

Part transplant

Amid debate about disparity between OE and aftermarket parts, what should fleet managers be choosing to keep costs down, while also minimising downtime and maximising fleet residuals? John Challen investigates

The age-old debate around choosing OE or aftermarket components for commercial vehicles rumbles on, arguably intensified by pressure to cut costs from transport operations. One vehicle manufacturer that set out its stall early is MAN, which introduced its Valueline low-cost parts range at the CV Show 2011 and now says it will be rolled out across 800 MAN parts by 2012. Elsewhere, independent aftermarket operations are looking at new approaches not only to improve quality, but also to grow market share.

Despite the cost pressures, Darren Miller, marketing boss at Unipart-owned supplier TTC, believes fleets will increasingly view parts supply on more than price. "They will also take into account service and support, and here the independent aftermarket beats the OEM route by offering a comprehensive all-makes range," he insists.

Miller says the greater selection of parts from the independent suppliers means fleets gain flexibility on a UK- and European-wide platform. "This continued choice through the independent aftermarket can only benefit commercial vehicle fleets by keeping servicing costs low and ensuring vehicle downtime is reduced," he states.

"We need to make sure that we consistently offer the highest quality products, supported by service and availability, so that our customers can supply their customers with an outstanding service. The independent aftermarket offers a credible and viable alternative to the franchised dealer route."

The real deal

There is no doubt that such attention to detail is important, especially considering that the problem of counterfeit parts in the aftermarket refuses to go away. Miller says TTC is committed to combating the issue. "We work closely with supplier partners to promote the benefits of only using products from recognised brands," he explains, adding that his aftermarket alternatives to OE parts are all of the same quality. "We also ensure our brand is recognised on the product and/or packaging to differentiate against counterfeit parts, which will carry either no brand or an unrecognised name."

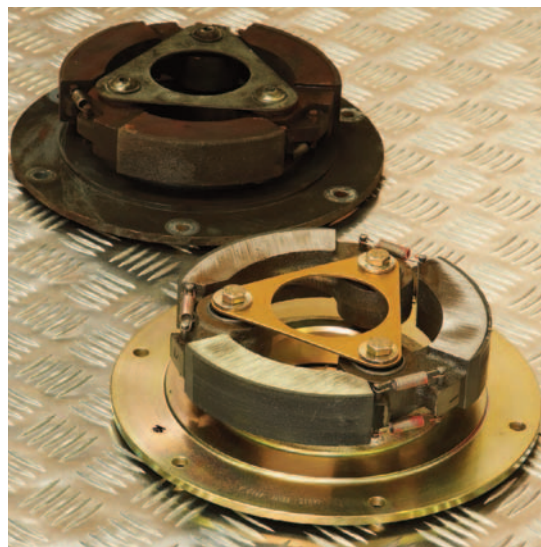
One company to suffer at the hands of counterfeit goods is Carrier Transicold, which offers a wide range of replacement parts for the bus and truck community. "We were at a dealer's premises recently and, by chance, a tractor unit came in with a [dubious] aftermarket clutch that had failed," recalls Scott Dargan, the company's operations director. "The clutch had destroyed itself, due to its poor quality. The return springs had come off and seized the whole system." Dargan adds that the lack of a comprehensive warranty didn't help. "It was purchased at one end of the country, and failed at the other, but they had to pay one of our dealers to strip it and fit a genuine spare part."

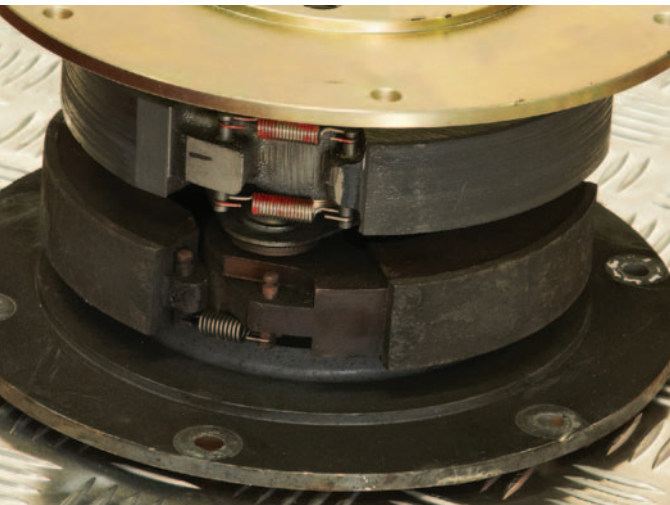
One area of alarm found by Dargan was that the friction lining was 30% less on the fake part, compared with the genuine one. "There was no leading edge of the friction lining, while the return springs were different sizes and quality. That part probably sold for around 50% of the genuine part, lasted four months and cost the customer £500 worth of labour costs."

Like MAN, Carrier Transicold is developing a 'value' range that, it says, will give customers a cheaper option than both new and remanufactured parts – effectively providing the company with a third tier or product line. "We are starting with some



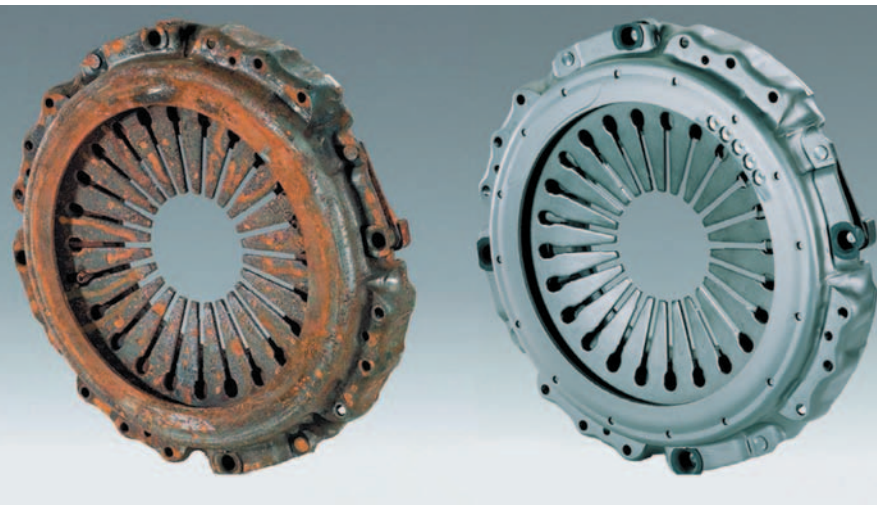
Darren Miller, marketing boss at Unipart-owned supplier TTC





Above: Original (top) and non-genuine (bottom) CV clutches. The latter has reduced friction lining, no leading edges (for correct clutch engagement, and missing return springs

Above right: The market for remanufactured parts is growing



of our electronic components, and we will take them back and repair them under a service exchange programme,” says Dargan. “We have to recognise that sometimes, if a customer has a truck that they are close to selling, it is not in their best interests to spend lots of money on a spare part.” Carrier Transicold expects to launch its value range in the next couple of months.

As good as new

Away from OE fit or aftermarket parts lurks another option for fleet manufacturers: remanufactured components. While many may view them with distain and scepticism, ZF Services is trying to alter that perception and is making the point that they have the potential to help cut carbon levels fleet-wide.

“It is to be hoped that remanufacturing is another term that will soon become more commonplace among the proponents of environmental causes,” comments Addy Doodt, sales director at ZF Services UK. “Remanufacturing can make a major contribution to conservation of both energy and the precious natural resources used to produce commodities, such as iron, steel and aluminium.”

While it may be natural to presume that new always offers better quality than used, Doodt argues that a true remanufacturing process – rather than basic reconditioning – can transform a used component into an item that is not only as good as new, but also updated to the latest product specifications, making it sometimes even better than new.

Winter warmers from Grayson

Grayson Thermal Systems, which designs and manufactures heating and cooling parts for OEMs, is encouraging customers to schedule routine air conditioning maintenance in the winter and early spring months, to keep costs down.

Operations manager Coleen Williams says that the price of products such as refrigerant gases is now routinely put up by suppliers around Easter. “We now expect large price hikes just before each summer season for gases and many other products, and we have to pass these increases on. So it makes sense to try to beat the price rise. Vehicle operators who do this should also find that turnaround times for servicing are shorter, so vehicles get back into service quicker.”

Grayson also has a dedicated service centre, which has recently doubled the size of its mobile service fleet, recruited more engineers and expanded its range of services.

Williams cites blower motor failures as one of the prime reasons for Grayson’s emergency roadside breakdown service to be called out. “Cleaning the filters regularly takes 10 minutes, and could save both money and hassle,” she says. “Having a vehicle stranded at the roadside is always going to be bad for business.”

Remanufacturing process

In the case of a Sachs CV clutch, for example, he explains that the worn product is stripped to component level and the individual parts washed, measured and tested to assess their ability to complete another lifecycle. Those that meet the criteria are remanufactured to within the original tolerances and placed into stock, while any part at, or approaching, the wear limit is discarded.

The unit is then rebuilt according to the latest specifications for the product – a process that takes place on a dedicated production line under the same quality controls as an OE clutch. Where components are not available from remanufactured stock, new OE items are supplied to complete the assembly.

Certain parts, such as friction linings, fulcrum rings and tangential springs, are always replaced with new OE items, as a matter of course. Finally, the clutch assembly is performance tested to the same criteria as those used for a new unit and warranted as such before release to the market. **TE**