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MORE PERSPECTIVES

Caring for your tires is caring for your car, ...and the people who ride in it.

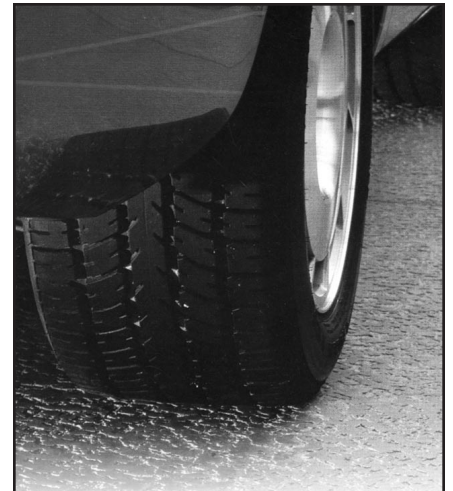
No matter how careful a driver you are, or how crashworthy you perceive your vehicle to be, a critical factor in vehicle safety is tire maintenance and care. Tires are directly responsible for the control of your vehicle. All road forces are funneled through your tires and so any weakness in those tires reduces or even eliminates your ability to maintain safe control of the vehicle. Improperly inflated or worn tires also decrease your fuel efficiency. In the wake of the Firestone tire recall that began in 2000, consumers are paying closer attention to inflation levels and tread depth on their tires. Now consumers are being urged to pay attention to an additional factor: born-on dates.

European and some Japanese car manufacturers have long warned consumers that tires are perishable. Ford recently announced that it is urging drivers to replace tires after six years, regardless of wear. According to research conducted by Ford scientists following the Firestone recall, a tire's internal structure weakens as it ages which can result in tire failure. Driving in hot climates (like Arizona) and heavy loading of vehicles speeds this aging process. To be a careful driver means that you should also be especially vigilant about tire maintenance and integrity.

The tire industry as a whole takes the position that tread depth is more important to monitor than tire age. However, the tire industry has much to lose if consumers begin demanding only the freshest tires. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration is currently examining Ford's data and is developing a test designed to simulate the effects of aging on tires.

Ford's new stance is directly related to the wave of deadly crashes involving Ford Explorers and Firestone Tires. As a result of many successful lawsuits against the companies, Ford is now taking action designed to keep their consumers safer. Keep in mind however, that an expiration date does not replace the need for proper tire care and maintenance. Drivers must continue to monitor inflation levels and tread depth on their tires, even when new.

—Jessica E. Feingold



How to Find A Tire's Age:

- Look for the letters "DOT" on the sidewall. This indicates compliance with applicable safety standards set by the U.S. Department of Transportation.
- Adjacent to these letters is the tire's serial number, which is a combination of up to 12 numbers and letters. The last characters are numbers that identify the week and year of manufacture. For example, 1504 means the fifteenth week of the year 2004.
- Don't get frustrated if you can't find these characters. The numbers are printed on only one side of the tire, which sometimes is the one facing inward when the tire is mounted on the wheel.
- If you have tires that are more than 6 years old, consider getting new ones, regardless of the tires' visible wear

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