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“There will always be a lower price, but who will be standing behind that part when you need them is an important element of the aftermarket [parts buying] decision.”

Behind the scenes with a non-OE aftermarket parts maker

Fleets consider a variety of factors when choosing the right part for a repair. Reliability, durability, availability, reputation of the manufacturer, age of the vehicle, warranty and price all come together to lead to the best choice.

For years there has been a debate about the difference between OEM and aftermarket replacement parts, with many people thinking aftermarket parts manufacturers did not have the resources to provide the same quality, availability and warranty as their OEM counterparts.

At least one aftermarket parts manufacturer thinks that is changing. Egan Hernandez, marketing manager for IPD, says manufacturers of branded aftermarket parts are now using validation processes for all parts “that are very similar to the OEM supplier production pre-approval process.”

He says the quality assurance program used by IPD is not just an inspection. “It includes monitoring process parameters at the supplier to ensure parts are made to specifications.”

He adds, “Lean concepts are vigorously applied to the manufacturing process to ensure 100% parts quality at each and every step of the process, in-house and at the supplier.”

Given that aftermarket replacement parts usually come at a lower price than OEM replacement parts, how is it possible for a company to make these quality investments? Egan explains that IPD focuses on lower costs by running lean processes that reduce the cost of scrap, work in process, re-work, customer return and other non-value added costs.

I asked Egan how he responds to OEMs who say parts tolerances and other specs are not the same between the OE parts and the aftermarket replacement part. “Obviously OEMs do not share their drawings with the aftermarket, so suppliers have to develop their own processes for defining specs and tolerances,” he says.

In the case of IPD, Egan says that involves “reverse engineering the OEM part by purchasing OEM samples, measuring them, identifying materials, creating drawings and determining ideal specifications and tolerances based on our 60 years of manufacturing experience.”

He also says the company does product testing in actual vehicles. “Especially with very critical parts, we install newly developed parts into engines, operate the engine for a specified amount of time and evaluate the parts to ensure they perform to our standards before we introduce them to the market.”

But we all know that fleets expect more than good parts. After-sale support is also an important factor in a fleet manager’s replacement part decision-making. Egan says IPD recognizes the importance of that and provides an online catalog system, plus technical support via technical bulletins, through videos, and from an online technical support hotline.

The question remains, should you choose non-OE aftermarket replacement parts? Obviously Egan says yes, adding, “That depends on the aftermarket company’s commitment to (and processes for) producing quality parts.”

And he speaks of the importance of branded aftermarket replacement parts. “Branded parts manufacturers will normally take ownership of the quality, consistency, service support and warranty administration for the products they put their name upon.”

He adds, “When a company stamps their brand on a part, their reputation goes along with it. There will always be a lower price, but who will be standing behind that part when you need them is an important element of the aftermarket [parts buying] decision.”

Are aftermarket replacement parts right for you? That is something you will have to decide for yourself. What is clear is that when making your purchasing decision, make sure to ask questions about process, quality control, warranty, and after-sales support. Then whether you choose an OEM part or an aftermarket replacement part, you’ll have made an informed decision. 🗣️

Every month, Denise Rondini uses this column to offer information and insight designed to help fleet managers make smart parts and service choices. As the former executive editor of *Successful Dealer* and *Truck Parts & Service* magazines, she has covered the aftermarket since 1982. She can be reached at drondini@truckinginfo.com or (773) 951-8563.