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NHTSA Manufacturer ID vs Brand: Target Identity Worksheet

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Executive Summary

A brand name, a VIN prefix and an NHTSA manufacturer ID answer three different questions, and treating them as interchangeable is the most common identity error in maps of US vehicle, trailer and covered-equipment makers. Under 49 CFR Part 566, each manufacturer of motor vehicles, and of motor vehicle equipment to which a safety standard applies, must submit identifying information and a description of what it produces (www.ecfr.gov). The required fields are the full individual, partnership or corporate name, the address and state of incorporation, and a product description. Tires are outside this regime. NHTSA states that vPIC (the Product Information Catalog and Vehicle Listing) data is coded directly from submittals after review (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov), so a manufacturer record is a self-reported identity filing, not an ownership register.

The scale of the mismatch is measurable. Paging the public API on 2 November 2026 yielded about 23,174 manufacturer records (231 full pages of 100 plus a last page of 74) (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov) against 12,417 makes (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov); NHTSA publishes neither total, so both are this report's own counts. One manufacturer ID can carry several makes, because a make is simply a name a manufacturer applies to a group of vehicles or engines (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov); the body of this report shows this with the Honda and Toyota records in the live API. WMIs (World Manufacturer Identifiers, the first three VIN characters) are coordinated by SAE International under contract to NHTSA (www.ecfr.gov), and in a vehicle built in stages the VIN is assigned by the incomplete vehicle manufacturer (www.ecfr.gov) while the final-stage manufacturer assumes certification responsibility.

Ownership is a separate question that the NHTSA record does not answer. FinCEN announced a rule that permanently removes beneficial ownership reporting for US companies (www.fincen.gov), Delaware states that stockholder names are not on file with its Division of Corporations (corp.delaware.gov), and GLEIF counted 135,451 Legal Entity Identifiers (LEIs) meeting its Parent Relationships metric as of October 2025 (GLEIF Level 2 metric of the month). Parent and owner claims therefore need dated, independent corroboration for each candidate.

The report supplies a field-level crosswalk (Table 2), a fictional multi-stage trailer example with a decision class for each record (Table 3), and a five-class outcome scheme: confirmed manufacturer, plausible candidate, unrelated similarly named manufacturer, historical record, or unresolved. Facts were checked against primary pages on 2 November 2026; the eCFR text read was current to 10/29/2026 (www.ecfr.gov).

Introduction and Background

Consider a hypothetical screening query (Hypothetical Example): an analyst is mapping dry-van and flatbed trailer builders in the US Midwest and has a shortlist of brand names. One brand, "RidgeLine", appears on trailer decals and in a dealer catalog. The analyst needs to know which legal entity builds it, whether the same entity completes the product or merely supplies a chassis, where the product is built, and who owns the company today. A VIN decoder will return a make. The NHTSA Manufacturer Information Database (MID) will return manufacturer records. Neither returns, on its own, the entity an acquirer would sign a letter of intent with.

This report is written for private-equity origination analysts, the audience of Docket's target research work, and takes a deliberately narrow angle: a field-by-field crosswalk from NHTSA's manufacturer identification records to acquisition-target identity. It is not a consumer VIN-decoder guide and it does not treat safety-record datasets. Brand, VIN prefix and NHTSA record are three clues that must be reconciled; ownership is a fourth, separate claim.

The regulatory backbone is short. Part 566 exists to facilitate regulation of manufacturers and to establish a code numbering system for regulated manufacturers (www.ecfr.gov). New manufacturers file within 30 days of beginning manufacture (www.ecfr.gov), and registered manufacturers are to keep the entry current by submitting revised information within 30 days of relevant business changes (www.ecfr.gov). That is a reporting duty, not proof that every entry is promptly corrected. NHTSA's own description of its portal says the information is submitted once unless an update is needed (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov), and that NHTSA makes it available to the public on a NHTSA website (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). In a March 2022 final rule, NHTSA said most, if not all, Part 566 entries were already submitted through vPIC (www.federalregister.gov).

Two limits frame everything below. First, the MID is not a supplier directory: it covers vehicle makers and makers of equipment subject to a safety standard, and excludes tires (www.ecfr.gov). Second, it is not an ultimate-beneficial-owner register. The sections that follow define the record types, show what each Part 566 field supports, walk the search protocol, explain multi-stage and WMI logic, and then treat brand-to-entity and ownership resolution as independent steps.

Definitions and Taxonomy: Six Record Types That Are Not the Same Thing

The statutory definition is brief. Federal law treats a person who imports motor vehicles or equipment for resale as a manufacturer, alongside those who manufacture or assemble (www.govinfo.gov). There is no brand test in that definition, and brand appears in the regulations only as an attribute attached to a manufacturer. A foreign manufacturer designating a US agent, for example, must list all trade or brand names, marks, logos or

other designations of origin (www.ecfr.gov), and NHTSA's Manufacturer Handbook asks for the brand or label names associated with the business (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). The brand is thus a field on someone's filing, not a filer.

Table 1 below separates the record types an analyst will meet. It uses NHTSA's own vocabulary where the agency defines a term and flags where a term is simply a vPIC field.

Record type	What it literally identifies	Where it appears	Typical trap
Manufacturer (Part 566 filer)	The individual, partnership or corporation that filed its name, address, state of incorporation and product description (49 CFR Part 566)	MID record and linked Part 566 document (vPIC home page)	Assuming the filer is the operating company that sells under the brand
Brand / make	A name a manufacturer applies to a group of vehicles or engines (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov)	Make fields, decals, VIN decoder output	One manufacturer ID can carry several makes, and a make list includes many small-builder names
WMI	The manufacturer identifier in VIN positions 1-3, extended by positions 12-14 for low-volume makers (49 CFR Part 565)	VIN, MID WMI search (vPIC MID search)	Reading it as a plant, a brand or a current owner
Plant	The place where the manufacturer affixes the VIN (NHTSA manufacturer handbook)	VIN plant position, vPIC plant fields	Treating the VIN plant as where all manufacturing occurred
Final-stage, intermediate or incomplete-vehicle builder	A role in a vehicle built in two or more stages (49 CFR 567.3)	Certification label, incomplete vehicle document	Crediting the WMI holder with the finished product
Corporate parent / owner	Not identified by NHTSA filings; requires separate evidence such as GLEIF parent data (www.gleif.org)	State records, GLEIF, SEC filings, company statements	Importing a parent from a vendor database without a dated source

The table shows that only the first row is an entity record. Every other row is an attribute, a role or an out-of-scope claim. The vPIC manual reinforces this by defining make as a name that a manufacturer applies, not as a company (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov).

Manufacturer versus brand in the API

The live API makes the split visible. The record for manufacturer ID 988 returns a legal name, American Honda Motor Co., Inc., with a separate common-name field reading Honda (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). The make endpoint for the same ID returns multiple makes, including Acura, each tagged with the manufacturer name (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). A similar pattern appears for Toyota Motor Corporation, whose manufacturer record lists Lexus among its makes (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). These are neutral structural illustrations, not ownership statements: the API shows which makes were filed under which manufacturer ID, not who controls the filer.

For small builders the distinction is subtler, because the 12,417 makes in the dataset include entries that read like company names rather than consumer brands (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). A "make" hit for a small trailer builder may therefore be the same string as a company name, a DBA (doing business as) or a product line, and the

MID name search itself matches current names, previous names and DBAs where available (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). The practical rule is to treat any string match as a lead and the Part 566 document as the evidence.

What Part 566 and the MID Actually Establish

Part 566 requires three things: the full name of the manufacturer, its address and state of incorporation where applicable (www.ecfr.gov), and a description of each type of vehicle or covered equipment produced. The description rules matter for target mapping. For trailers, trucks and multipurpose passenger vehicles, the description must indicate the intended use, such as tank trailer, motor home or cargo van (www.ecfr.gov). An incomplete vehicle manufacturer must say so and state the stage of completion (www.ecfr.gov). Those two clauses are the most useful identity evidence in the filing, because they say what the filer claims to build and at which stage.

An analyst reading a Part 566 document should extract the following, and nothing more:

- **Corporate name:** copied exactly, including punctuation and entity suffix.
- **Address and state of incorporation:** recorded as filed, with the filing date.
- **Product description:** the vehicle or equipment types, weight ranges and intended use.
- **Role statement:** whether the filer describes itself as an incomplete, intermediate or final-stage manufacturer.
- **Revision date:** the most recent change visible on the document or record.

Scope is wider than automakers. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) information-collection record describes the duty as mandatory for domestic and foreign manufacturers, including importers, of vehicles and equipment subject to the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, except tire manufacturers (www.reginfo.gov). The same record shows the estimated annual burden rising from 131 to 352 hours at its 2022 reinstatement (www.reginfo.gov). That record is dated 2022, and the collection's later renewal status was not confirmed for this report.

What the MID adds to the filing

The vPIC home page describes the MID as a place to view manufacturer information including address, products, makes and models. The same page says NHTSA is working to improve data quality with manufacturers (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov), which is a useful reminder that completeness is not uniform. The vPIC manual is more direct: the information submitted varies by manufacturer, vehicle type and model year (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov).

Table 2 below is the reference asset of this report: a field-level crosswalk for the Part 566 and MID record. Each row states the literal fact the field supports, the inference that is unsafe, the corroborating source and a freshness check.

MID field or filing	Literal fact supported	Unsafe inference	Corroborating source	Freshness check
Manufacturer ID	NHTSA's code number for a regulated manufacturer	That one ID equals one operating company or brand	Original Part 566 document; API manufacturer details (vPIC API documentation)	Record revision date; compare name history
Full name (566.5(a))	The name the filer submitted	That the name matches the current state-registered entity	State entity search (name, status, formation date) (corp.delaware.gov) (faqs.in.gov)	State status at search date (icis.corp.delaware.gov) (corp.delaware.gov)
Address and state of incorporation (566.5(b))	A residence address and incorporation state, if applicable	That the address is a plant or the headquarters today	State filings; USPTO owner state (www.uspto.gov)	Filing date; 30-day update duty
Product description (566.5(c))	What the filer says it builds, including intended use for trailers	That all brand products are built by this filer	Company statements; certification labels (49 CFR Part 567)	Date of the description
DBA / trade / brand names	Aliases the filer reported	That a brand string is unique to this entity	Assumed-name filings (not unique) (www.sos.state.tx.us)	Assumed-name expiry, up to 10 years in Texas (Texas SOS name filings FAQ)
Manufacturer type	Self-described role, such as incomplete or final-stage	That the type holds for every product	Incomplete vehicle document (49 CFR Part 568)	Revision date
WMI	A manufacturer identifier assigned through SAE (www.ecfr.gov)	That the WMI holder built or owns the product	Part 565 filing; VIN decode; SAE practice (saemobilus.sae.org)	Only WMIs in vPICList display (vPIC API documentation)
Plant fields	Where the manufacturer affixes the VIN	That this is the only or main production site	Company site list; state records	Model-year specific
Parent / owner	Not a Part 566 field	Any ownership claim	GLEIF Level 2 (www.gleif.org), SEC filings, dated transaction evidence	Date of each source

The crosswalk makes the reasoning auditable: every "unsafe inference" is a place where analysts routinely extend a record beyond what the filer asserted. Notice that the last row is intentionally empty of NHTSA evidence, because the filing structure has no ownership field.

Searching the MID and API: A Worked Protocol

Step 1: search the MID by every name the target has used

The MID search form accepts partial names, and the static page text states that a name search runs against current names, previous names and DBAs where available. Search separately by brand, by suspected legal name, by prior names and by state, and record each query. A dedicated WMI search filters by WMI, product type, make name or model name, while a filing search uses an NHTSA-assigned identifying ID. Because the MID is a script-driven page, its rendered record layout could not be confirmed in text form for this report; analysts should recheck search behavior in a live browser before relying on a documented field list.

Step 2: open the original Part 566 submission

The MID links the filed documents behind each record. Capture the corporate name, address, state of incorporation, product description, filing or revision date and manufacturer type from the document itself rather than from a summary view. NHTSA does not routinely issue written approvals of Part 565 VIN-decoding submissions (www.ecfr.gov), which is a reminder that acceptance in the system is not a verification of identity claims.

Step 3: use API methods for repeatable checks

The vPIC API documentation describes lookups whose matching depends on the input type. A name string performs a partial LIKE match and can return several manufacturers (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov), while a numeric ID does an exact match and returns exactly one record. Manufacturer lists are paged at 100 items (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov), and the filing method for Part 565 and 566 documents returns up to 1,000 results at a time (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). The documentation says the dataset is populated from manufacturers' Part 565 submittals (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). For WMI lists there is no all-WMI method; the manufacturer-specific lookup returns only WMIs registered in vPICList, so absence from results does not prove the manufacturer holds none.

The following **worksheet columns** keep API work reviewable:

- **Query:** the exact string or ID and the method used, plus the date run.
- **Returned manufacturer ID and name:** copied as returned, with the common-name field kept separate.
- **Document URL:** the link to the Part 566 filing opened by the reviewer.
- **Submission or revision date:** from the document, not from the API.
- **Match score reasons:** exact name, previous name, DBA, address, state or product description.
- **Reviewer status:** one of the five decision classes defined later.

Step 4: record what the dataset can and cannot cover

vPIC data represents vehicles intended for sale or importation into the United States, and the decoder is intended for model years 1981 and later (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov). NHTSA's FAQ gives roughly 99 percent decoding confidence from model year 1995 forward (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). Those are decoding statements, not statements about how many US builders are registered. The catalog entry for the vPIC dataset on data.gov carries its own last-updated date, which is worth recording as a freshness marker (catalog.data.gov).

Multi-Stage Builders, WMIs and VIN Decoders

Why the WMI is not the owner

The WMI is the first section of the VIN under ISO 3779, and ISO 3780 specifies the identifier used to identify road vehicle manufacturers worldwide (www.iso.org). SAE International issues and assigns WMIs; its J1044 practice describes a procedure for issuance and assignment (saemobilus.sae.org). In US regulation, NHTSA has contracted with SAE to coordinate the assignment of manufacturer identifiers. The vPIC home page likewise says WMIs are assigned to a manufacturer by SAE and referenced in vPIC (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov).

Three consequences follow. First, a WMI identifies the party that obtained it for a make and vehicle type, not necessarily the party that now operates the business. Second, a manufacturer may hold many: a name search for Toyota in the WMI list returned 34 WMI records on 2 November 2026 (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov), spread across several manufacturer IDs, which shows that WMI and manufacturer ID are many-to-one rather than one-to-one. Third, a vehicle type is derived from the WMI in the vPIC data, so the type field is a function of the identifier (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov).

The low-volume threshold and a conflicting figure

Part 565 now defines a low-volume manufacturer as one making fewer than 1,000 vehicles of a given type each year (www.ecfr.gov), and low-volume makers use a six-character identifier made of VIN positions 1-3 plus 12-14. NHTSA's rulemaking text confirms that small manufacturers must use a six-character identifier (www.nhtsa.gov). A 2007 proposal, however, stated the earlier test at fewer than 500 vehicles annually (www.federalregister.gov). Analysts who see "500" in older guides are reading the pre-amendment threshold; the current eCFR text uses 1,000. In released decode files the low-volume case matters for another reason: positions are masked, so a six-character WMI cannot be reconstructed from public decode output alone (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov).

Who is the final-stage builder?

Many trailer, body and specialty-vehicle products are completed in more than one stage. A final-stage manufacturer is a person who performs the manufacturing operations that turn an incomplete vehicle into a completed vehicle. In a multi-stage vehicle, the VIN is assigned by the incomplete vehicle manufacturer (www.ecfr.gov), the incomplete vehicle document begins with that manufacturer's name and mailing address, and an intermediate manufacturer that alters the vehicle furnishes an addendum bearing its own name and address (www.ecfr.gov). The final-stage manufacturer assumes legal responsibility for certification duties, subject to stated exceptions (www.ecfr.gov). The trade association NTEA calls this sector the multi-stage vehicle industry (www.ntea.com).

The roles in a multi-stage product can be summarized as follows:

- **Incomplete vehicle manufacturer:** assembles components into an incomplete vehicle and assigns the VIN.
- **Intermediate manufacturer:** alters the vehicle between stages and adds an addendum with its own name and address.

- **Final-stage manufacturer:** completes the vehicle and, subject to exceptions, assumes certification duties.
- **Importer:** uses the VIN assigned by the original manufacturer.

The certification label adds nuance. Its default rule names the actual assembler of the vehicle, but if a corporation controlled by another corporation assembles the vehicle and the controlling corporation assumes the duties, the controlling corporation's name may appear instead (www.ecfr.gov). For trailers, a party engaged in trailer manufacture that is not the maker can be named when it assumes the liabilities imposed by the Act for that trailer (www.ecfr.gov). A label name is therefore evidence of who stands behind certification, which can differ from the party that welded the product. Importers must use the VIN assigned by the original manufacturer (www.ecfr.gov), so an importer's own name will not appear in the VIN of the product it brings in.

How much decoding detail exists for trailers

The vPIC analytical manual notes that its motor-vehicle decode file has 128 data elements (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov) while the separate trailer decode file has only 24 (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov). The manual also states that plant fields describe where the manufacturer affixes the VIN (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov). For a trailer builder, the decoder will thus yield a thin record, and the NHTSA decoder itself says the displayed information is reported by the manufacturer (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). NHTSA built the decoder from manufacturer submissions (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov).

Resolving Brand to Entity and Ownership Separately

The NHTSA step ends with a filer name, a filing date and a product description. Everything after that is independent corroboration, and each claim should carry its own source and date. The sources fall into four groups, each with a different blind spot:

- **State registries:** identify the entity, status and registered agent; they generally do not hold owners.
- **LEI data:** identifies entities and self-reported accounting parents; coverage is voluntary for most private firms.
- **Securities filings:** list subsidiaries of public parents only.
- **Trademark and federal-award records:** show brand owners and claimed transfers, with their own filing conventions.

Legal entity: state records

State business registries identify entities, not owners. Delaware's entity search returns fields such as entity name, file number and formation date (corp.delaware.gov) but does not provide entity status (corp.delaware.gov), and the search reflects the database as of the date of the search (icis.corp.delaware.gov). Delaware says stockholder names are not on file with its Division of Corporations (corp.delaware.gov), and alternative entities such as LLCs are not required to list members or managers (corp.delaware.gov). Indiana's guidance tells users to identify a business by considering the displayed name, address and registered agent (faqs.in.gov). Name changes are filed as amendments, as Texas describes for its Certificate of Amendment (www.sos.state.tx.us), so an NHTSA filing under a former name can legitimately

differ from today's registry. Assumed names add a further wrinkle: Texas notes that an assumed name certificate does not prevent anyone else from filing the same name (www.sos.state.tx.us), and Delaware routes fictitious names to its Division of Revenue rather than its corporate registry (corp.delaware.gov).

Parentage: LEI, SEC and trademark records

GLEIF's Level 1 data records the legal entity's official name as it appears in official registers (www.gleif.org), and Level 2 holds self-reported direct and ultimate accounting consolidating parents (www.gleif.org). Collection began in May 2017 (www.gleif.org). The definition rests on financial consolidation (www.gleif.org), and a record can be counted as complete when the entity reports parents or gives an accepted reason for not doing so (www.gleif.org). Exceptions include entities controlled by natural persons without any intermediate legal entity (www.gleif.org) and non-public relationships (www.gleif.org). GLEIF also notes that any legal requirement to hold an LEI comes from elsewhere (www.gleif.org), and LEIs are renewed annually (www.gleif.org). A missing LEI for a private manufacturer is therefore uninformative, and a missing parent record is the common case (www.gleif.org).

For public parents, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) subsidiary exhibit lists each subsidiary with its jurisdiction and the names under which it does business (www.ecfr.gov), though not every subsidiary need be listed. EDGAR keys identity to filer Central Index Key numbers (www.sec.gov), so it helps only where a parent files. USPTO records add a brand-side clue: trademark applicants state their state or country of incorporation (www.uspto.gov), and assignment data keep a history of claimed interests in a mark (www.uspto.gov). Recording an assignment is a ministerial act, not a determination of validity (tmep.uspto.gov), so an assignment record is evidence of a claimed transfer rather than proof of title. For firms registered to receive federal awards, the System for Award Management (SAM) checklist asks whether another entity owns or controls the registrant (sam.gov), and registrations must be renewed every 365 days (sam.gov).

Beneficial ownership is not publicly available

FinCEN announced a final rule permanently removing the beneficial ownership reporting requirement for US companies and US persons (www.fincen.gov), effective August 14, 2026 (www.federalregister.gov). FinCEN's own page states that US companies are exempt (www.fincen.gov). Any information that was reported is held in a non-public database (www.fincen.gov). Analysts should therefore expect no federal public source for beneficial owners of a domestic private manufacturer and should state the evidence gap explicitly instead of filling it with an unsourced vendor attribution.

Data Analysis and Evidence

The quantitative core of this topic is the gap between how many records exist and how many identify distinct operating companies. *All counts below were retrieved on 2 November 2026 unless stated.*

Records in the public API. Page 232 of the paged manufacturer list returned 74 items, and later pages returned none; since earlier pages hold 100 items each, the implied total is 231 x 100 + 74 = **23,174** manufacturer records (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). The make list holds **12,417** entries. NHTSA does not publish either total, the manufacturer figure is inferred from page counts, and the dataset's own last-updated date is posted

at the data.gov catalog entry (catalog.data.gov). The ratio of roughly 1.9 manufacturer records per make reflects equipment makers, importers, plant-level entities and builders, so it should not be read as a count of automakers.

Name collisions. A partial-name search for "toyota" returned **15** manufacturer records, spanning multiple legal entities and plant-level entries (vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov). For a small trailer builder with a common surname or place name, equivalent collisions are likely. NHTSA's documentation confirms that a name string produces a LIKE match and can return several manufacturers.

Industry structure. The US Census Bureau's County Business Patterns for 2023 show **569** employer establishments in truck trailer manufacturing (NAICS 336212) (data.census.gov), **855** in motor vehicle body manufacturing (336211) (data.census.gov), **71** in motor home manufacturing (336213) (data.census.gov), **704** in travel trailer and camper manufacturing (336214) (data.census.gov) and **109** in heavy duty truck manufacturing (336120) (data.census.gov). NAICS 336212 covers truck trailers and trailer chassis (www.census.gov), while the body-manufacturing class explicitly includes products assembled on a purchased chassis and sold as complete vehicles (data.census.gov). The Bureau of Labor Statistics Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages annual averages for 2025 give 768 private establishments and 38,059 average employment in NAICS 336212 (data.bls.gov); this differs from the Census establishment count because the programs use different frames and years, and the two should not be mixed in one series.

Ownership coverage. In October 2025 GLEIF reported 135,451 LEIs with at least one valid parent, excluding reporting exceptions (GLEIF Level 2 metric of the month). In the daily file dated 2 November 2026, the relationship-record file held 676,762 records (GLEIF concatenated file download page). These two figures differ in date and in unit (LEIs with a valid parent versus relationship records), so they do not give a coverage rate. Treat a missing parent record as an open question to resolve with dated corroboration, not as a signal about ownership.

Reporting burden. The OMB record for Part 566 estimates the aggregate annual burden at 352 hours after the 2022 change (www.reginfo.gov), an increase the record attributes to a higher expected number of submissions each year rather than to the effort of any single filing. The OMB record also describes a mandatory collection covering importers as well as builders (www.reginfo.gov).

Worked Case Study (Hypothetical Example)

(Hypothetical Example) A Midwest trailer builder

Table 3 below walks through a fictional case. Every name, place and code is invented for illustration, and none refers to a real company. The analyst starts with the brand "RidgeLine" and builds one row per record type, assigning a decision class and the next source to check.

Record	Fictional finding	Decision class	Next source to check
Brand	"RidgeLine" appears on trailers and a dealer catalog; an assumed-name filing would not be unique (www.sos.state.tx.us)	Unresolved (a string, not an entity)	MID name and brand search

Record	Fictional finding	Decision class	Next source to check
Part 566 filer	Northfield Trailer Works, LLC, filed 2019, product description "cargo trailers, GVWR 7,000 to 14,000 lb"	Plausible candidate	State entity search, registered agent (faqs.in.gov)
WMI assignee	A six-character identifier whose third character is 9, assigned to a different name, "Ridgeline Fabrication Inc."	Historical record until the name link is shown	Part 565 filing and prior-name search
Final-stage builder	Lakeshore Body Co. completes a chassis supplied by Northfield; the incomplete vehicle document names Northfield first	Confirmed for the completion role only	Certification label and addendum
Plant	VIN plant code points to "Maple Ridge" while the Part 566 address is a different county	Unresolved	Company site list, state filings
Corporate parent	Company statement names "Cardinal Holdings Partners LP"; no LEI parent record (www.gleif.org); Delaware holds no owner data (corp.delaware.gov)	Plausible candidate, uncorroborated	Dated transaction evidence; GLEIF check (www.gleif.org)

The fictional table illustrates three typical outcomes. The filer and the WMI assignee carry different names, which is only resolvable through a name-history trail rather than a string match. The final-stage builder is a different company from the chassis supplier, so a roll-up of "RidgeLine" revenue to the wrong entity is a live risk. The parent claim is the weakest row and, per the earlier sections, would need independent corroboration before it influenced any screening decision.

Implications and Future Directions

For origination workflows, the main implication is that identity resolution should be staged and logged. A reasonable sequence is: capture the brand string, find the filer in the MID, open the Part 566 document, classify the record into one of five outcome classes, then run entity and ownership corroboration as separate tasks. Docket, a deal-origination and evidence-backed acquisition target research platform and service for private equity firms, publishes this report, and the protocol above is deliberately tool-agnostic: it can be run by hand with the public MID and API.

The five outcome classes can be applied as follows:

- **Confirmed manufacturer:** the Part 566 document, a current state record and a company statement agree on name, address and product.
- **Plausible candidate:** the filing matches on name and product, but one corroborating source is missing or stale.
- **Unrelated similarly named manufacturer:** the name collides but the state, product description or address conflicts.
- **Historical record:** the filing or WMI uses a former name or a ceased business, with a documented name change or no current registry status.
- **Unresolved:** the record cannot be tied to the brand or target from available sources.

Several uncertainties deserve flagging:

- **Approval status:** the status of the manufacturer identification collection's OMB approval after its 2022 reinstatement was not confirmed for this report.
- **Interface drift:** the MID is script-driven, so its layout can change without notice, and its fields should be rechecked before each project.
- **Ownership evidence:** federal beneficial ownership reporting for domestic companies has been withdrawn (www.fincen.gov), so ownership diligence for US private manufacturers will continue to rely on company disclosures, transaction documents and counterparties rather than a registry.
- **Counts:** the manufacturer and make totals are this report's own paging counts and will drift as filings are added.
- **Professional advice:** nothing here is legal advice; questions about the regulatory status of a specific product should go to qualified counsel and to NHTSA directly.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the difference between a manufacturer and a brand in NHTSA data? A manufacturer is a filer with an ID, a name and a product description; a make is a name the manufacturer applies to a group of vehicles or engines (crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov). One manufacturer record can carry several makes.

How do I do an NHTSA manufacturer ID lookup? Use the MID name search, which covers current names, previous names and DBAs where available, or the API's numeric ID lookup, which returns exactly one record. Then open the Part 566 document.

Does the VIN WMI tell me who owns the company? No. The WMI is a manufacturer identifier coordinated by SAE under contract to NHTSA. It identifies a manufacturer for VIN purposes, not a current owner; the international standard describes it as the first section of the VIN (www.iso.org).

What does the vPIC manufacturer API return? It supports exact-ID and partial-name lookups, paged lists and filing retrieval; the dataset is populated from manufacturer submittals.

How does the manufacturer ID relate to NHTSA's other reporting rules and to complaint data? Other NHTSA reporting parts define "manufacturer" more broadly; the Part 579 definition includes any parent corporation, subsidiary or affiliate (www.ecfr.gov). Complaint files and other safety-record datasets are outside this report's scope, so the point here is only that the entity behind a manufacturer ID, make or brand string must be identified before any such data is joined to a target.

Is the NHTSA listing a supplier directory? No. Part 566 covers manufacturers of vehicles and of equipment subject to a safety standard, other than tires. Tire brand-name owners are handled in a separate tire identification part of the federal regulations.

How do I find the legal entity of an acquisition target? Combine the Part 566 name and state with a state entity search (corp.delaware.gov), then check trademark owner state (www.uspto.gov), trademark assignment history (www.uspto.gov), GLEIF Level 1 (www.gleif.org), EDGAR filer identity (www.sec.gov) and any SEC subsidiary list.

Where is a WMI list? The API has no all-WMI method; the manufacturer lookup returns only WMIs registered in vPICList, and the MID has a WMI search.

Conclusion

The question "which entity is this?" has no single NHTSA answer. A Part 566 filing supports a narrow set of facts: a named filer, an address and state, and a product description. A WMI supports an identifier assigned through SAE. A brand supports a name on a product. Multi-stage rules mean that the party that assigned the VIN and the party that completed the product can differ, and no NHTSA field establishes ownership. Federal beneficial ownership data for domestic companies is no longer a public path (www.fincen.gov), and state registries do not hold owner names (corp.delaware.gov).

The workable discipline is to keep each claim in its own column, date it, preserve contradictions such as the 500 versus 1,000 vehicle threshold (www.federalregister.gov), and assign one of five decision classes before any record enters a screening list. This produces a smaller but more defensible target map, and it makes visible exactly which ownership claims still need independent corroboration.

Source links

Links cited in this article, in order of first appearance. Full addresses are provided for readers using extracted text.

1. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-B/chapter-V/part-566
2. https://vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov/About
3. https://vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov/api/vehicles/GetAllManufacturers?format=json&page=232
4. https://vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov/api/vehicles/GetAllMakes?format=json
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6. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-B/chapter-V/part-565
7. https://www.fincen.gov/news/news-releases/fincen-permanently-ends-beneficial-ownership-reporting-requirements-millions
8. https://corp.delaware.gov/faqs
9. https://www.gleif.org/en/newsroom/blog/transforming-data-into-opportunities-metric-of-the-month-level-2-understanding
10. https://vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov/MfrPortal/Manufacturers/EditMfrInfo
11. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/03/09/2022-04030/vehicle-identification-number-vin-requirements-manufacturer-identification-certification-replica
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13. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-B/chapter-V/part-551
14. https://vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov/documents/ManufacturerHandbook.pdf
15. https://vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov
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17. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-B/chapter-V/part-567/subpart-A/section-567.3
18. https://www.gleif.org/en/lei-data/access-and-use-lei-data/level-2-data-who-owns-whom
19. https://vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov/api/vehicles/GetManufacturerDetails/988?format=json
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26. https://www.uspto.gov/trademarks/apply/base-application-requirements
27. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-B/chapter-V/part-567
28. https://www.sos.state.tx.us/corp/namefilingsfaqs.shtml
29. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-B/chapter-V/part-568
30. https://saemobilus.sae.org/standards/j1044_202501-world-manufacturer-identifier
31. https://vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov/api/home/index/faq
32. https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/nhtsa-product-information-catalog-and-vehicle-listing-vpic-vehicle-api-json
33. https://www.iso.org/standard/45844.html
34. https://vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov/api/vehicles/GetWMIsForManufacturer/toyota?format=json
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38. https://vpic.nhtsa.dot.gov/decoder
39. https://www.gleif.org/en/lei-data/access-and-use-lei-data/level-1-data-who-is-who
40. https://www.gleif.org/en/about-lei/common-data-file-format/level-2-data-reporting-exceptions-format
41. https://www.gleif.org/_documents/2024-04-22_the-legal-entity-identifier-faqs_v1.0-final_approved_.pdf
42. https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-17/chapter-II/part-229/subpart-229.600/section-229.601
43. https://www.sec.gov/search-filings
44. https://www.uspto.gov/ip-policy/economic-research/research-datasets/trademark-assignment-dataset
45. https://tmep.uspto.gov/RDMS/TMEP/print?href=TMEP-500d1e1.html&version=current
46. https://sam.gov/sites/default/files/2024-11/entity-checklist.pdf
47. https://sam.gov/entity-registration
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