

How Important Is **THE AGE** of Your Tires?

By Brett A. Emison

With high gas prices, drivers often hear about the importance of keeping tires properly inflated. It is common for drivers to rotate, balance and check tires regularly for wear.

However, most drivers do not know that tires have an expiration date. Just because a tire looks brand-new does not mean it is safe to use. Tires have an expiration date and should not be used if it has been six years or longer since the tire was manufactured.

Other tire failure factors include:

» **AGE OF THE TIRE:** Tires deteriorate with age; older tires have a much higher risk of failure than newer tires with similar wear and tread depth.

» **USE OF THE TIRE:** Tire deterioration is accelerated when the tire is stored and not used on a regular basis.

» **TEMPERATURE:** Tire deterioration is accelerated by heat. Tires used primarily in warmer climates (such as the Southwest) have a higher risk of failure than tires used in cooler climates.

Tire companies have known for decades about the dangers of older tires, yet numerous human factor studies show that the general public is unaware of this critical danger.

A 1977 *Business Week* article warned that "a long park in a garage can be as hard on tires as thousands of miles of highway travel." A 1981 paper, *The Effect*

of Tire Aging On Force And Moment Properties Of Radial Tires, found that it was "well known [in the tire industry] that over extended periods of time the physical properties of rubber undergo significant changes. There are extensive discussions in the [industry] literature of how rubber properties such as modulus elongation, loss factors, etc. are affected by ozone, temperature, oxidation, humidity and other environmental factors."

Despite this knowledge, tire manufacturers still fail to provide readily accessible information about the age of tires. Tire manufacturers must provide the date on which the tire was manufactured, but not the expiration date after which the tire should not be used.

To make matters worse, the "born on" date is provided using a cryptic code that most consumers — and even most tire installers — are unable to accurately read. What's more, until recently, these dates were placed on the inside wall of the tire making the manufacture date very difficult to find.

Tires are the only part of your car connecting you to the road. Even the most expensive and agile sports car cannot outmaneuver a blowout. Make sure you take adequate precautions to keep you and your loved ones safe by checking the condition of your tires regularly.

(continued on next page)



HOW TO» Determine the Age of Your Tires

» Each tire has a required Department of Transportation (DOT) number imprinted on at least one of its sidewalls. That number begins with the letters "DOT" and may contain up to 12 additional numbers and letters. The first and last digits are the most important.

» The first two letters or numbers identify the manufacturer of the tires.

» Prior to the year 2000, the last three digits of the DOT number represented the week (two digits) and year (one digit) of production. So if the last three digits were 408, the tire was produced in the 40th week of the eighth year of the decade. There was no universal identifier that confirmed which decade in which the tire was manufactured (however, tires produced in the 1990s may have a small triangle following the Tire Identification Number).

» Tires produced after January 1, 2000 have a four-digit date code at the end of the DOT number. The first two digits represent the week of production and the last two digits represent the last two digits of the year of production. So, 5107 indicates that the tire was produced in the 51st week of the year 2007.

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AT LEAST 50 CHILDREN ARE BACKED OVER BY VEHICLES EVERY WEEK.

48 are treated in hospital emergency rooms.

2 die.

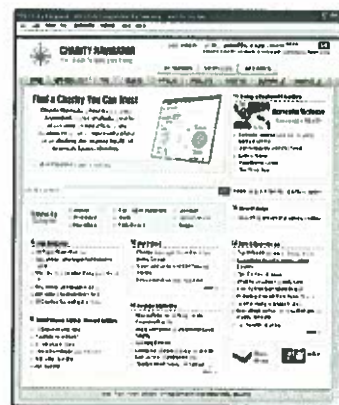


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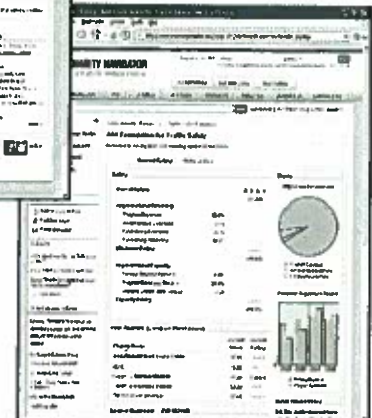
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