



# Tire maintenance key to safety, fuel economy

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Tires are the Rodney Dangerfield of the automotive world. Even though they're the only component of the car that actually touches the pavement, tires "get no respect."

Tires influence the braking, steering, comfort, handling, fuel efficiency and driving safety of every vehicle, but are often ignored or misunderstood by many consumers. Tires pound over potholes, careen off curbs and screech to a halt, but the prevailing public sentiment is, "They're round, black and have tread. Beyond that, who cares?"

With gas prices now hovering around \$3, smart drivers care. Savvy consumers are seeking to increase fuel economy and the life of their tires by paying more attention to those rubber objects that are attached to their vehicle.

It's not important that most people still aren't aware that today's tires are scientific marvels, holding up under extreme heat and freezing conditions, cruising over pavement, rocks, dirt, water, snow, mud, gravel and all sorts of road hazards.

It is worth noting, though, that these high-tech tires, with their advanced tread designs, sidewalls, belts and compounds, are beginning to garner more public attention as gas prices escalate.

Tires that are underinflated by 6 to 7 pounds per square inch increase tire rolling resistance 10 percent or more, increase tread wear rates and tire fatigue. When a tire is underinflated, the tire's road contact zone and cyclic stress level changes resulting in undesirable loss in tire and vehicle performance.

To prevent the above, we recommend the following in maintaining proper inflation level (a vehicle's proper inflation level can be found either on the door or on a placard in the glove box) and in checking tire wear:

- Check tire inflation pressure (including the spare) at least once a month and before every long trip. Tires must be checked when they are cold; that is, before they have been run a mile.
- Tires should be rotated at least every 6,000-8,000 miles and the alignment should be checked once a year. Misaligned tires can cause the car to drag, which lowers mileage and causes unnecessary tire wear.
- At least once a month, motorists should inspect the tires closely for signs of uneven wear. Uneven wear patterns may be caused by improper inflation pressures, misalignment, improper balance or suspension neglect. If not corrected, further tire damage will occur.

Nearly ninety percent of drivers don't check their tire inflation properly. However, this percentage is starting to drop as gas prices underinflate consumer pocketbooks.

With escalating fuel prices, the time is now for drivers to focus on simple things like proper tire pressure to maximize tire performance and increase fuel economy.

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