



WORTH THE GAMBLE?

Arguments rage over where to get OE spares, but two things are certain: competition is cutting prices and improving service; and there are still cowboys out there offering OE parts that are certainly not. Steve Banner reports

Truck manufacturers are often keen to imply that anybody who purchases replacement parts from independent suppliers, rather than franchised dealers, is taking a risk. The item bought may not be of OE quality, they suggest. It may fail prematurely and do damage to other components on the vehicle; it could endanger lives, if it is safety-critical; and the warranty it carries is likely to be inadequate.

Independent wholesalers retort that they have OE spares readily available, probably at a more competitive price than the dealers, and that the only difference between what they offer and whatever is on the shelves of the local dealer is the packaging and its logo. After all, they contend, truck manufacturers are less manufacturers than assemblers of parts made by others – and those self-same parts reach the aftermarket through a

variety of outlets. So truck operators having problems with a particular component may be just as close to finding a solution, if they talk to the firm that made it – Knorr-Bremse or WABCO, say – as they would if they contact a dealer.

That's certainly the view of Willenhall, West Midlands, based OE parts distributor Roadlink International joint managing director Keith Sedgley. He makes the point that reputable independent factors are often members of large buying groups, which can offer ex-stock OE items at attractive prices. They can also supply parts for all types of truck – whereas a dealership may be restricted to one or two, unless it has access to a manufacturer's all-makes parts programme – along with expertise built up over many years.

Furthermore, many independent automotive aftermarket suppliers have access to TecDoc (which allows parts required by commercial vehicles to be identified accurately), he adds. And since, in July, TecDoc combined with two other providers of information on vehicle spares – TecCom and AutoDaCon, under the umbrella name TecAlliance – that's a powerful tool.

What about warranty?

And as for warranty, Sedgley suggests that fleet workshops should start asking franchised dealers a few pointed questions. "The warranty on OE items wholesalers supply is often quite similar to the parts warranty offered by the truck assembler," he says. And he adds: "Just because it arrives in a manufacturer's box, that does not necessarily mean it is the same item that was fitted to the vehicle on the assembly line."

DAF parts sales and marketing director Trevor Mitchell concedes that may well be true. But, he explains, that's because replacement components it

OESAA gathers big names from the truck and bus industry

The campaign on truck and bus aftermarket component quality initiated by the recently formed action group of original equipment suppliers is gathering momentum. Bosch, Corteco, Federal-Mogul, Knorr-Bremse, Mahle, Wabco and Yuasa have all signed up to OESAA (Original Equipment Suppliers Aftermarket Association).

Their stated aim is to increase awareness of some suppliers' false claims of OE quality – warning that unsuspecting workshops may be purchasing components not tested to vehicle manufacturers' quality standards.

The group is about to launch a new advertising campaign, following the success of the 'horsemeat versus beef' launch at Manchester Mechanex in May. A constant stream of visitors there compared a wide selection of OE components displayed next to their 'matching quality' equivalents and were dismayed

by some of the more blatant non-OE examples, which were described as 'a betrayal of trust' by one mechanic.

OESAA chairman Nigel Morgan, managing director of Schaeffler Automotive Aftermarket (UK), says that the only way to be certain you are fitting OE quality components is to fit parts from brands that supply parts for original fitment.

"The overwhelming majority of components produced by the members of the group are destined for the vehicle manufacturers' assembly lines. The fact is that we also supply these exact same parts to the aftermarket in our own boxes. So you know that they have been designed, manufactured and tested to the exact demands of the vehicle producer. We believe that the only 'matching quality' is OE, and that it does not make commercial sense to fit parts that you cannot be 100% certain of, in terms of quality and reliability."

supplies feature all the latest updates – a practice pursued by many manufacturers. And while Iveco parts director David Power agrees that some 60% of its vehicle content "is made up of bought-in parts", well over 90% of those items are available either at dealerships or from the company's own parts warehouses.

Fast movers

"I'm talking about everything from a suspension bracket to a door hinge," he says. "By comparison, a factor would maybe carry 30% to 40%," he adds, insisting that's because factors have to concentrate on fast-moving items, whereas companies like Iveco are obliged to hold slow movers, too.

MAN's aftersales director Vince Welsh backs that story, stating that the manufacturer carries a far more comprehensive stock of spares in the UK than any factor can. "We hold £12m worth and each of our dealers has around £300,000 worth," he asserts. "We list 41,000 part numbers and, unlike factors, we're legally obliged to keep those items in stock for a certain number of years to support older vehicles. Our availability is running at 86% at dealer level and 94% centrally in Swindon... We want to get all our dealers above 90% before the end of the year."

Welsh also argues that parts sales help manufacturers fund some of the support services operators depend upon that would otherwise be loss-makers. He cites roadside rescue: the rates users are charged do not cover the cost, he contends. And he adds that manufacturers are able to use their network of workshops to enhance their warranty offer to a level that independent suppliers cannot match.

"So far as warranty is concerned, if you fit one of our parts and it fails within 12 months, then not only will we replace it, but we will also fit it for you,"

explains Welsh. "Furthermore, if the part's failure resulted in the truck having to be towed to a workshop, we will pay the towing charge."

That sort of offer may well be the result of healthy competition – both from the independent sector and between OEMs. For example: "We're looking to introduce a two-year warranty on most of our parts, no matter who fitted them," states Scania general manager for the UK parts operation, Graham Dale. And ask a dealer to fit your part and many manufacturers will double the warranty it carries: – although, with the R&M contracts most new trucks are sold with, independent factors are effectively excluded from supplying parts for the first two or three years of their lives.

Truck makers also now provide packages to make operators' lives as easy as possible. "At DAF, we offer single-point invoicing, which means we gather all invoices for parts purchases made by a customer at dealerships nationwide and send out a

**Scania parts desk:
the manufacturer is
looking at an
all-makes scheme**





single invoice once a month,” explains parts sales and marketing director Trevor Mitchell.

Meanwhile, turning to prices, Iveco's Power points out that, under its Parts Price Challenge, Iveco matches the price of any genuine like-for-like spare. And MAN's Welsh says his firm runs “similar programmes from time to time, often on a regional basis”. Meanwhile, Scania's Dale says the manufacturer has reduced its price on around 4,500 replacement parts

over the past two years. “We're trying to shake off accusations that, because we're Scania, we're bound to be expensive,” he explains.

Further, conscious that, unlike factors, they do not operate as one-stop shops, several truck assemblers have introduced all-makes truck and trailer parts programmes over the years. MAN, for example, lists 8,000 parts for trailers. DAF's TRP programme is the most successful, but Volvo has made some headway with Roadcrew. Iveco is likely to offer a Europe-wide, all-makes programme, according to Power. And Scania hopes to build on

its trailer parts and consumables programme with a truck all-makes initiative.

All-makes irony

The irony, however, with truck all-makes schemes won't be lost on readers. How can manufacturers claim that they, and they only, are the experts in parts for their vehicles, but then suggest that selling spares for rival trucks is a useful service? “Anybody running an all-makes programme who accuses an independent supplier of being a jack-of-all-trades needs to look in the mirror,” jibes Sedgley.

But no matter where you get your parts, if it is an OE item you are after, then make sure it is genuine. If you have any doubts, ask the supplier to produce a certificate of matching quality. That is the advice proffered by Ken Read, UK aftermarket product and marketing manager at OE and aftermarket filter maker Mann and Hummel.

“There are too many brands that claim to meet OE quality without delivering it,” he warns. He finds it surprising that workshops are sometimes willing to fit non-OE, rather than an OE, filter, given that the prices are low and differences are likely to be modest. Especially since the former may not last as long as the latter. **TE**

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Graham Dale

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