

GENUINE ARTICLE

Buying OE-quality parts from factors can lead to upfront savings, but the OEMs are fighting back with some significant benefits on offer for operators. Steve Banner reports

Independent suppliers of OE-quality parts for trucks could be forgiven for feeling that vehicle manufacturers and their dealers are squeezing them out of the aftermarket. Why? Take Mercedes-Benz: 80% of its new trucks are sold with a two-year R&M package, according to customer services director Sam Whittaker. "And 64% of our customers sign up to a contract that lasts anywhere from three to eight years," he adds. "The average is 4.5 years."

It is a safe bet that those trucks will be serviced using parts that come in boxes bearing the three-pointed star. And there are incentives. It's not just that Mercedes spares typically come with 12-month warranty, but, as Whittaker says, if a faulty part causes, say, your engine to blow up, the engine - not just the part concerned - will be replaced.

Nor are there likely to be any availability problems. "The parts first-pick rate at dealer level is 83%," he says, adding that at Mercedes UK parts centre it's 95% "and we can achieve a 99.9% first-pick rate within 48 hours." Further, if that means having to air-freight an urgently required item from Germany, then that is what will happen.

While all this is good news, what happens if you operate Scania and MAN trucks as well as Mercedes? Then Whittaker and his opposite numbers at the other marques will not be able to help you. Mercedes does not run an all-makes programme so you will have to look elsewhere.

However, that need not mean doing business with a commercial vehicle parts factor. Several truck makers now run all-makes schemes offering varying degrees of coverage. DAF, for example, has TRP; Volvo has Roadcrew (now also available through Renault Trucks dealers); MAN is piloting a trailer parts programme, initially under the Service Complete banner; and Scania is developing its Vehicle Related Services (VRS) programme.

"It makes sense for us to do so, because very few truck operators are

completely loyal to one brand and the aftermarket is so vast," comments Scania general manager for UK parts operations Graham Dale. "We sell around £10m-£11m worth of parts a year through the VRS operation, compared with £120m of genuine Scania parts and I believe the two activities could eventually end up the same size."

Some franchised dealers have also set up their own all-makes schemes to cater for hauliers running mixed fleets. MAN and Isuzu Truck dealer Cordwallis Group's CV Parts 365 programme is a good example, with parts from Sachs, Valeo, Haldex and Hella among those in its catalogue.

But note that some factors stocking parts for all makes typically only carry fast-moving items. Not so Scania: "We hold £35m worth of stock in our warehouse in Milton Keynes," says Dale. "Last year, we supplied 35,500 part numbers for our products and Scania carries a total of 135,000. By contrast factors will carry no more than 2,000 part numbers for Scania."

On the other hand, as truck manufacturers are for the most part assemblers of components sourced





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from others, OE-specification items that factors supply may be exactly the same as those obtained from franchised dealers, albeit in a different box. They may also be cheaper.

"Depending on volume and the deal you're on, you could be talking about a 10% saving," states Steve Carolan, national sales manager at tensioner, pulley and auxiliary drive belt supplier Dayco. Nor need warranty be a concern, he stresses. Dayco's is three years, unlimited mileage - and if a major vehicle component is wrecked because a Dayco part is faulty, Dayco undertakes to replace it, he insists. "But we seldom see a warranty claim."

Aware that they have a reputation for being expensive, truck makers regularly offer promotional deals on replacement components, especially for older vehicles. "We recently launched a price match challenge and we've been taken up on it over 300 times so far," says Karl-Heinz Meister, MAN's head of UK parts.

OEMs also have the advantage of dealer networks with workshops able to fit parts, whereas most factors do not. Furthermore, the OEM networks offer Europe-wide coverage. But there are yet more benefits of dealing with vehicle

builders, according to Whittaker. "For example, if a fleet runs an in-house workshop, we can supply it with an impress stock of parts at our expense," he explains. "We can manage it on the operator's behalf. He only pays for what he uses and we take back anything that hasn't been used." And he adds that Mercedes prices frequently used parts "as cheaply as we possibly can".

PARTS OR TRUCKS

Then there is the intangible question of manufacturer goodwill to be borne in mind. Parts factors want to sell hauliers parts. Manufacturers want to sell them trucks, R&M agreements and finance packages as well - so are likely to look sympathetically on what may be a debatable warranty claim.

They may also be prepared to consider a claim for consequential loss from a haulier penalised by its customer because a time slot delivery was missed due to a truck part failure.

"Remember, though, that our Service24h roadside rescue service attends incidents in well under an hour," advises Whittaker. If all else fails, it should be able to, for instance, source a tractor to pick up a stranded trailer so

that the delivery can be made.

All that said, there remain good reasons for purchasing from factors. The only caveat: make absolutely sure that it parts are of OE-specification for the truck concerned, warns Ken Read, marketing manager at filters maker Mann and Hummel. "A general statement from a parts manufacturer that it is an OE supplier is not good enough," he states.

"And never forget that if you fit OE parts then you will automatically meet the requirements of the European Union's Block Exemption regulations and won't invalidate the vehicle's warranty," he adds.

Fitting an item that is not OE-standard may lead to problems. If you inadvertently source counterfeit versions of the genuine article, that could be a recipe for disaster - resulting in anything from engine damage to lives put at risk warns Jonathan Walker, managing director of engine pistons and cylinder liners manufacturer Mahle.

"Only purchase goods from trustworthy wholesalers and investigate bargain offers thoroughly," he advises. They might not be quite the bargain they appear. [TE](#)