

How old are your tires and why does it matter?



Ralph Seekins

Tires, in my opinion, are the most important part on your vehicle. They control the vehicle's ability to safely turn, stop, and accelerate. And nothing can be more dangerous than a high speed blowout.

Everyone knows it's time to replace tires when the tread wears down to the wear bar. But, at the same time, almost nobody pays attention to the age of that same tire. And, the most common question we hear when we ask someone how old the tires on their vehicle are is: "Well, what difference does that make? It still looks pretty good to me. No cracks, no bald spots, and lots of tread left."

So, today, let's talk about the perils of driving on older tires – even those that haven't spent a single day rolling down the road.

Over time, tire rubber rots – most often from the inside out. So, the older the tire on your vehicle,

the greater the safety hazard it becomes, even if it looks like it should last a few more years. The older the tire is, the more prone it becomes to sidewall blowout or tread separation. A tragic example comes from an event from 2008 where a driver bought a used tire for his vehicle rather than spending the money for a new one. Two weeks later, the tread separated while traveling down the road. The vehicle went out of control and hit a motorcycle – killing the rider. It was later found that the used tire was nearly 10 years old.

My wife and I decided to haul a trailer load up the Alaska Highway a few years back. I knew the trailer tires were older. But, I decided to take a chance and, against my better judgment, we hit the road. By the time we got to Fairbanks, three of the four tires had blown out – two sidewall blowouts and one tread separation. The tires were a little more than 10 years old but all had great tread and looked really good on the surface.

So, if you want to know just how old a tire might be, those made after 2000 have a four-digit DOT code on the sidewall that will tell you. The first two numbers represent the

week of the year while the last two reveal the year of manufacture. A DOT number of 1113 tells us the tire was made the 11th week of 2013. Tires made before 2000 have a three digit code. The first two tell us the week it was made and the third digit is the last number of the year of manufacture. So a third number of 9, for example could mean either 1999 or 1989. My advice – don't buy a tire with a three digit code no matter how good it looks and, if there is one on your vehicle, replace it as soon as possible.

Finally, my best advice – for maximum safety - is never buy a used tire; make sure any new tire you buy hasn't been sitting on the shelf for years; and replace your vehicle's tires at least every six years regardless of how good they might look. I learned my own lesson. I hope you never have a similar experience.

If you have any questions, please feel free to stop by our QuickLane Tire and Auto Center for a free, no obligation consultation.

Ralph Seekins has more than 42 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.