"The temporary respite provided by a new belt will actually delay essential remedial action. This could give the issue a chance to develop into something much more sinister."

Two other components in the ABDS also help to reduce vibration. The Torsional Vibration Damper (TVD pulley) helps to protect the engine and the belt from vibrations generated at the crankshaft. The Overrunning Alternator Pulley (OAP) removes vibration from the belt.

It is unlikely that the OAP will compromise the actions of the TVD or that the TVD will compromise the actions of the OAP. However, as both components protect the tensioner from wear, or the damping mechanism of either begins to fail, a direct consequence is increased wear to the tensioner. So, both pulleys can develop problems that will cause an automatic tensioner to fail.

Non-chargeable time issues

A vehicle that returns to the workshop for the same problem increases non-chargeable time. Its downtime increases, too, which means that either your fleet manager will be angrily reaching for the telephone, or a third party customer might just be considering sending his vehicles to a different workshop next time around. Either way, confidence in the workshop falls.

Identifying the source of noise problem is fraught with danger:

- Replacing the belt is no solution. The vehicle and the problem will be back.
- Removing the belt while the engine continues to run can damage the TVD.
- The TVD might be the cause, but so might the OAP.
- Both can cause the tensioner to fail.
- Replacing the tensioner is only a partial solution.

Good engineering practice

Differentiating between the symptoms and the causes of wear inside the ABDS can be difficult. It's worth remembering that all components were installed as OE at the same time. They were designed to operate together as a system, so it's a good bet that if one component has symptoms of wear, others will experience them too.

Gates says a complete drive system overhaul not only makes more sense, but represents good engineering practice too. It ensures that the ABDS will run to its full potential, will minimise vehicle downtime and over the long term will provide fleets with the best value for money.

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