

The Truth About OEM & Aftermarket Filters

One page on how filters are really made and chosen: who actually builds "OEM" filters · what determines quality · how smart buyers decide

Web: histarfilter.com

For: equipment owners · workshops · dealers

Updated: 2026-07

BUYER'S GUIDE

Takeaway ①

Who makes OEM filters

Spoiler: not the machine brand

Takeaway ②

Three different things

Legit aftermarket ≠ no-name ≠ counterfeit

Takeaway ③

Quality is in the specs

A brand is just one form of assurance

Takeaway ④

How to vet a brand

Four questions, checked on the spot

Takeaway ⑤

Three tiers to pick from

Spend less — or spec higher

1 You Already Buy "Aftermarket"

Look around

THREE EXAMPLES YOU SEE EVERY DAY

- Tires:** Komatsu and Cat don't make tires — machines ship on Michelin or Bridgestone. Come replacement time, you pick by budget and duty, value or performance. Nobody asks which tire is the **"genuine"** one
- Batteries:** when an equipment battery dies, nobody orders an "OEM battery" from the machine maker. A Varta or Bosch goes in and you drive on — a third-party logo on it is **perfectly normal**
- Glass:** about one in three cars worldwide carries "OEM" glass made by Fuyao. The dealership's genuine windshield and the glass shop's Fuyao may come off **the same line** — "OEM" is, at heart, branded sourcing

THREE THINGS PEOPLE CONFUSE — DON'T

	What it is	Verdict
Counterfeit	Fakes someone else's trademark — illegal	❌ Walk away
No-name	No standards, no data, no warranty	⚠️ A gamble
Legit aftermarket	Own brand + published specs + benchmarked testing	✅ Standard practice worldwide

 **The law is on your side:** the US Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act bars voiding a machine's warranty merely for using quality aftermarket parts; EU Block Exemption rules protect the same right. The machine is yours — **so is the choice**.

2 How the Industry Really Works

Core insight

Komatsu doesn't make filters. Neither do Caterpillar or John Deere. The "OEM filter" you buy was built by a specialist filter manufacturer — then boxed under the machine brand's label.

INDUSTRY STRUCTURE · FROM MACHINE TO FILTER

TIER 1 · MACHINE BRANDS

Komatsu · Caterpillar · John Deere · SANY · Volvo

They build machines, not filters — filters are sourced, then re-boxed

▼ So who supplies them?

TIER 2 · OE FILTRATION BRANDS

Donaldson · Parker · HYDAC · Fleetguard · MANN

They supply OEM lines and sell their own aftermarket ranges. **Fleetguard is literally part of Cummins** — the line between "OEM" and "brand part" was blurry from day one

▼ And who cross-references them?

TIER 3 · AFTERMARKET SPECIALISTS

HIFI · SF · Baldwin · HiStar Filter

Focused on the aftermarket — built on cross-reference data and published specs

THE SUPPLY CHAIN, HONESTLY

Same: the world's filter-media makers are a handful of companies (Ahlstrom, H&V...) — raw materials share the same origins; contract manufacturing and private labels are industry norms.

Different: QC consistency, depth of testing (full ISO 16889 beta-ratio runs — or not), speed on new models. **Aftermarket brands vary widely** — which is exactly why Step ③ exists.

3 First Principles of Filter Quality

How to vet

BRANDS DON'T DETERMINE QUALITY — SPECS DO

Factor	What to look at
Media	Micron rating, dirt-holding capacity, beta ratio
Seals	Nitrile vs. FKM — temperature & fluid rating
Structure	End caps & center tube: collapse / burst pressure
Workmanship	Adhesive lines, pleat geometry consistency
Bypass valve	Opening-pressure accuracy — if it fails, you have no filter

So what is a brand? **One mechanism of assurance** — someone vetted these specs for you. Assurance can be verified. It doesn't need to be worshipped.

FOUR QUESTIONS TO VET ANY BRAND ON THE SPOT

- Does it **publish cross-reference data** you can check yourself?
- Does it **grade the evidence** behind each cross?
- Does it publish **full specifications** — dimensions, ratings, materials?
- Does it put its **warranty in writing**?

★ These four are the standards **HiStar Filter holds itself to**: 560,000 spec records, 300,000 cross-references, 374 brands — all public at histarfilter.com

4 Three Tiers of Aftermarket — the OE part is the default; the aftermarket is the choice

VALUE

routine service · light duty

Same spec, same standards. What you save is **the logo and the distribution mark-ups** — not the quality.

MATCH

the workhorse · fit & forget

Key specs **benchmarked to the OE part** at an honest price — the right answer for most machines, most of the time.

UPGRADE

severe duty · beyond OE

Glass-fiber media / extended life / high-efficiency water separation — for mining dust, poor fuel, long drain intervals. When the OE compromise isn't enough, the extra money buys performance.

📌 The OE part is tuned to a global-average duty cycle plus a cost target — a **passing-grade default**. Your machine works in the real world. Cross-referencing was never just about saving money: **spend less, or spec higher — your call**.