

Tuesday, January 17, 2006

# A new level in garaging ideas

## More residents are considering hydraulic lifts to stack vehicles as a way to ease the parking crunch.

By MICHAEL CORONADO

The Orange County Register

SAN CLEMENTE – One lousy parking space could have scuttled the building deal for Skip Jarvis in this coastal town, where land is precious and pricey.

The law said Jarvis needed six parking spaces for his proposed mixed-use building downtown on Avenida Serra. He could only squeeze in five on the 4,000-square-foot lot as designed.

So he looked down for an answer. And up. And east. And across the Atlantic. And then Jarvis, along with his architect, found what may prove an uncommon answer to a common problem.

Why not bury the car underground and lift the vehicle skyward when needed using hydraulic lifts, the kind infrequently seen in Southern California but ubiquitous in Europe and the East Coast?

"In some areas, it's a unique solution for a unique dilemma," said Jonathan Orduna, associate city planner.

The subterranean lift is believed to be the first in Orange County to satisfy a city-mandated parking requirement. If successful, the hydraulic contraption could spawn increased use of the space-saving devices as Orange County housing gets more cramped and parking scarce.

Costing an estimated \$30,000, the hydraulic lift works by lowering a car at ground level into a subterranean parking space. Another car can be driven onto the lift at ground level and both cars can be raised up and lowered to access either vehicle.

Several lifts are already in use in an apartment complex in Santa Ana, a Los Angeles restaurant and in private homes peppered throughout Orange County. But those units only raise a car up and down at ground level. The unit in San Clemente would also lower a vehicle into the hidden, underground hole.

The cost makes sense in some places, explained Jim Fasbender, who works with Parking Automation Systems of Villa Park.

A parking space requires about 200 square feet. In the Midwest, where land can run a few bucks a square foot, a hydraulic system wouldn't make sense, he said.

Coastal Orange County is another financial world, though, where land can cost several hundreds of dollars a square foot, putting space at a premium.

Fasbender said there were fewer than 200 lifts operating in the county five years ago. This year, he already has orders to install about 150 lifts at

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residential properties during the next few months, he said.

Expect to see more of the metal lifters inside condominium parking structures in the near future, said Fasbender, as the technology catches on with builders, and ultimately the public.

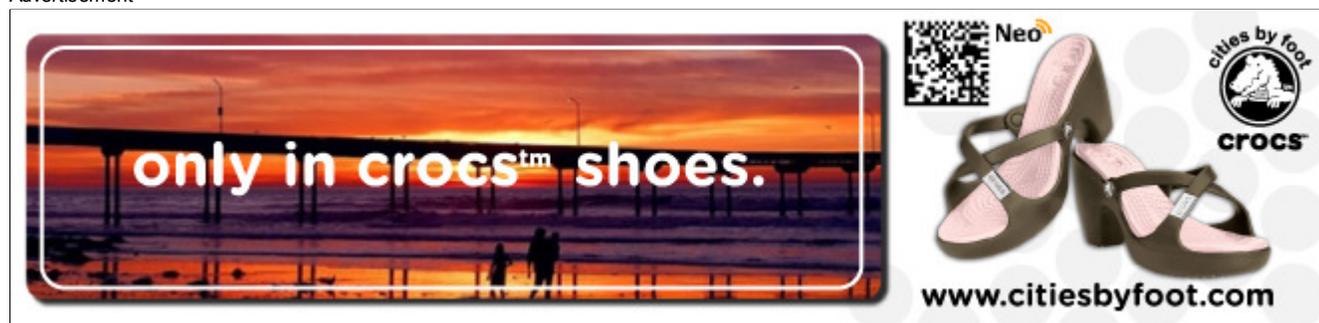
"It's like bunk beds," he said. "It's something that's new for this area. It's a matter of people changing their perspective (about parking)."

San Clemente officials seem receptive to the idea so far and say if the project gets approval it will become the test model for similar proposals in the future.

The city's Planning Commission is expected to vote on the plan at its Feb. 8 meeting.

Contact the writer: (949) 465-5424 or [mcoronado@ocregister.com](mailto:mcoronado@ocregister.com)

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