

# How To Select Tires For Your Vehicle

By Charlie Hayes

The newest trend in the automotive world these days is “rims” -- flashy, often custom wheels and the tires that go with them – usually as big as they can go. If you’ve just purchased a new set of rims and are looking for the tires to go with them, remember– most cars are built to accommodate plus or minus three percent in the diameter of the tire, SUVs are built to accommodate a more generous 15%. You can up your wheel size and still maintain the same tire diameter depending on the other dimensions and features of the tire, however not every tire in every size will provide your particular car with the maximum performance you’re looking for. If you’re replacing a single tire, it should be exactly the same tire – brand, model, size speed rating, etc. as the existing tires. If, say, your front tires wear out substantially before your rear tires, you may need to replace the pair. Though their specs should be as close as possible to the tires on the other two wheels, an exact match isn’t required if you are replacing both of the front or both of the rear tires.

Are your tires worn out? The industry standard is that tires should be replaced when you have 2/32” or less tread depth – or, if you place a penny in the tread and the top of Lincoln’s head is not covered. However, this is an outside limit, for most drivers who may be encountering rain, snow or other weather that can severely affect traction, a rule of 3 times that, or 6/32” (if the tread covers the top of the Lincoln Memorial) should be used. Of course, if you’re experiencing any kinds of problems with your tires in terms of traction, they may need replacing regardless of tread depth. And if your tires consistently show odd or uneven patterns of wear, it may be an indicator of a more serious problem, from lack of alignment to a bent or twisted frame to irregularities in your driving style (do you “floor it” at ever stoplight – you tires will tell.)

How many tires do you need? It depends on how, where, what and when you drive. If you live in a relatively dry climate with mild winters and basically commute back and forth to work in the suburbs, just about any standard tire will do. If you live where it’s 100 degrees in the summer, rains all spring and snows all winter, you probably need a good set of regular or all season tires and perhaps snow tires as well. If you’re primarily a freeway driver, you’ll want different tires than if you’re taking your SUV on twisted back roads, etc. Of course the best place to get advice on exactly what kind of tires you need is a) from your auto dealership, b) from your mechanic (who can tell you what effect various tires are going to have on handling etc.) and c) from your tire dealer, who, though they have a vested interest in selling you tires, also want you to keep coming back. Your dealer or tire sales person are also the person to ask if you’re considering altering the wheels or tire size for performance/cosmetic reasons – do not just assume because an 18” wheel, for example, was offered for your vehicle, that you can just pop them onto your individual

car, as any number of other suspension and drive train changes may have accompanied that original option. Tires and wheels of the wrong size, either too small or too large, can actually be dangerous, so get the right information.

Finally, how much should you pay? Remember, under most circumstances tires last a good long time, and good tires can both improve ride and handling and therefore safety. So as always, the rule is to buy the best tires you can afford. And don't forget the spare –make sure that you have the appropriate factor-specified spare for your car. And, if you have the storage space and tires are on sale, it's even a good idea to keep a matching tire (not a reduced size or temporary spare) in the garage just in case you get a flat close to home, that way you'll be up on four matching tires in no time, rather than having to driver or be towed to a dealership and purchase a tire at full price.

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