

Proactive tire care makes life easier for vehicle and safer for you

BY TOM TRACEY
Special to the Record-Eagle

We tend to ignore tires, but a vehicle will go nowhere if neglected — or worse yet — go somewhere unexpected.

“It’s very important to match the type of car and style of driving,” said Lon Kinney, owner of Kinney’s Complete Auto Service in Traverse City.

“Decide if you want a tire for year-round use or seasonal driving, or for performance or ride comfort.”

Garth Story, general manager of Tire Factory in Traverse City, advised customers to compare price with quality.

“It pays to shop around, comparing qualities such as tread wear rating, traction rating and temperature rating,” he said.

Mike Thompson, tire/service advisor at Auto Service Center in Traverse City, said, “We talk to customers first to find out what their driving needs are, what they can afford.”

Features

When shopping for tires, a

buyer is faced with many decisions. Hard or soft tread compound? Low-profile silhouette or high-clearance design?

Entry-level or premium lines?

“Hard compounds are normally less traction but more miles, while soft compounds are normally more traction but less miles,” said Kinney.

“High clearance tires provide a softer ride,” said Story, “however, most vehicle manufacturers are issuing low profile tires for original equipment. This trend satisfies mostly cosmetic, but (also) some performance desires, such as cornering and higher-speed driving.”

He added, “Higher price does not necessarily mean higher quality. Some lower-priced tires are better than some of the major brand tires.”

Deciphering codes

On most passenger tires, the letters and numbers stamped on the sidewall reveal much about the tire itself. For example, a tire stamped P215/70

R15 refers to a passenger tire, 215 millimeters wide, with a height 70 percent of the width, radial construction and a wheel diameter of 15 inches.

Another set of codes stamped on the sidewall grade the tire in government tests for tread wear, traction and temperature. Tread wear is based on an average score of 100, so a tire rated 200 would wear twice as long as average.

Traction is rated as a tire’s ability to stop on wet pavement. A rating of A, B or C is given, with A for best, B for good and C for acceptable. Temperature — which is the tire’s resistance to destructive heat generation — is also given an A, B or C rating.

Two of the most important numbers on the tire are the load rating and maximum cold inflation. Since tires need to support the weight of the vehicle plus any passengers and cargo, the load rating must be respected. As for inflation, running a tire with lower air pressure than designed can

overheat the tire, causing accelerated wear and heat disintegration.

Local conditions

Here in northern Lower Michigan — where snowfalls can be twice as heavy as downstate — both Story and Thompson recommend customers install a set of soft compound, high-traction tires in the winter to ensure safe driving over ice, sleet and snow.

“Choose a tire with more sipes (crosscuts in tread) and a narrow tread face,” said Story. “This combination of qualities should perform well in this area.”

“Goodyear Ultra Grip is a good choice,” said Thompson.

As spring and summer roll around, many local residents find themselves taking more road trips, pulling recreational trailers or visiting distant job sites. Miles can add up quickly and tire replacement becomes an issue.

“Out of our 13 lines, Dayton is the tire for most customer’s

needs,” said Kinney.

Story recommends Nokian brand tires, saying, “They offer softer compounds, more sipes, great mileage and improved ride.”

Making tires last

How can you help your tires last longer?

“By watching air pressure, having alignment checked and having tires rotated regularly,” said Kinney.

“Rotating tires every 5,000-6,000 miles is critical to extending tread life,” said Story. “With extreme weather changes, air pressure plays a large role in the life of tires, and should be checked every one to two months. Re-balance tires every 10,000 miles to help ensure even tread wear, and make sure the vehicle is mechanically sound,” he said.

Thompson agreed: “A dragging slide on a brake caliper can put wear on a tire, and potholes can knock a car out of alignment. Loose parts like idlers and tie rod ends can affect tire wear, too.”

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