

MY OLD TIRES

I'm sure this isn't the first time you've read about tire aging, but let me tell you what I've learned.

Is it time to replace your tires?

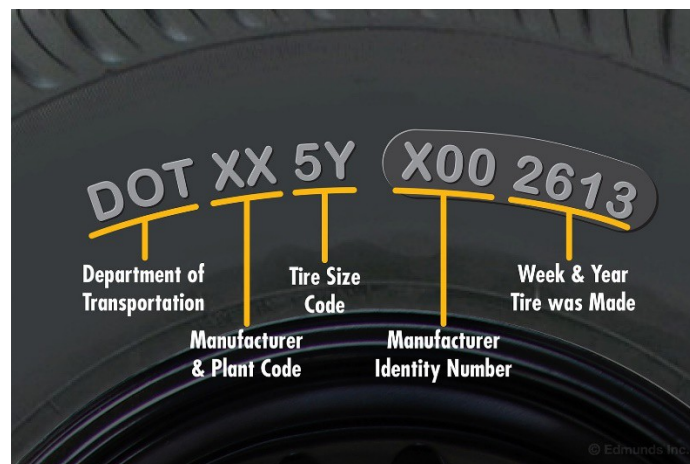
Most collector car owners don't wear their tires down to the point that the tread depth indicates needed replacement. Wearing down from the original depth of 10/32 to a replacement depth of 2/32 takes daily driving and/or long trips, which of course, also requires a dedication to overall vehicle maintenance for road worthiness on our old cars. My bet is that most of us occasionally face the issue of "timed out" tires which still have sufficient tread depth.

How old is old?

If you read the recommendations from tire manufacturers or Tire Rack, you'll see suggestions for tire replacement at 6 to 10 years old. *Wait a minute! I've heard about ten years, but not 6 years!* As Edmunds.com has reported, Safety Research & Strategies, Inc. have "identified over 250 incidents in which tires older than six years have experienced tread and belt separations — most resulting in loss-of-control and rollover crashes. These incidents were the cause of 233 fatalities and 300 injuries in 2012." And before I could say "yeah, but..." for puttering around in our old classics, there are conditions that might shorten those durations, but none that extend them. So even for a light-weight car driven infrequently and parked in a garage, the clock (calendar) is ticking.

Tire Age

Just as tread depth doesn't tell the aging story, neither does their lack of sidewall or tread cracks. Tires have the date of manufacturing on the sidewall, as shown in the illustration from Edmunds.com, below. Since 2000, the 4-digit code indicates the week and year that the tire was made. Before that, the year was indicated by a single digit. So the big question is...Do you know when the tires on your car were made? And don't be shocked that this date is over a year earlier than when you bought the tires as "specialty" low-volume tires that may be only produced once a year.



The Date Code Isn't a Freshness Date on a Loaf of Bread

Let's assume that your tires show no obvious failings: cracking on the shoulder, sidewall or tread, tread separation, or sidewall bubbles and the like; let's say they look perfect. You even keep them properly inflated. And it seems like you just bought them, um, *Geez, how did I lose an entire decade of time?* Yep, I'm old, the car is old and now the tires are old too. Now is when

Denial (with a Capital D) kicks in: *“But surely they’re really good enough to drive on as little as I do!”* Well, not so much. Even if we can avoid catastrophic failure, the rubber compound gets harder over time, so the ability of the tread to deform, or grip the uneven road, diminishes. (Which is also the main reason why a summer tire loses grip in cold weather- it loses its flexibility.)

Oh, You’re Just Selling Tires...

Let’s remind ourselves why we like driving in the Asheville area: hills, curves, and moderate weather allowing for 12 months of driving. What we don’t like are pavement chinks, loose gravel, an abundance of rainfall and wet autumn leaves on blind curves. Oh, and deer. *Oh, so you remember that close call?* And look at it this way- your SUV probably has 1½“more tread width that your LBC (and about 500 more safety features too). New tires offer bolt-on modern technology for any car; *today’s tires can last for more miles than a 1960-era car itself.* And that fact can lull us into keeping them too long. But if we want to improve the handling of the car, updating the tires is far easier than installing new springs, shocks, bushings, tie rod ends and brakes and it’s one of the few jobs where our egos don’t get in the way, because we’re *expected* to have a tire store do all the work. A new set of sticky tires: *Safety Fast!*

Aren’t you longing for new tires like Ms. O’Keeffe?



Alfred Steiglitz

Do It Now

We’re always looking for an excuse to do something on our car. Check your schedule, but you probably have the time available. Go ahead, get a good flashlight, your bifocals and (depending on the condition of your knees) kneel down, stoop or sit on your shop stool and check the date. And don’t forget the spare in the boot. Then do some research on Tire Rack or Consumer Reports and give a tire store a call. You’ll be glad you did, just as I was.

I’ll leave you with two excellent references, one from Edmunds and the second is a source referenced in the Edmunds article.

How Old — and Dangerous — Are Your Tires? *Do Car Tires Have a Shelf Life?*

<https://www.edmunds.com/car-maintenance/how-old-and-dangerous-are-your-tires.html>

Safety Research & Strategies, Inc.

<https://www.safetyresearch.net/tire-safety>

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BCCWNC, Spurious V8 and MG Club, FBCC.