

## TIRES: TRAFFIC SAFETY TIPS

Buying new tires can be confusing. A major influence on tire life is how the tire is used, your driving style, the type of car you drive, where you drive and the tire maintenance you perform regularly. There are, however, several things you can do to select the best tires and take care of them.

### How to Buy the Right Tires

You need to know the right size, type, and tread.

**SIZE:** The vehicle owner's manual or the label inside the glove box,

### INSIDE

- Traffic Safety Tips
- Maintenance & Driving Tips
- Auto Safety Hotline



U.S. Department of Transportation  
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

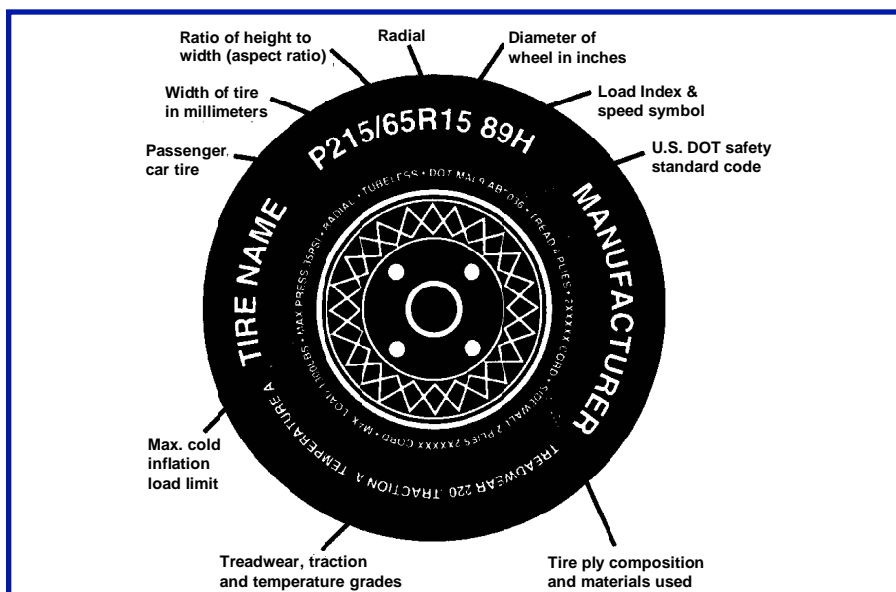
or on the door post, will give you the proper tire size. This is important information, because putting an undersized tire on your car can overheat or overload the tire, while an oversized tire can rub parts of the car.

**TYPE:** This information is listed in the owner's manual or a dealer can tell you the type of tires your vehicle needs. Almost all vehicles today come equipped with radial tires. Generally, radial tires provide better performance and durability. The other types of tires available are bias-ply and bias-belted.

**TREAD:** There are several kinds of treads. "Mud and snow" tires (with the m+s symbol) are all-season tires, capable of providing good traction in snow, slush, rain, and mud. "Snow" tires are for areas with heavy or frequent snowfall. Standard highway treads are for normal driving conditions. Ask your tire dealer for advice on the best tread for your type of driving.

### Tire Quality Grading

All tires must meet Federal safety standards. In addition, all new vehicle tires, except snow tires, temporary-use spares, and tires for off-road use, have three ratings on a paper label and molded on the tire sidewall. These ratings are treadwear, traction, and temperature resistance. (See figure 1.) The grading system is designed to help buyers make relative comparisons among tires. It is not a safety rating and not a guarantee



▲ Figure 1. How to read a tire sidewall. Courtesy: Tire Industry Safety Council.

# ABOUT TIRES

## TRAFFIC SAFETY TIPS

that a tire will last for a prescribed number of miles or perform a certain way. It simply gives tire buyers additional information to combine with other considerations, such as price, brand loyalty, and dealer recommendations.

Tire quality grades can be used to pick the best tire for your needs. Grades are assigned by manufacturers after performing tests designed by the government. **All tire dealers are required to provide you with a booklet explaining these grades and showing the grades of the tires they sell.**

**TREADWEAR:** The treadwear grade lets you compare how long different tires would last if driven by the same driver under the same road conditions and if the tire is maintained properly. A tire

rated 100 will last approximately twice as long as one rated 50.

**TRACTION:** The traction rating, scored A, B, or C, tells you how well the tires can stop your vehicle on wet roads. An "A" has the best traction. (See figure 1.)

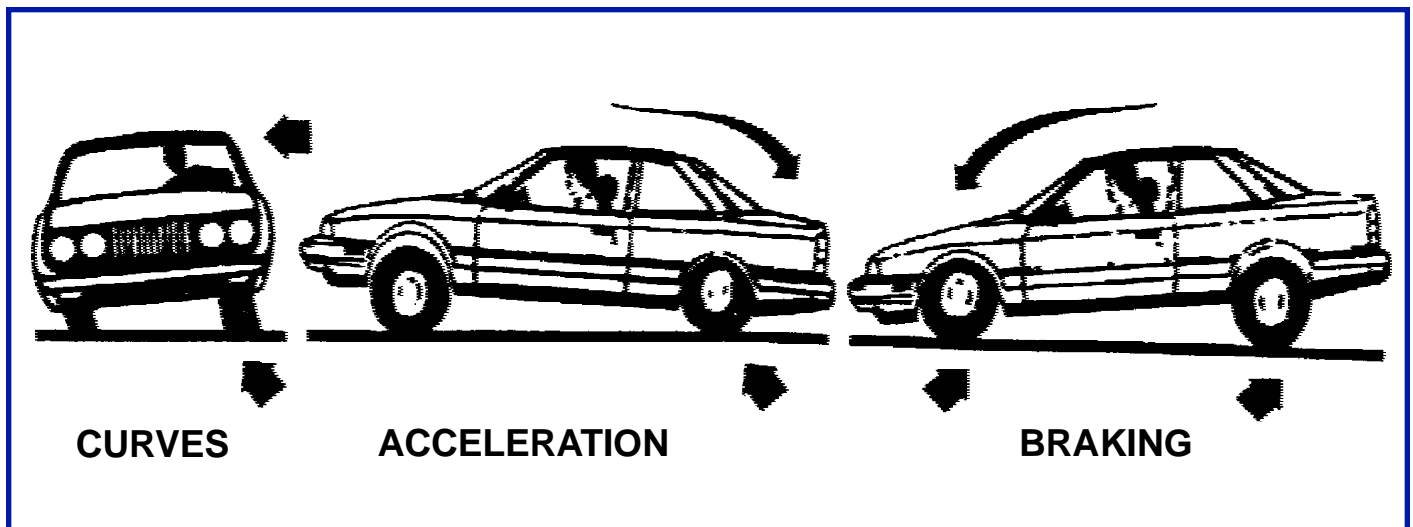
**TEMPERATURE RESISTANCE:** This rating, also scored A, B, or C, measures how well the tire will resist overheating during sustained high speed use. In general, the lower the running temperature, the less likely the tire will fail. A tire graded "A" represents the best performance, and is better than a "B" tire.

*A Consumer Guide to Uniform Tire Quality Grading, is available free from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. This guide lists the grades of all*

tires and will help you compare various brands. To obtain a copy, write to NHTSA, General Services Division (NAD-51), 400 7th Street, S.W., Washington, D.C., 20590.

## When You Buy Tires

Your new tires should be registered so that you can be reached if a safety defect is found. Ask your tire dealer for a tire registration form to send back to the manufacturer--in certain cases, the dealer will register the tires for you. In the event you receive a defect notification letter, go to your dealer for inspection or free replacement of the tire. ■



▲ Figure 2. The worst tire stresses occur during hard cornering, fast starts, and fast stops. Courtesy: Tire Industry Safety Council.

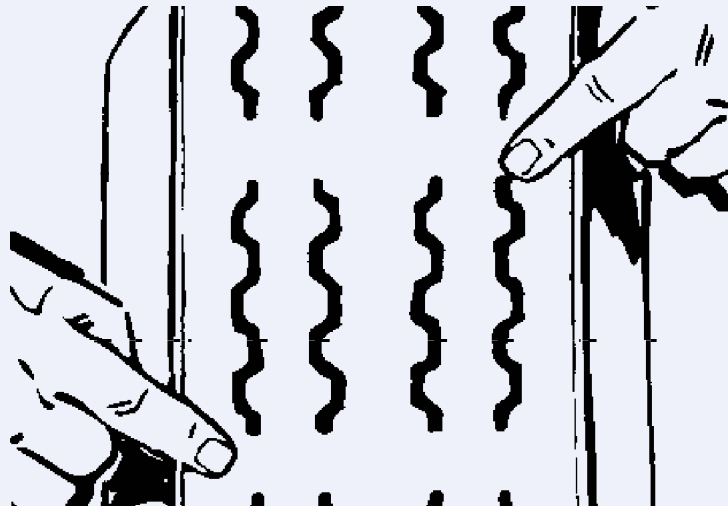
# MAINTENANCE & DRIVING TIPS

✓ **Maintain the proper air pressure in the tires. Check pressure every week for routine driving. Also, check pressure before making any long trips.** Measure the pressure when the tires are cold.

✓ **Keep your tires at the recommended inflation pressure.** This can be found in your owner's manual or on the label either in the glove box or near the door latch on the driver's side. The maximum inflation pressure is shown on the side of the tire. With the recommended air pressure, tires will last longer and be less likely to fail, and the car will use less fuel. Serious injury may result from tire failure because of underflation or overloading.

✓ **When you check tire pressure, make sure there is enough tread on the tire to operate safely and that the tires are wearing normally.** All grooves should be visible and deep enough to at least touch the top of Lincoln's head on a penny.

Look for even wear. If you see the treadwear warning bars across the tire--it's time to



▲ Figure 3. Treadwear Warning Bars.

Courtesy: Tire Industry Safety Council.

replace that tire. Bald tires are unsafe. (See Figure 3.)

✓ **If some spots on the tire seem to be wearing faster than others, see your service station or mechanic.** You could have misaligned wheels, worn shock absorbers, or other potential problems.

✓ **Make sure your wheels are balanced and aligned properly.**

✓ **Avoid "jack rabbit" starts and stops and fast, tire-screaming turns.**

✓ **Never overload your car.** Your car and tires are designed to operate safely only up to their load limits. These limits are shown in your owner's manual and on the certification plate on the edge of the driver's door.

# IF YOU THINK YOUR MOTOR VEHICLE HAS A SAFETY PROBLEM, WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

## AUTO SAFETY HOTLINE (800) 424-9393

If you think that your vehicle has a safety problem, you can assist the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) by completing and mailing back the Vehicle Owner's Questionnaire (VOQ) included with this fact sheet, or calling the Auto Safety Hotline.

The toll-free Hotline number, (800) 424-9393, can be reached from anywhere in the United States. If you are calling from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, the number is (202) 366-0123. A Spanish-speaking operator is available weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Eastern time. The Hotline is available to the hearing impaired through a teleprinter (TTY) number, (800) 424-9153. In the Washington, D.C. area the TTY number is (202) 366-7800.

If it is determined that a safety defect exists, the manufacturer

has to fix the problem at no cost to the owner.

If there are any documents relevant to your case, including copies of repair bills and letters to the manufacturer, attach them to your completed VOQ.

If you are not sure of any information requested in the VOQ, leave the box blank. But we must have the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) to process your questionnaire. The VIN is a 17-digit number that can be seen through the front windshield on the driver's side of the dash-

board. When reporting a tire problem, the DOT identification (located on the sidewall) is needed.

The VOQ asks if you authorize NHTSA to provide a copy of your report to the manufacturer. If so, check YES on the VOQ and sign and date it. When we send the report to the manufacturer, it often results in a satisfactory solution of individual problems. But NHTSA cannot *order* corrective action unless the vehicle or item of equipment is determined to have a defect and a safety recall campaign is conducted.

Check out our home page for information on a variety of vehicle safety topics.  
<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/>





