



Ralph Seekins

I was recently talking with a friend who purchased a new set of tires for his car and I told him to make sure he drove carefully during the break-in period. He got this quizzical look on his face and told me he had never heard of such a thing. I'll bet you haven't either. So let's talk about it.

Take a look at a tire cutaway diagram on the internet. You'll find that it's made up of things like rubber, fabric, steel belts, and bead wire. They are all bonded together under heat (between 130F up to 250F depending on manufacturer and tire type) and pressure in a process called vulcanization.

When the new tire comes out of the vulcanization machine a release lubricant is sometimes applied to prevent it from sticking to the mold.

Break in your new tires

Some of that lubricant stays on the tire and, until it is worn away, it can cause the tire to be a bit more slippery than the one it is replacing. So, some care should be taken when accelerating, driving around sharp turns or stopping quickly until the lubricant has had some time to wear off the surface and migrate out of the inside levels of the tread. A few trips down a gravel road many times does the trick.

Another factor to remember is that deeper (or higher) tread doesn't let the tire respond as quickly as one where the tread has worn down. It's what's known in the industry as "tread squirm." That's one of the reasons you'll notice that NASCAR race cars tires have no tread whatsoever. And it's also the reason autocross racer tires have very little tread on them. No squirm and more contact with the surface makes a tire respond to input quicker and more efficiently.

So, in many ways, those new tires on your vehicle provide greater safety for you and your family on the road. But, be aware that they may

not respond exactly like the ones you just took off – even if they are the same brand and model. Just keep in mind that, to be at your safest, you should expect new tires to require about a 500 mile break-in period before they reach optimum performance.

Oh, and, by the way, now is the time to plan on installing your winter tires. According to Alaska law, North of 60 degrees latitude (just south of Soldotna), you can install studded tires after September 15th and keep them on until April 30th. South of 60 degrees latitude you can install studded tires after September 30th through April 14th. An exception is that on a paved portion of the Sterling Highway, a person may not operate a motor vehicle with studded tires from May 1st through September 15th, inclusive.

Best wishes for safe driving for you and yours. See you right here next week!

Ralph Seekins has more than 43 years' experience in the automotive industry. He started as a mechanic, worked in sales, and for the past 37 years, has been the owner of Seekins Ford Lincoln.