle carrier upwards and the tyres lift clear of the ground. On lowering, the flow reverses, the load-carrying bellows refill and the axle settles back onto the ground in a controlled manner.

The critical point is that these two movements occur *simultaneously and in the correct sequence*. For this reason most lift axle valves incorporate a quick release function in the body: the air from the load-carrying bellows is discharged to atmosphere through the valve's own exhaust port instead of travelling back along a long line. Many types also include a stage that limits the pressure fed to the lift bellows.

The valve does not work alone; it is the final link in a control chain. In OE architecture this chain typically follows the sequence: **levelling valve - ECAS/EBS control unit - solenoid (magnet) valve block - lift axle valve - bellows**. The levelling valve determines chassis height and therefore load-carrying bellows pressure; the ECAS/EBS unit evaluates this information together

with speed, axle load and driver demand; the solenoid valve block converts the electrical decision into pneumatic switching; and the lift valve actually feeds and exhausts the bellows lines. In systems derived from Knorr-Bremse, Wabco/ZF, Bendix and Haldex the naming of these layers varies, but the logic is the same. On trailers in particular, keep in mind that the lift logic is often defined not in the valve itself but in the parameters of the trailer EBS/ECAS unit — behaviour that looks like a "valve fault" sometimes originates from a configuration in the unit.

- **Body:** Usually cast aluminium alloy; houses the supply, load-carrying bellows, lift bellows and exhaust ports.
- **Port markings:** According to the common body marking convention used on pneumatic components, **1 = supply**, **2 = delivery / bellows line**, **3 = exhaust**, **4 = control (pilot)**; on dual-circuit types the two circuits of the same function are shown as **11-12** and **21-22**. These numbers are not an OE specification value but a marking convention read on the body; they must be verified on every vehicle.
- **Control piston / diaphragm:** Transmits the pilot signal or lever movement to the internal valve assembly.
- **Double-acting valve assembly:** Opposing poppets that feed one line while opening the other to exhaust.
- **Quick release stage:** Provides fast raising by venting the load-carrying bellows air by the shortest route.
- **Pressure limiting stage:** Limits the pressure fed to the lift bellows (fixed or adjustable depending on type).
- **Load sensing (pilot) port:** Reads load-carrying bellows pressure and determines the automatic lowering threshold.
- **Solenoid coil (on electro-pneumatic types):** Controls the valve via a cab switch or an ECU signal.
- **O-rings and sealing elements:** Elastomer seals that prevent internal leakage between ports.

Manual, Automatic and Electro-Pneumatic Types

On the manual type the driver raises and lowers the axle using a control valve or lever in the cab; the system is entirely pneumatic. On the automatic (load-sensing) type the valve continuously reads load-carrying bellows pressure: when the load rises above a certain threshold the axle lowers by itself, and when the load is removed it can be raised again. On electro-pneumatic types the command arrives via a solenoid; if the vehicle is ECAS/EBS equipped, the raise-lower logic is defined in the electronic unit and the valve only performs the final-stage pneumatic switching. These three architectures are not interchangeable; port count, pilot input and control logic differ.

Difference Between a Pusher Axle and a Tag Axle

On 6x2 tractor units the position of the auxiliary axle directly affects the valve's control logic. An auxiliary axle located *ahead* of the drive axle is called a **pusher axle**, while one located *behind* it is called a **tag axle**; in most applications the tag axle is of a self-steering design. On a pusher axle, because load is transferred ahead of the drive axle, the automatic lowering threshold is

generally defined to engage earlier, and the load change on the drive axle during traction help is more pronounced.

On a tag axle the lowering threshold is set according to the total load distribution of the rear axle group; on self-steering types the axle must be able to centre mechanically during raising and lowering, otherwise tyre scrub is seen during manoeuvring. On multi-axle combinations the lift sequence is also fixed: which axle rises first and which lowers first as load increases is defined by the vehicle manufacturer and must not be changed arbitrarily. For this reason, saying simply "lift axle valve" is not enough when selecting a replacement; whether the axle is a pusher or a tag, and the lift sequence on that vehicle, are also part of the match.

Traction Help Function

On many vehicles the lift valve is used together with a traction help function. When pulling away on a slippery surface or a gradient, the auxiliary axle is briefly raised or the load-carrying bellows pressure is reduced; part of the load is thus transferred to the drive axle and wheel spin is reduced. By design this function is *temporary*: above a certain low speed and after a certain time, the system returns to normal by itself. Speed, duration and axle load limits vary by vehicle and market; in practice the **maximum axle loads stated on the vehicle registration document and the lift axle usage conditions defined by the manufacturer are binding**. Likewise, the lift axle is designed to be used only when empty or partially loaded; when the permissible load of the remaining axles is exceeded, the axle must be on the ground. The automatic lowering threshold is therefore not a comfort feature but a safety and compliance function.

Typical Applications and Matching

Application / Segment	Example Use	Key Feature
3-axle tractor unit (6x2, pusher axle)	Raising the auxiliary axle ahead of the drive axle	Early-engaging automatic lowering threshold + traction help
3-axle tractor unit (6x2, tag axle)	Axle behind the drive axle, mostly self-steering	Threshold based on rear axle group load distribution, centring requirement
4-axle truck / concrete mixer	Front or rear lift axle management	High load threshold, robust body
Multi-axle trailer / low-bed	Axle lifting on the empty return run	Simple pneumatic control, quick release; logic mostly in the trailer EBS/ECAS
Bus / midibus (auxiliary axle)	Axle management according to passenger load	Precise threshold, quiet and progressive switching
ECAS/EBS equipped vehicle	Electronically controlled lifting	Solenoid control, integrated operation with the ECU

Part number verification: Although lift axle valves look very similar externally, the port count and layout, pilot input arrangement, lift bellows pressure limit, automatic lowering threshold, control type (manual / pneumatic pilot / solenoid) and coil voltage vary by type. The wrong valve type can result in the axle not rising at all, dropping by itself on the road, or rising while loaded. Before installation, verify the match using the OE part number, the port numbers on the body (1/2/3/4 or

11-12 / 21-22), the control type and, where applicable, ECAS/EBS compatibility; do not rely on visual similarity.

Standards and further reading

This subject is governed by the equipment rules for air-braked commercial vehicles. In the United States the federal air brake standard, FMVSS 121 (49 CFR 571.121) defines the reservoirs, protection and timing a compliant system must provide, and Europe applies the equivalent limits of UNECE Regulation No. 13. For further detail, see the on-road braking performance requirement in 49 CFR 393.52. Always confirm specific figures against the current regulation and the vehicle manufacturer service data.

Outside the United States the equivalent duties sit in national law. In the United Kingdom, regulation 18 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 requires every part of the braking system to be maintained in good working order. In Canada, air brake systems fall under the Motor Vehicle Safety Regulations, which contain CMVSS 121.

Fault Symptoms and Diagnosis

Faults are usually reported as "the axle won't raise", "the axle won't lower" or "it lowers by itself"; however, the same symptoms can also stem from a leaking bellows, a blocked line or an electrical control fault. The table below summarises the symptoms most frequently encountered in the field together with their likely causes and verification methods.

Symptom	Possible Cause	Check / Verification
Axle does not rise at all despite the command	Low supply pressure, internal valve poppet stuck, no air reaching the lift bellows	Measure the pressure at the supply port (1); connect a gauge to the lift bellows line and check whether pressure builds on command
Axle rises but slowly / only partly	Load-carrying bellows not fully exhausting, quick release stage restricted, exhaust blocked	Listen to the discharge rate at the exhaust port (3); measure whether residual pressure remains in the load-carrying bellows line
Raised axle lowers by itself on the road	Lift bellows or its line leaking, internal leakage in the valve, pilot signal dropping out	Soap-bubble test on the bellows and fittings with the axle raised; monitor pressure drop against time
Axle does not lower despite load being applied	Automatic lowering (load-sensing) stage faulty, pilot line blocked, threshold incorrectly set	Measure pilot/load-carrying bellows pressure under load and compare with the threshold value
Axle stays down when the vehicle is empty and cannot be raised	No supply to the control switch/solenoid, valve seized, lines cross-connected	Measure voltage at the solenoid terminals; compare port connections with the body numbers and the schematic
Continuous air consumption, compressor runs excessively	Constant leakage from the valve exhaust port, internal poppet not closing fully	Carry out a soap test at the exhaust port with the system at nominal pressure

Symptom	Possible Cause	Check / Verification
Axle lands hard when lowering, knocking noise	Load-carrying bellows filling too fast, restrictor/damping stage faulty, bellows damaged	Observe the rate of pressure rise in the load-carrying bellows during lowering; check the condition of the bellows and bump stop
Erratic raising-lowering in cold weather	Moisture in the system, icing inside the valve, inefficient air dryer	Check the air dryer and reservoir draining; trace the source of moisture

Distinguishing Faults by Pressure Measurement

The most reliable diagnosis is simultaneous pressure measurement at the valve's inlet and outlet ports. If system pressure is present at the supply port but no pressure builds in the lift bellows line on command, the problem is inside the valve. If pressure does build but the axle still does not rise, the culprit is usually the bellows, a mechanical linkage or a seized axle carrier. If residual pressure remains in the load-carrying bellows line during lifting, the exhaust/quick release side is restricted.

Leak Testing and Identifying Internal Leakage

With the axle in the raised position, the system is left at nominal pressure; the lift bellows line, the fittings and the valve body are scanned with soap solution. If no external leak is visible but the axle gradually lowers, internal leakage (a poppet not closing fully) is likely. Replacing the valve without making this distinction is a common mistake; the lift bellows itself can also crack over the years and produce the same symptom.

Signal Checks on Electrical Controls

On electro-pneumatic types, fault finding must start with the electrics: is there voltage at the cab switch or ECU output, is the coil resistance plausible, is the connector corroded or water-ingressed. If voltage reaches the coil but the valve does not switch, the fault is in the valve; if no voltage arrives, the problem is in the wiring, the switch or the control unit. On EBS/ECAS equipped vehicles, reading the fault memory significantly reduces the measurement workload; on trailers it should additionally be checked that the lift parameters are correctly defined in the trailer unit.

Replacement / Installation Steps

Personal protective equipment (PPE) and safety: A raised axle can drop suddenly the moment the air in the lift bellows is released; compressed air and a moving axle can cause serious injury. Before starting work, secure the vehicle on level ground, chock the wheels, stop the engine, switch off the ignition and **release the pressure in the suspension circuit in a controlled manner**. Support the lift mechanism mechanically or work with the axle in the lowered position; never go under the axle without support. Wear safety glasses and gloves.

1. **Secure the vehicle:** Park on level ground, chock the wheels, switch off the engine and turn the ignition off.
2. **Bring the axle to a safe position:** Lower the lift axle to the ground or support it mechanically with suitable equipment.

3. **Release the pressure:** Vent the suspension and lift circuits in a controlled manner; confirm on the gauge that pressure has dropped.
4. **Isolate the electrics (if fitted):** On electro-pneumatic types switch off the battery master switch, disconnect the solenoid connector and inspect the pins for corrosion or water traces.
5. **Mark the lines:** Label or photograph the supply, load-carrying bellows, lift bellows, pilot and exhaust lines before disconnecting. Also note the port numbers on the body: in the common marking convention **1 = supply**, **2 = delivery / bellows line**, **3 = exhaust**, **4 = control (pilot)**; on dual-circuit types the circuits are shown as **11-12** and **21-22**. Since the numbers can be arranged differently depending on the valve type, compare the layout you read with the vehicle schematic. Mixing up ports is the most common mistake made on this valve.
6. **Disconnect the air lines:** Loosen the fittings with the correct spanner and separate the pipes without forcing them; temporarily plug the open port openings to prevent dirt ingress.
7. **Remove the old valve:** Undo the bracket and mounting bolts and take the valve off; check the bracket for cracks, distortion and corrosion.
8. **Prepare the mounting surface:** Clean off dirt, rust and old gasket residue; renew any damaged brackets, bolts and hoses.
9. **Position the new valve:** Fit the correct valve type to its bracket with the exhaust port facing downwards and the port orientation matching the vehicle layout; tighten the bolts progressively to the torque specified by the manufacturer.
10. **Reconnect the lines:** Following the labels and port numbers, connect the supply, load-carrying bellows, lift bellows and pilot lines to the correct ports; tighten the fittings so they seal but without overtightening. Seat the solenoid connector fully and fit its lock if present.
11. **Carry out function and threshold testing:** Charge the system to nominal pressure and leak-test all connections; raise and lower the axle several times to confirm that the movement is fast and progressive. Then load and unload the vehicle to check that the automatic lowering threshold works, that the axle stays down when loaded, and that traction help (if fitted) returns to normal by itself. On EBS/ECAS equipped vehicles, clear and re-read the fault memory.

Points to Watch (Common Mistakes)

The most critical mistake — mixing up ports: Swapping the load-carrying bellows and lift bellows lines can cause the axle to operate in reverse, overstress the bellows with excessive pressure and allow the axle to rise on a loaded vehicle. This is a serious risk both for the vehicle and for road safety. Always label the lines before removal, compare the port numbers on the

body (1/2/3/4, or 11-12 / 21-22 on dual circuits) with the vehicle schematic, and carry out the first test after installation with the vehicle empty.

Disabling the automatic lowering function: Bypassing the load-sensing lowering stage, blanking off the pilot line with a plug or arbitrarily changing the threshold leads to axle overload, brake imbalance and legal non-compliance. A faulty stage is not bypassed — it is repaired or the valve is replaced.

- Relying on visual similarity and fitting a valve with a different control type (solenoid-operated instead of manual, or a different coil voltage).
- Fitting a valve specified for a pusher axle to a vehicle with a tag axle (or vice versa), causing the lowering threshold not to match the vehicle layout.
- Ignoring the pressure limiting stage and feeding full system pressure to the lift bellows — bellows life is shortened.
- The exhaust port facing upwards or being blocked — water/dirt accumulation, freezing in winter and slow lifting.
- Working without releasing the pressure or supporting the axle — risk of the axle dropping suddenly and causing serious injury.
- Replacing the valve directly without first ruling out a leaking bellows or a cracked hose.
- Reusing hardened O-rings and seals; fitting a new valve without cleaning a corroded connector.
- Failing to verify the port layout and control type when selecting a replacement valve — with VADEN ORIGINAL lift axle valve references too, the first check to make before installation is to confirm that the port layout and control type on the body match the removed OE valve exactly.
- Handing the vehicle back without verifying the loaded/empty function test after installation.

Technical Values and Check Points

The values below are **typical / general reference** ranges for heavy commercial vehicle axle lift systems; they vary by vehicle and valve type, and the OE service manual is authoritative for exact values.

Parameter	Typical Reference Range	Note
System supply pressure	~8–12.5 bar (≈116–181 psi)	Varies by vehicle and circuit
Lift bellows working pressure	Typically ~6–8 bar (≈87–116 psi), limited according to type	Determined by the pressure limiting stage
Load-carrying bellows pressure	Variable with load, typically ~0.5–8 bar	Depending on empty/laden condition
Automatic lowering threshold	Specific to the vehicle and axle load; derived from load-carrying bellows pressure	The OE specification is authoritative and must not be changed arbitrarily

Parameter	Typical Reference Range	Note
Raise/lower time	Use a comparative acceptance criterion rather than a numeric target: compare against a reference measurement taken on the same vehicle (or on a healthy vehicle of the same type)	A marked increase against the reference indicates a restricted exhaust, a blocked line or a leak
Permissible internal leakage	In practice "zero" is the target; measurable leakage = fault	There should be no continuous bubbling in the soap test
Operating temperature range	Approx. -40 °C to +80 °C	Elastomer and freezing limit
Solenoid supply voltage (electrical type)	Generally 12 V or 24 V DC	According to the vehicle system; must not be mixed up

Connection torques vary by type and bolt size; the values below are for general reference only.

Connection	Typical Torque Range	Note
Body/bracket mounting bolt (M8)	~20–30 Nm	Tighten progressively and crosswise
Body/bracket mounting bolt (M10)	~40–55 Nm	The OE value is authoritative
Air line fitting	According to manufacturer specification	Do not overtighten; do not strip the thread
Solenoid coil retaining nut	According to manufacturer specification (typically low torque)	Do not crush the coil body

Field tip: With an "axle won't raise" complaint, connect a pressure gauge to the lift bellows line and give the command before removing the valve. If pressure rises, the valve is doing its job; the problem is in the bellows, the mechanical linkage or a seized carrier arm. This single measurement prevents a significant share of unnecessary valve replacements.

- Is the system pressure at the supply port (1) within the OE range?
- Does pressure build in the lift bellows line on command, and does the load-carrying bellows line exhaust fully?
- Has the raise and lower time increased noticeably compared with a healthy reference measurement?
- Does the axle hold its pressure for several minutes in the raised position (no internal/external leakage)?
- Does the automatic lowering threshold engage and the axle settle on the ground when load is applied?
- Does traction help (if fitted) operate for a limited time/speed and return to normal by itself?
- Is the exhaust port (3) free and facing downwards, is the connector dry and is the coil voltage correct for the vehicle?

Maintenance and Service Life

The lift axle valve is a long-lasting component when supplied with clean, dry air; its real enemies are moisture, dirt, vibration and corrosion caused by road salt. The valve is usually located under the chassis in an area exposed to mud and water spray, and because the raise-lower cycle is repeated dozens of times a day, the internal poppets and seals fatigue over time. For this reason, maintenance should assess the valve not in isolation but as part of the air preparation circuit and the lift mechanism as a whole.

- Change the air dryer cartridge at the manufacturer's interval and drain the air reservoirs, especially before winter; stop moisture at source.
- Regularly inspect the lift and load-carrying bellows for cracks, wear and chafing marks.
- Keep the valve body, the exhaust port and the connector free of mud/salt build-up; the exhaust port must remain open.
- Check hoses, pipes and fittings for vibration wear; secure any chafing lines with clips.
- At periodic service, test the raise-lower function and the automatic lowering threshold in both laden and empty conditions; compare the timing with the reference measurement from the previous service.
- Check the bushes and joints of the axle carrier arm for play; mechanical play can look like a valve fault.

A healthy lift axle valve operates trouble-free throughout a long service life; however, in damp systems and on vehicles with neglected maintenance, service life is markedly shortened. Timely intervention prevents both unnecessary tyre and fuel costs and the safety and compliance risks arising from axle overload.

The lift axle valve is a critical pneumatic component with a wide sphere of influence, from tyre and fuel economy to axle load compliance, and from traction performance to brake balance. Correct diagnosis, correct type selection, meticulous port connections and keeping the automatic lowering function operational all contribute to safe and efficient operation. The VADEN ORIGINAL Lift Axle Valve product family is developed for heavy commercial vehicle applications with an OE-compatible port arrangement, durable sealing elements and consistent switching characteristics; by verifying the correct reference and control type for your vehicle, you can achieve long-lasting lift axle performance.