

MOTORS

SPECIAL AUTOMOTIVE SUPPLEMENT

Time for tires?

Buying basics for tire shoppers

It's one of the most important vehicle-related purchases you can make, yet a whopping 62 percent of women and nearly half of all men think it's difficult, according to a recent survey. What is this process that so many American car owners consider a hassle? Buying new tires.

"Most people barely have time to do what they need to do every day, let alone find extra time to shop for tires, but driving on worn-out tires is a safety hazard and replacing them should be a priority," says Lauren Fix, the "Car Coach," a nationally recognized automotive expert who travels the country talking to people about their cars.

Though close to 85 percent of American women are responsible for the maintenance of their vehicles, many don't know when it's time to buy new tires or what they need to know to buy the right ones for their cars, the national survey by TireBuyer.com revealed. The survey also showed that 21 percent of men admit they don't know as much as they think they should about buying tires.

For all those American motorists who aren't sure when their vehicle needs new tires and how to go about purchasing them when it does, Fix offers a few simple tips:

A penny really can save "One penny can spare you a dangerous blowout," Fix says. It's a tried and true test of tire tread - stand a penny on its edge in a tread groove. Make sure Abe's head is pointing down, into the tire tread. If you can see the top of his hair or any of the

penny background above his head, it's time to replace your tires. If you can't see the hair on top of his head, your tire treads should still be OK to drive on. And remember, tires don't wear evenly so repeat the test on several spots on the tire.

Keep the manufacturer's advice in mind

Most manufacturers will give you an estimated amount of miles their tires will be safe for. Be sure you know what their recommendation is for your tires and vehicle, and keep a close eye on tire tread depth as you approach that mileage limit. If you're buying a used vehicle, be sure to have your mechanic check the tire treads and find out from the current owner when he or she last replaced the tires.

Well-cared-for tires are safer tires

The quality and condition of your vehicle's tires directly affect your safety on the road. Visually inspect tires at least once a month, looking for excessive or uneven tread wear, cracks or bulges on the sidewalls or tread, tread separation, and signs of punctures, or nails, screws, glass or stones imbedded in the treads.

Check for proper inflation at least once a month. Under-inflation is the leading cause of tire failure, and can impact how your car handles and its fuel efficiency.

Refer to your vehicle's owner's manual or the sticker on the inside of your car's door jamb for proper tire pressure.

Exceeding passenger and cargo load ranges is the second leading cause of tire failure. Check the code on

your tire's sidewall and your owner's manual for the maximum load range for your vehicle and don't exceed that range.

Finally, replacing all four tires at the same time ensures maximum safety, performance and efficiency.

What to do when it's time to buy

Go online. The TireBuyer.com survey showed that both men and women like the idea of buying tires online, citing the convenience, ease of purchase and the opportunity to see prices before buying in a pressure-free environment. Online purchasing is also appealing, survey respondents said, because they can instantly view the selection that would fit their car. They also liked the ability to have the tires shipped free from TireBuyer.com to the certified dealer of their choice.

The easy-to-navigate site allows buyers to browse from an inventory of more than 3 million tires and wheels, narrow their search to products that fit their car, and use 3-D imaging to see how any tire or wheel combination will look on their vehicle.

Once they choose a tire, they can purchase online and pay for the tires and installation - done by the certified local tire dealer of their choice.

"Driving around on worn-out tires isn't safe," says Fix. "Tires are the only point of contact cars have with the road. If you want to keep your car longer than usual because of the economy, then the best investment you can make is regular maintenance and buying new tires when you need them."



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