





# Rough Terrain Forklift Purchasing Guide



# Introduction to the Rough Terrain Forklift Buying Process

## What's inside:

-  Types & Tires
  -  Specifications
  -  Attachments
  -  Questions to Ask a Dealer
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Rough terrain forklifts, often known as material handling equipment, are engineered for operation on some of the most extreme terrain and climatic conditions. Commonly found on port loading docks, scrap yards and recycling plants, and within an endless variety of other industrial applications, there is one consistency among every rough terrain forklift: versatility.

Material handling equipment has achieved its broad level of adoption due to the mobility of the machines themselves. Top models are equipped with features that include robust transmissions geared for quick directional changes, custom tires that provide enhanced traction on loose, rocky terrain, and two- or four-wheel operation for safe, effective navigation. Rough terrain forklifts also feature multipurpose functionality – a feature that's driven by an extensive assortment of attachments and accessories, and one that continues to further broaden their usefulness across a range of industries and applications.

This purchasing guide will examine the specific features that qualify the machines to be considered 'rough terrain'. We'll also break down the different types and specs, finishing off with a review of the most popular attachments capable of cutting costs on almost any jobsite. But before getting into the technical components, we have to start with one of the most important considerations when comparing rough terrain forklifts: the dealer.

### Start here

A rough terrain forklift dealer should be the first (and most important) consideration in your purchase process. So choose carefully. Dealer support has a huge impact on effectively pairing the right machine with your intended purpose. Post-sale, they maintain and service your equipment, whether the scheduled maintenance is conducted on-site at your location or at their facility.

In fact, as any dealer will probably tell you, post-sale support and routine maintenance are two of the greatest contributing factors to achieving long-term ROI on a piece of material handling equipment. We'll cover the process of choosing a dealer in more detail below. But, in general, when comparing dealers, it's important to pay attention to these three traits:

- **Techs:** How many professional service technicians do they have available? And are they in-house or sub-contracted?
- **Parts:** What are their stock levels on name-brand parts? And how quickly can they get something delivered?
- **Service:** What is their first-call fix rate? And how quickly do they turn around customer issues?

### Service level agreement (SLA)

With a quality dealer, the above considerations will all be covered in a service level agreement (SLA). The SLA defines all post-sale service including labor, parts, and any fees resulting from the routine maintenance plan you select. An SLA is one of the primary benefits of a quality dealer, and one that has the potential to cut a huge chunk of repair costs out of your budget over the lifespan of the machine.

### Top manufacturers

Another aspect that indicates a quality dealer is their inventory. If you have an eye on expansion, you may want to select a dealer that specializes in one particular brand. If not, a dealer that offers a range of rough terrain forklifts will enable you to try out a number of different options to see how they stack up against your particular needs.

As a means of comparison, the world's leading manufacturers of rough terrain forklifts and material handling equipment include:

- **JLG:** Encompassing JLG, Lull, and SkyTrak equipment, JLG products specialize in custom, fuel-efficient Tier 4i engines that deliver heavy-duty output with minimal emissions. Popular among a wide range of heavy equipment users, they are also frequently used within mining and military applications.
- **Bobcat:** Bobcat is one of the world's most recognized name brands in heavy equipment and it's easy to see why: they provide a wide range of machinery with rough terrain capability. They also offer material handling equipment that functions as a combination of machines simultaneously, namely wheel loader, attachment carrier, and rough terrain forklift. It's worth noting that the compact track loader is considered best for rough terrain operation, according to the manufacturer.
- **JCB:** Known for their proprietary Dieselmix engine, JCB equipment is powered by a 74 hp low-rev engine shown to enhance efficiency in rough terrain situations while providing maximum fuel efficiency. They've also invested heavily in exhaust control, complying with EPA regulations despite the fact that their machines do not use an exhaust after-treatment system.

- **Caterpillar:** Another recognizable name brand popular among construction and farming applications, Caterpillar material handling equipment is reportedly capable of handling between 2,500 and 36,000 lbs, with track and multi-terrain loaders that heft 2,900 to 4,000 lbs. They also feature a suspended, rubber track undercarriage and provide reliable traction and flotation on a variety of terrain.
- **Manitou:** Manitou is comprised of its namesake, Gehl, Mustang, Loc, and Edge and known for the quality of its telehandlers. Currently manufacturing about 40 different models, they cater to the construction and demolition sectors with an equally impressive selection of attachments.
- **Pettibone:** Based in the United States, Pettibone rough terrain equipment is the result of customer input, largely designed and developed based on marketing research collected from owners and operators. This has led to impressive performance features that include heavy weight handling capabilities, boom rotation, and added flexibility when operating on hi-rail.
- **Genie:** A subsidiary of Terex, Genie boasts one of the largest selections of heavy equipment machinery, more than 300 unique models to be exact. They also invest heavily in the design of their machines to ensure optimal performance even on jobsites that include limited access terrain and high-reach areas.

## Types

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The term "rough terrain forklift" is a somewhat broad name that often encompasses a number of different machines. More commonly referred to as telehandlers, there are three different types of material handling equipment: telehandlers, rotating telehandlers, and straight mast forklifts. Each is designed to work within extreme environments, natural landscapes, and the uneven ground often found on construction sites.

Common specs and prices include:

Type	Lift Height	Max Reach	Load Capacity	Estimated Cost
Telehandler	20'	10'	7,400 lbs.	\$40,000 - \$84,000
Telehandler	23'	11'	30,800 lbs.	\$104,000 - \$375,000
Telehandler	24'	14'	9,900 lbs.	\$70,000 - \$100,000
Rotating Telehandler	45'	38'	8,818 lbs.	\$70,000 - \$180,000
Rotating Telehandler	97'	83'	11,023 lbs.	\$122,000 - \$229,000
Straight Mast Forklift	9'	-	4,400 lbs.	\$24,000 - \$70,000
Straight Mast Forklift	22'	-	6,000 lbs.	\$30,000 - \$110,000

But "rough terrain" isn't simply an indication of the machine's robust nature. It also specifies design advantages that result in enhanced maneuverability and performance. Here's a closer look at the unique benefits found within each of the three types.

### 1. Telehandler (telescopic handler)

Telehandlers provide substantial lift heights over standard forklifts. Often designated as compact telehandlers and high-reach telehandlers, they can heft full weight capacities from 18 feet (compact) to 56 feet (high-reach) in the air. With rated load capacities commonly ranging between 5,500 lbs and 12,000 lbs, popular models include power shift transmission and all-wheel steering as well as a number of additional steering features that allow the operator to position the lift as close to the work area as possible.



Newly redesigned to incorporate the latest ergonomic features like tiltable steering wheels, many telehandlers also feature cab designs that are roomy and comfortable. This enables longer, more productive work shifts by minimizing fatigue and repetitive stress injuries. Most rough terrain forklifts within this range are run by a single joystick that controls all boom functions and hydraulics for simple and efficient operation.

Used within rugged exterior environments for construction and similar applications, telehandlers can also be fitted with non-marking tires, making them well suited to building maintenance, signage and billboard maintenance, and arenas and special event venues.

### 2. Rotating telehandler (roto telescopic handler)

Similar to a standard telehandler, rotating telehandlers are popular for their ability to lift heavy weight to great heights. But their design takes maneuverability a step further. Sometimes known as a rotary telehandler, rotating telehandlers are designed with turntable rotation, enabling them to swivel 360° and service a wide area from a single position.



Also employing joystick controls, some machines offer the addition of a second joystick on the left side of the machine to operate rotation separately. Four-wheel, power assisted steering is common among leading brands as is minimized slip differential on the rear axle to boost traction and safety.

Many models are equipped with stabilizers to ensure safe movement with shifting loads from one side of the machine to the other. But some rotating telehandlers feature a design that

allows them to move substantial weights without stabilizers as well, reducing the time it takes to reposition for the next stage of work.

Somewhat smaller than their fixed-cab counterparts, common load capacities for rotating telehandlers range between 4,000 lbs and 10,000 lbs, with lift heights from 15 to 80 feet. The extended height this type of machine offers can also be paired with a winch attachment and used as a crane, replacing the need for an additional piece of equipment on construction sites or the exteriors of multistory buildings. This level of performance also reportedly makes rotating telehandlers a popular rental option.

### 3. Straight mast forklift

Not to be confused with standard lift trucks, straight mast forklifts are essentially a cross between a forklift and an RTV. They are transported on the back of a flatbed trailer or other large truck and designed for loading and unloading building materials within a range of rough terrain environments, including construction, demolition, mining, and other industrial jobsites.

Load capacities are similar to a standard lift, ranging between 5,000 lbs and 36,000 lbs. However, industrial-grade masts do reportedly provide more substantial lifting capacity at height, with 6,000-lb and 8,000-lb capacity lifts serving as two popular examples among a number of rental houses. But where a straight mast forklift really differs is in the maneuverability and accessibility it provides through large heavy-duty pneumatic cushion tires that enable the lift to traverse rough terrain as easily as any other equipment on the jobsite.



Most lifts in this category come with two-wheel and four-wheel drive. And depending on the model selected and your intended application and work environment, straight mast forklifts can be powered by diesel fuel or propane. This enables them to be used outdoors as well as indoors.

## Tire Types

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Tires are another important factor to consider when comparing material handling equipment. Most tires that accompany this type of machine are designed for rugged terrain and exterior use. They're available in a variety of tread depths to tackle sand and loose dirt as easily as rocky, jagged terrain. Sometimes known as motor grader tires or bias tires, they feature enhanced durability often through casings that are reinforced with nylon cording. This design



lengthens the life of the tires while also making them more resistant to impact, punctures, and other damage.

Common tires found on rough terrain forklifts include:

Size	Description	Ply Rating	Tread Depth (32nds of an inch)	Width	Diameter	Load Rating
12.00-24	SGG-2A	8	28	12.9"	48.4"	4,180 lbs.
13.00-24	SGG-2A	12	28	13.5"	50"	6,000 lbs.
14.00-24	SGG-2A	12	32	14.6"	52.6"	6,800 lbs.
15.5-25	SGL D/L-2A	8	30	15.7"	49.4"	4,300 lbs.
17.5-25	HRL D/L-3A	20	35	18"	53.5"	8,050 lbs.
23.5-25	SGL E/L-2A	20	39	24.4"	63"	12,000 lbs.

### Rim size

To evaluate tires, the first thing to know is how to decode the numbers on the sidewall. In numeric sizing, if the tires you're comparing have two sets of numbers, such as 12.00-24, the first number (12.00) indicates the tire's width in inches. The second number (24) specifies the wheel or rim diameter. If there are three numbers on the tire, 26x12.00-12 for example, the first number indicates the tire's height. The second is the width, and the third represents the wheel or rim diameter.

This information will come in handy when talking to your dealer. He or she should be able to consult with you on the best type of tire for your application and machine compatibility. But it's good to have a basic understanding of how to determine which tires will work with which machinery.

- **Before you purchase:** When it comes to material handling equipment, dealers and tire manufacturers generally recommend sticking to a rim that is roughly the same width as the sidewall of the tires you need. This will provide the most even wear on the treads and ensure the longest life possible for the set.

### Types

For rough terrain forklifts, there are generally two main types of tires used: solid rubber and polyurethane. Each has its own benefits. But depending on your intended application, one type may prove substantially more durable than the other. Discover the best type for your application with the following comparison:

#### 1. Pneumatic tires (solid rubber)

Pneumatic tires are constructed of solid rubber. The design makes them extremely durable – immune to punctures, tears, and similar damage encountered on a jobsite. They also reportedly have a longer lifespan than polyurethane tires, their foam filled counterparts – three to four times as long by some estimates. While each manufacturer boasts a proprietary or

patented tread, be on the lookout for models that are guaranteed flat-proof, apertures that promote ride comfort, shock absorption, single stage construction, and a variety of rubber blends that can be customized to your jobsite.

- **Common applications:** lumber yards, transfer stations, recycling centers, construction sites
- **Expect to pay:** \$400 to \$2,000 new and \$80 to \$600 used

## 2. Polyurethane tires (foam-filled)

The second type is not solid but is equally as flat-proof. Filled with polyurethane fill, these tires are often the standard for many telehandlers, man-lifts, and rough terrain construction machinery. The design is extremely robust while adding a cushion of extra padding for the operator, absorbing shock and smoothing out the ride on rough terrain. But where they really stand out is in load rating: reportedly supporting double the weight of their solid counterparts.

Polyurethane tires are also more resistant to rolling than solid pneumatics, saving on the cost of fuel. Though not as long-lasting as solid rubber, foam-filled tires can outlast air-filled models by two to five times. They're also substantially less expensive, often costing less than half that of a solid rubber tire.

- **Common applications:** heavy industrial, construction, mining, forestry, demolition, glass handling, foundries
- **Expect to pay:** \$150 to \$700 new and \$40 to \$350 used

## Specifications

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Rough terrain forklifts provide a high degree of mobility and safety as well as access to areas that would otherwise be off limits. Much of this productivity is the result of their heavy-duty design and components.

When comparing models, here are the popular specs and top features to be on the lookout for that are proven to drive efficiency.

### Engine HP

Engine power is often a critical component of buying a rough terrain forklift. The extra horsepower allows it to tackle a wide variety of terrain and reliably heft loads to great heights on unpaved and uneven surfaces.

Under the hood, you'll frequently find a Tier 4 Interim certified diesel engine made by Cummins, Cat, or John Deere, or a Dieselmix if you're considering a model from JCB. Regardless of the brand name, you should expect to find an engine capable of at least 74 to 78



hp on the lower end (straight mast forklifts) and up to 142 hp on the high end (encompassing telehandlers with extended reach capability).

### Maximum lift capacity

This is the total amount of weight the forklift can move off the ground. The most common lift capacities are between 4,000 and 12,000 lbs. However some of the larger telehandlers, like those manufactured by Manitou can heft up to 30,000 lbs.

It's important to distinguish between rated load capacity and max lift when fully extended. Models are capable of lifting anywhere from 50% to 100% of their stated load capacity at full height. So if your jobsite requires heavy loads, ask your dealer about the rating for payloads at max lift height.

### Maximum lift height

Max lift height is one of the primary advantages of a rough terrain forklift. Capable of safely hoisting heavy loads within extreme work environments, telehandlers and rotating telehandlers can reach between 18 to 97 feet. But again, pay close attention to max lift capacity when the lift is fully extended.

### Maximum reach

While lift height represents vertical elevation, max reach is how far the lift can extend on a horizontal plane. This feature is ideal for work environments with inaccessible upper levels – lifting building materials into the exposed structure of new construction for example.

Also known as forward reach, weight limitations are further reduced, often substantially, when the lift is extended to height and reach. For example, a telehandler with a 6,500-lb weight capacity may also be able to handle that same load at its full lift height of 42 feet. But when reaching forward, the load at max reach (without stabilizers) is only 700 lbs.

### Cab dimensions

The size of the cab often accounts for the bulk of the machine's length and width. The boom housing is positioned alongside the cab for telehandlers and other extended machinery and mounted on the front for smaller rough terrain forklifts. Average lengths are around 19 feet with widths averaging about 8 feet.

Within the cab, great strides have been made to economize the space as much as possible. This creates a more comfortable work environment for the operator and has been shown to increase productivity by reducing fatigue. Common cab enhancements include:

- Ergonomic controls and intuitive control layout
- Easy entry and exit with handholds and built-in step



- Increased safety through an open rollover protection structure (OROPS) or enclosed rollover protection structure (EROPS) that extends over the driver's seat
- Improved visibility through windows and boom placement

### Outriggers / stabilizers

Outriggers are engineered to allow added weight to be lifted to maximum height while ensuring the safety of the operator and any personnel in the lift. Most commonly known as stabilizers, they are most frequently installed on larger telehandlers and mounted to the front of the lift.

Largely intended for safety during forward reach operation, they prevent rollovers by elevating the front tires off the ground and counterbalancing the extra weight. For example, a telehandler capable of a max load of 7,000 lbs fully extended may only be capable of 1,100 lbs during maximum forward reach. But with the stabilizers down, that same lift has a max forward reach capacity of 2,700 lbs.

## Attachments

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Though not quite as versatile as a skid steer loader, telehandlers and other rough terrain forklifts accept a number of attachments that boost both productivity and safety. Some of these can also save you on the purchase of unnecessary equipment by converting a rough terrain forklift to a number of other heavy industrial machines.

Included among the most popular attachments are:

- **Standard carriage** – Often included with many models, a standard carriage measures between 48 to 72 inches and is used to haul, load, and unload around the jobsite. Most major brands feature quick-coupling technology. **Expect to pay \$1,800 to \$3,100**
- **Side-tilt carriage** – Similar to the standard carriage, this model provides up to a 10° rotation on the carriage, allowing the operator to compensate for uneven terrain when picking up or placing materials. It also allows the operator to tilt the entire load slightly during transport. **Expect to pay \$4,300 to \$5,500.**
- **Swing carriage** – Providing a 180° swing, this type of carriage allows the operator to slip in or out of work areas more effectively and safely by shifting the load to the other side of the machine. Commonly supporting weights of 6,500 and 8,500 lbs, it also minimizes repositioning of the lift during operation. **Expect to pay between \$7,500 and \$10,000.**

- **Side-shift carriage** – Side-shift carriages enable the operator to move the load from side to side for easier placement and retrieval without repositioning the lift. They come in two types: “integral,” where the side-shift is a built-component of the carriage itself, and “hang-on,” an aftermarket upgrade that is mounted to the existing carriage. **Expect to pay \$7,000 to \$9,500.**
- **Dual fork positioning carriage** – This time-saving carriage enables the operator to adjust fork positioning automatically, without having to physically leave the cab and slide them over by hand. **Expect to pay \$1,500 to \$2,800.**
- **Pallet forks** – found on any standard lift truck, pallet forks allow the operator to move and transport palletized goods. Forks measuring 48 inches are standard, with longer options including 60 inches and 72 inches. A 10,000-lb weight capacity is typical. **Expect to pay \$1,200 to \$2,000.**
- **Lumber forks** – The same as pallet forks, only wider. The wider surface area of the forks provides more support for heavy weights often found in pallets of cement and bundles of lumber. **Expect to pay \$1,500 to \$2,600.**
- **Cubing forks** – Used for transporting palletized blocks or brick, cubing forks include anywhere from 4 to 6 forks to provide extra support. **Expect to pay \$1,800 to \$3,200.**
- **Grapple bucket** – Add a hydraulic claw onto a standard forklift bucket and you’ve got a grapple bucket. They’re designed for safely transporting brush, refuse, and other loose materials without it spilling around the work area. **Expect to pay \$3,600 to \$9,300.**
- **Material bucket** – More heavy-duty than a standard bucket, some models feature a bolt-on cutting edge for hacking trees and large shrubs during landscaping and demolition. **Expect to pay \$2,400 to \$2,800.**
- **Lifting hook** – A lifting hook turns a standard carriage into a hoisted rig capable of picking up and transporting non-palletized items, large pipes or cylindrical containers being common examples. **Expect to pay \$700 to \$2,400.**
- **Universal skid steer adapter** – While the rough terrain vehicles don’t accept a wide range of attachments themselves, they can be retrofitted with a universal skid steer adapter and instantly pair with the full range of accessories available. This attachment has the potential to greatly reduce the purchase of redundant equipment. **Expect to pay \$450 to \$600.**

- **Tower** – An extension without really being an extension, a tower provides an extra 8 feet of reach, allowing the operator to place and retrieve materials at greater heights without the purchase of a boom extension. **Expect to pay \$2,500 to \$2,800.**
- **Fork-mounted work platform** – Popular among facilities and building management personnel as well as utilities providers and billboard companies, these platforms turn a rough terrain forklift into a personnel lift. They come in a variety of sizes and weight classes, typically supporting one or two individuals and the necessary tooling. **Expect to pay \$700 to \$7,250.**
- **Truss boom** – Designed for lifting and positioning trusses and other large pre-assembled building materials, truss booms add an extra 6 feet of reach onto the end of a telehandler boom. Depending on your application, they can be purchased with and without a winch. **Expect to pay \$2,700 to \$11,300.**

## Questions to Ask a Dealer

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Expandability and other aspects of post-sale support make the relationship with your dealer one of the most cost-effective aspects of ownership. Whether you rely on them for routine maintenance, emergency breakdown support, or consultation for the development of your fleet, a professional rough terrain forklift dealer can provide a variety of services that maximize your investment.

Additionally, they can help build your business through ongoing consultation on fleet expansion, and which types and sizes of material handling equipment may be best suited to help you achieve your goals quickly and affordably.

But before you pick up the phone, it's important to have a clear understanding of a few of the main criteria used to effectively evaluate the dealers you're considering. These criteria include:

### Training and safety

How much training does the dealer supply? Rough terrain forklifts do not require the operator to be licensed in the United States. But in many states they are required to receive certain levels of training. And that training has to be monitored, logged, and evaluated. Anyone with working knowledge of a telehandler and related equipment can provide the training. As a result, there are a number of programs and certifications available through major manufacturers, dealers, and independent training schools.

Major manufacturers like JLG often provide a number of different options to receive training on their equipment. Known as the JLG University, the course can be classroom-based, self-paced e-learning, or online instruction delivered by an instructor.

Trainings can encompass operation, safety, and service, all of which have the potential to cut costs resulting from breakdowns, accidents, and injuries. However, not all dealers will provide in-person or classroom instruction. Some offer training packets that include DVD tutorials and handbooks that focus on operation and safety – Bobcat being a prime example.

### Financing

Does the dealer offer financing options? A rough terrain forklift can cost anywhere from \$24,000 to \$375,000 – a pricey investment on either end of the spectrum. While many dealers will rent or lease most of the machines in their inventory, many also provide financing options that enable companies and individuals to incorporate the latest technology into their business while taking advantage of depreciation-based tax credits.

More commonly, it's a great way for start-ups and those without the funds required for the full purchase price to continue building their business without a huge outlay.

It's important to pay close attention to the rate of interest and terms offered by a dealer, and then compare those numbers with what you may be able to get on your own. Telehandler manufacturers often provide financing through their dealers. At the same time, independent dealers may also offer loans through a third-party leasing firm. But that doesn't mean it's going to be the most cost-effective solution for you. Evaluate forklift financing offers by comparing them with what you could get on your own through your personal bank. With an established relationship and credit history, the terms you may qualify for could save you substantial money over the life of the loan when compared to a dealer or third-party financing.

### Service level agreements (SLAs)

The service level agreement is the contract that stipulates, in detail, the costs and frequency of your post-sale support. And like the various machines themselves, each SLA has the potential to be a little different. The good news is this also makes them negotiable. When evaluating a dealer, pay close attention to the SLA they're willing to provide, focusing on the following points in particular:

- **Local:** Service providers in your area are far preferable to those who have to travel to service your equipment. Ideally, you should give preference to the dealer who maintains in-house technicians or sub-contracted personnel within 50 miles of your location.
- **Parts:** While not true of everything, name-brand mechanical parts do tend to last longer and be more reliable than their cheaper, generic counterparts. The SLA will determine exactly what types of parts are included for maintenance and repairs and in which cases substitutions will be allowed. Make sure you know what to expect in both

cases.

- **Service schedule:** This will be the frequency in which your machine or fleet will receive its scheduled maintenance. Detailing all parts, service, and related costs, this line-item includes basic scheduled maintenance, full maintenance (encompassing operating systems), and comprehensive service (checking every component and system from the front to the rear).
- **Customer service:** This is a big one. The SLA should include the hours and responsiveness of customer service, both of which are critical during a breakdown. Ideally, 24/7 customer support is the best, but depending on your location that may not always be available. So what happens after hours? Make sure the SLA includes a plan for weekends and holidays, with guaranteed response times.
- **Warranty:** This provides guarantees on the workmanship as well as parts and labor associated with your post-sale service plan.

### Local EPA regulations

How knowledgeable is the dealer regarding EPA regulations – in particular those unique to your locale? As part of the United States Environmental Protection Agency's emissions standards, heavy machinery powered by a diesel engine has to adhere to both state and federal emissions regulations. EPA Tier 1 through Tier 3 regulations have already been introduced and are currently enforced. On the heels of these limits, the stricter Tier 4 hydrocarbon (HC) limits will be phased in through 2015.

While the responsibility for compliance is ultimately yours, the dealer you're considering should be able to provide proof of compliance on any machine you purchase – new or used – and advise you on any of the state or federal laws that apply to that machine.

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