



Spare the rod

Determined not to give ground to independent parts factors, Scania has been busy expanding its VRS all-makes parts programme. At April's CV Show, it revealed an impressive line-up embracing truck as well as trailer parts, plus lubricants and consumables.

In doing so, Scania is acknowledging that many of its customers run mixed fleets, says aftersales director Mark Grant. "Many want to deal with a single supplier," he adds. Hence, VRS items are supplied through all 89 of the marque's dealer outlets alongside Scania's own parts range - which means that operators benefit from the manufacturer's slick parts distribution system.

"If a dealer places an order before 6.30pm, it will be delivered between 8.00am and 9.00am the next day," says Grant. "And all VRS products are OE [original equipment] or OE-equivalent and carry a 12-month warranty."

First-pick rates vary depending on the product category, he admits, as Scania is still building up the range. "With consumables, however, we're hitting an

As truck manufacturers seek to dominate R&M, so many are also beefing up their all-makes parts offerings. Steve Banner reviews rationales and options for workshops and operators

average of up to 95% at dealer level," he claims. With Scania's own parts the dealer first-pick rate is 98%. "Remember, though, that because of our modular approach, our parts range is quite small," continues Grant. "Our 9-, 13- and 16-litre engines, for example, all use the same cylinder head."

Meanwhile, Scania spares carry a 12-month parts and labour warranty, too, rising to three years on engines, gearboxes and axles fitted by Scania dealers. And if a part fails and damages other vehicle components, those parts will be covered as well. Compare that to parts sourced from factors, which are typically covered by whatever warranty the parts manufacturer provides. That varies in duration and may, or may not, include labour.

Completing this picture, Scania has the advantage that it can offer UK- and Europe-wide support through its dealer

network - something few factors can match. If a truck breaks down because a part has failed, then Scania Assistance can be summoned. And, if the fault cannot be dealt with at the roadside, the stranded vehicle can be hauled to a Scania dealer and fixed.

ALL-MAKES SPARES

Of course, Scania is not alone in its capabilities. DAF, for example, is placing increased impetus behind its TRP all-makes parts offer, with Preston dealer Lancashire DAF opening its latest TRP Shop. Trading under the Lancashire Truck & Trailer banner, this represents a £300,000 investment, occupies 2,700ft² and is on Bolton's Victory Trading Estate.

More TRP dealership satellite sites are likely to appear soon. "We're looking at strategic locations where large premises are not required and from where we can deliver a highly responsive parts service

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Mark Grant

to the maximum number of operators," says DAF parts marketing manager Stewart Davies.

Nor is Volvo's Roadcrew all-makes operation standing still, according to manager Sue McKay. It covers everything from slack adjusters to alternators, and has just added another range of parts and callipers. That said, OEM-backed all-makes programmes usually focus on fast-moving items and Roadcrew is no exception.

However, its portfolio is liberally sprinkled with OE parts featuring well known makes, such as Knorr-Bremse and Haldex, and Roadcrew has its own line-up, too. Its own-brand parts may not be OE, but they are still high quality items from reputable manufacturers, says McKay. "And they are 20–25% cheaper," she adds.

Prices and availability from the OEMs are also likely to improve further as technology – and specifically 3D printing – changes the game (pictured, below right). In Germany, Mercedes-Benz is now able to print around 30 plastic parts, mainly for older trucks, which means these no longer have to occupy warehouse shelves.

Faced with such OEM competition, how can the factors make headway? By providing an all-makes service that is just as good, if not better, than anything they can offer, says TruckStop managing director Matt Stiley. "A good factor never says 'no'. So if a customer needs a part, then we'll find it and get it to him, even if that means sending a van to a warehouse to fetch it," he says. "And if he wants it by 4.00pm, having ordered it that morning, we'll do everything we can to ensure he receives it."

And note: unlike a franchised dealer, TruckStop does not feel obliged to order parts through a particular channel, says Stiley. "We can be completely flexible when it comes to getting things," he comments. "We can think on

our feet." That can make a difference.

Based in Redditch, commercial vehicle parts distributor TruckStop also operates branches in Worcester and Birmingham. It stocks a wide range of components from OE suppliers. Aside from being wrapped in the parts manufacturer's packaging, they are – in the main – identical to parts supplied by franchised dealerships.

Never forget that, to a great extent, truck manufacturers are assemblers of others' components, observes Stiley. And he adds that TruckStop can also supply inexpensive parts (still good quality) to customers about to dispose of a vehicle – so simply needing something to keep it going ahead of being packed off to auction.

The bottom line: are factors always cheaper than franchised dealers? "They

should be. Body parts may be as much as 50% cheaper, for example. But you can't generalise because the situation can vary so much," replies Stiley. Much depends on whether truck builders are running promotions to boost sales.

Nevertheless, he concedes that factors such as TruckStop cannot offer the nationwide or Europe-wide support that manufacturers offer. They also do not enjoy the backup of dealer workshops. But, he says, if dealers did not face competition from parts factors and independent workshops, prices would undoubtedly be higher.

TOO RELIABLE

Good point. But Scania's Grant pinpoints another key reason why this OEM is working so hard to keep spares sales buoyant: the reliability of components it fits when vehicles are initially assembled means demand for replacements is not growing much. "We're doing a lot of running up and down in the parts aftermarket but, in effect, we're standing still," he muses.

Other manufacturers face the same challenge – exacerbated by fleets disposing of trucks when they are no more than three or four years old but have yet to start consuming parts. Some of those trucks appear on the British used market, but others are exported. When that happens the opportunity for UK dealers and factors to sell spares is lost.

A final point, though: whether they source parts from dealers or factors, hauliers will face currency-driven price fluctuations in the coming months, thanks to the instability of sterling after the Brexit vote. So says Keith Sedgley, joint managing director of West Midlands-based brake components supplier Roadlink International.

"Most of the parts sold in the UK aftermarket are produced overseas," he points out. "We haven't seen price rises just yet, but they're on the horizon." [TE](#)

