

# Get the Most Mileage From Your Tires

By Sarah Smith

Tires are tires, right? You go out, get the right ones for your vehicle, and that's it, right? If you own a vehicle you should know, things are seldom that simple. It's not enough to buy the right tires (which could be tricky in itself), but those tires must also be taken care of: for the passengers' safety and to prolong the life of the vehicle.

For starters, did you know you have to "break in" your tires? Tires are complicated, made up of layers of rubber, steel and fabric. These layers won't be truly working together until the tires have been used a while. Additionally, when in the factory, they're coated with a lubricant to make them easier to remove from their mold. This coating, which isn't removed at the factory, reduces traction. To remove that coating, and to get those various layers interacting with each other, drive carefully for the first 500 miles or so. Corner smoothly, and go as light as possible on the braking and acceleration. You'll give the tires a chance to warm up until they can operate at their maximum capacity.

For that matter, do you know what those abbreviations and numbers on your tires mean? How often should you get them rotated, and why? What are the signs that your tires are wearing down or losing tread unevenly? Do you understand the Federal Government Uniform Tire Quality Grading Standards (aka: UTQG)?

## ***What are the UTQG standards?***

First, these standards apply to regular, everyday tires for passenger cars. Snow tires, as well as that temporary spare you may have gotten with your car, and any kind of deep tread tires are excluded from this rating system.

As such, your everyday tires are government rated (or "graded") for the three T's: **Tread wear**, **traction**, and **temperature**. The grades are marked on the tire itself. For instance, the tread wear valuation might read 150, which would indicate that it would wear one-and-a-half times better than a tire rated 100.

These ratings are relative figures and your driving circumstances may vary widely from the government's testing ground. Possible variables include the terrain, as well as, the driver's own personal style. Some drivers are, after all, harder on their cars than others.

As regards traction, there are four grades from best to worst: AA, A, B, and C. However, the government tests only for straight-ahead braking on wet concrete and asphalt. There's no feedback on how these tires might corner or handle hydroplaning.

The temperature tests lead to a rating of A (highest), B, or C. C is the level all tires must meet as per the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard. Over- or under-inflation, excessive speed, or overloading of the vehicle can separately or in combination lead to dangerous temperature levels.

### ***There are other numbers too, you know.***

Again, your owner's manual should advise you about what size is best for your vehicle. So, say you drive a 1998 Honda Civic Sedan DX. The recommended tire would read 185/65-14. 185 refers to the tire's section width in centimeters. 65 represents the tire's aspect ratio: the ratio of sidewall height to tread width. 14 indicates the wheel/rim size.

### ***What else leads to tire wear?***

- **Incorrect tire pressure.** (too much or too little air) is a leading cause of premature tread wear. Purchasing valve stems when you buy your tires is a great investment. Be aware that the stems wear out too, and may need replacement before the tires do. Read your owner's manual for the manufacturer's recommendation for tire pressure readings.
- **Seasonal changes.** A ten-degree shift can result in a one-pound gain/loss in pressure. Cold weather decreases pressure; warmer air increases it. Be on the safe side and buy your own air pressure gauge. The one at your local garage is used throughout the day and may not be as reliable.
- **Tire tread** should read at least 2/32" in each groove. If that isn't the case, that could mean your tire pressure is wrong, so check this first.
- **Purchase similar tires.** When buying tires, buy four at a time to insure stability in handling. If you can't do this, put the best tires on the back. This issue is especially important with four-wheel and all-wheel vehicles.
- **Rotate tires** regularly and often to cut down on uneven wear and prolong the life of your tires overall.

If you have further questions ask your favorite mechanic or a well-informed clerk at your local auto supply store. The better informed you are about maintaining your vehicle, the safer you'll be.