



What's in a Name: Generic versus Brand Name Auto Parts *The Parts in Your Car Make a Difference – Part 2*

When you roll through the aisles of the local grocery store and you reach for a can of green beans, do you grab the store brand instead of the Green Giant™ can? As you shop for a new bottle of dandruff shampoo, do you reach for the Shoppers Choice instead of Head & Shoulders®? When your worn-out shock absorbers, need replacement do you ask your auto repair shop for shocks in the white box instead of the national brand?

If you answered yes to the first two, you may be a wise and frugal shopper who knows how to stretch a dollar. If you answered yes to the third question, you should think twice. Here's why.

As you compare the ingredients of your store brand green beans and the name brands, you will find them clearly identified and meeting FDA approval. That generic bottle of dandruff shampoo has the same list of chemical components as the name brand product by volume and measure. But, if you try to make that same comparison on an auto parts box... you can't. Unlike many consumer products such as food, there are no government regulations on most auto parts. Yet poorly made auto parts can pose a real safety risk.

Of the tens of thousands of components used to assemble the average car, less than a handful of those components have government-imposed safety regulations. Brakes pads – the most frequently used, worn and replaced item on a vehicle – have no regulation on performance or safety. If that bottle of generic dandruff shampoo does not work effectively, you see white flakes on your black sweater. But if the brake pads from that white box don't stop your car ...

Just about every category of auto parts has been knocked off by low-cost, inferior products. The great motivator for this trend is lower price. As consumers look for lower prices and shop for the best deal, repair shops and parts stores are forced to stock cheaper parts. Competition is intense and consumers let their fingers do the walking either on the Internet or on the phone to determine the low price leader.

Your independent car care center is your best choice when it comes to repairs but, having them install the cheapest part may not be the best buy in the long run. Ask the technician or shop owner about the parts he installs and be sure to ask for a quality branded part when you need a replacement. Your family's safety depends on it.

Consider ball joints or tie rod ends made from inferior metals coming apart at 65 mph. Ever see a car on the side of the road with the front wheel laid sideways under the front fender? Some poorly made no-brand brake pads have even been found to contain grass clippings and other substitute materials. Think about making an emergency stop with those pads. Consider an alternator that fails to charge your battery. Now consider this failure occurring while you drive down an interstate highway causing you to lose your power steering and brakes because the engine just died. Think about any of those scenarios happening with your family in the vehicle with you.

The knock off part may look like the original and might fit on your vehicle but don't confuse fit with function. How can you tell if it is going to perform like the original? Can you look at the ingredients on the side of the box and compare it to the national brand? The answer is simply NO!

For driving safety you really need to ***Know Your Parts!*** The best way to ensure quality and safety is by insisting on products from full-service suppliers with the trusted name brands who stand behind every part they make. These companies have invested countless dollars in research and development to build a brand reputation based on quality. With cheap off-brand products the actual manufacturer of the product is an ocean away and not subject to U.S. laws in most cases.

An educated parts store employee or auto technician can help you choose a quality branded part to insure the safe operation of your vehicle. It is also wise to do your own research on the Internet. Whether you do-it-yourself or take your car to a repair professional always ***Know Your Parts***. Never authorize a repair unless you know what parts are being installed.

Remember, this is no can of beans; it is a critical component on your car – which is not only your second largest investment, but an important element in your vehicle's safe operation.

The Automotive Aftermarket Supplier Association is a trade organization representing North American Automotive Aftermarket suppliers. Visit <http://kyp.aftermarketsuppliers.org> for details on the "Know Your Parts" campaign.

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