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# Thanks a Million



**Reprint Edition**

# XRF

Reduced Friction Chassis Parts

# Thanks a Million

By Jim Wilder  
Undercar Digest Editor

When you talk with John Thody about XRF chassis parts, he describes them as premium products that technicians insist upon using once they've given them a try.

As a result, the company has been growing steadily by distributing its products mainly through the two-step distribution channel, with undercar and other specialty warehouses selling ball joints, tie-rod ends, idler arms, control arms, pitman arms, bushings, sway-bar links and related parts directly to shops. XRF also offers strut mounts.

He noted that the company doesn't play "pricing games" with offshore packagers, so XRF is not the cheapest brand on the market; however, he added that its pricing is very competitive with the name-brand major suppliers. The company sells to distributors only on net prices and does not produce a jobber price or a suggested retail price.

XRF, a division of Gwencor Corp., with headquarters in Marysville, Mich., was founded in 1996 after John and his brother Stephen left the employment of another parts manufacturer. Starting with about 1,500 part numbers to sell, John took on the United States and Stephen tackled Canada as their main sales territories. Today XRF offers nearly 4,000 part numbers, providing about 90% coverage for domestic and import passenger cars, light trucks and

heavy-duty trucks. Many of the latest part numbers have been suggested by shop and warehouse customers who sell XRF as their premium line.

John noted that one of the biggest sellers is XRF's "Zero-Lash" ball joints that have a burnished, "perfectly" round ball stud that is fully encapsulated in a high-pressure/load Acetel bearing. He added that the ball joints have zero allowable lateral and vertical movement, as this movement is what causes the ball joints to pound and fail prematurely. Also, XRF's housings are precision machined and made of mid-carbon SAE1045 steel to give the housing extra strength.

These ball joints have been used to eliminate wear problems common in Chevrolet S10 pickups and late-model Ford Explorers. Shop operators also have found that XRF's chassis parts hold up exceptionally well on F-series Ford trucks, from the F-150 all the way up to the Super Duty F-450s, that are used for heavy-duty work.

XRF's million-mile warranty is part of the company's marketing campaign, and although a claim



XRF specializes in chassis parts, such as this control arm for a late-model Ford Explorer.



XRF has replaced all metal-stamping ball joints with much-stronger, longer-lasting forged parts and offers a million-mile warranty.

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hasn't reached his office yet for a vehicle with a million miles on the odometer, John is confident of his product. His favorite vehicle for business travel, his Ford E-350 Econoline van, has 600,000-plus miles on it. The OE ball joints were replaced with XRF's about 550,000 miles ago, and the XRF ball joints are still well within serviceable range.

If there are any comebacks within the first 90 days after installation of XRF ball joints, the company will replace the product free of charge and share the labor cost with the technician. After 90 days the parts are provided free. John noted he has not had any comebacks when professional technicians have performed the work, but he has received a few from what he calls "parts replacers or installers."

John refers to XRF as a combination engineering and marketing company – not to be confused with repackagers. An engineering and manufacturing center in Taiwan that partners with XRF oversees the research in designing a more-durable part, John said. In addition, the company recently opened a state-of-the-art assembly plant in Thailand, where its neighbors include Toyota, Hitachi and Sony.

"They are all ISO 9001/2 certified, and our primary factories are also TS16949/QS9000 certified," he said. "In addition, they must follow our specified quality-control system."

Designing new parts involves examining and dissecting original-equipment-manufacturer (OEM) and original-equipment-service (OES) parts with the engineers who work on improving the materials and the designs



John Thody, who along with his brother Stephen founded XRF in 1996

to make the XRF components last longer and be more user friendly to help the professional technician do a better job faster.

Order fill far exceeds the 90% level, John said, and distribution centers are strategically placed to fill orders promptly. The company has a 30,000-square-foot distribution and packaging center in Port Huron, Mich.; a 20,000-square-foot distribution center in Brampton, Ontario; and distribution centers in Moncton, New Brunswick; Edmonton, Alberta; Vancouver, British Columbia; Denver; Los Angeles; and Caracas, Venezuela.

The company is looking for select high-quality two-step distributors that are looking for alternative suppliers, he said. Although two-

step distribution is the primary way XRF goes to market, the company also sells to some mass retailers and repair chains, and even to other suspension-parts manufacturers.

"We are experienced brand packagers," he said. "Over our history in the chassis-parts business we have packaged almost 30 private-label brands. We already provide special customer-specific labels on our XRF box. XRF parts are sealed in a poly bag to prevent the loss of small parts and to protect against dirt and moisture. All units are factory-

packed with high-quality molybdenum disulphide grease. We also include a Universal Product Code and industry part numbers.

"One reason that our company has grown so quickly is because we are not bound by the restrictions of the giant corporations but have the freedom and the determination to be the innovator," John said. "XRF has



A motorist listens intently as a technician explains the need for an upper control arm that includes the ball joint.



XRF's state-of-the-art assembly plant in Karbinburi, Thailand



Forged ball joint with bellows anchored boot



Inside and outside views of XRF's packaging and distribution center in Port Huron, Mich.



Chassis parts are tested for wear with a special mud-spray tester and a salt-spray tester.



already led the industry with many product innovations in design, function and materials. We cannot be a leader if no one will follow. As a result, we are seeing many of our non-patentable innovations being picked up by the major chassis-parts producers. XRF is the leader in forged components, not



An XRF burnished, perfectly round ball stud with special heat treatment for omnidirectional strength.

only with idler arms but also we have replaced all metal-stamping ball joints with much-stronger, longer-lasting forged parts. Many of our forged ball joints are three times stronger than our competitors' part yet are priced about the same."

He noted that XRF uses mid-carbon steel, while some competitors use low-carbon steel. The company also takes pride in the use of high-quality rubber components.

"Our rubber components use materials that guard our parts against a host of potential contaminants as well as road-level ozone and some new chemicals that are used on cars," he said. "XRF is the leader in sealing, using multi-lipped seals to keep grease in and contaminants out. Our heat treatment gives greater omnidirectional strength to our ball studs. There are currently experiments being conducted using cryogenics as surface treatment for ball studs. Also, XRF has installed ball-stud burnishing machines that not only put a mirror finish on our ball studs but also make them within 2 mil [0.002 inch] of perfect roundness."

John noted that XRF does not offer a "good-better-best" line of chassis parts, and he is to the point when he talks about it with customers and in his advertising themes: "Since we do not have different levels of value for lives, XRF believes that there should be only one level of quality for chassis parts – superior."

Like many in the industry, John believes there is a major difference between "installers or parts replacers" and professional technicians. It is XRF's goal to sell its products through the distribution chain to professional technicians, and the company is also doing its part to help educate those involved in making the repairs. The company hires qualified trainers to provide training for shops throughout the country at hands-on clinics sponsored by their distributors. Classes cover chassis, driveline and steering. Clinics covering product knowledge also

are conducted for counter people. In addition, the company is in the process of designing point-of-purchase displays that shop operators can use to help educate the motorists who come to shops for repairs.

John noted that being a privately held company enables him and his brother to avoid getting bogged down in corporate layers that may delay an improved or new design that will benefit the aftermarket. Because of this they see that XRF can grow more quick-

ly but, more important, continue to be on the leading edge of technology by providing the industry with some of the best and longest-lasting chassis parts available. **UD**

**XRF**  
Reduced Friction Chassis Parts

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