



COMMERCIAL FLEET TIRE DIGEST

*The authoritative guide to reducing commercial tire expenditures from
Pressure Systems International,
the manufacturer of the Meritor Tire Inflation System by PSI™*

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Truck Drivers and Tires

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to setup your
Tires 101
Class for
Drivers/
Mechanics

Drivers certainly can play an enormous role in how long tires last; and with tire companies continuing to raise prices on a regular basis due to the soaring costs of natural rubber and the oil based raw materials, tires will continue to be the #1 maintenance cost for fleets. Tire education, especially in light of these escalating costs, is absolutely critical for any fleet.

I made an effort over the holidays to visit my local truck stop several times for morning coffee and to chat with drivers about tires. Since all drivers are tire experts, it made for very interesting conversation.

Owner/Operators have a completely different mindset when it comes to tires versus the company driver. The cost of tires for an O/O is substantial since they are only purchasing a few tires at a time, so they typically pay top dollar. Additionally, when those dollars come out of your own pocket, you want the best value for your money. Owner-Operators base their tire purchase decisions on cost/mile or miles/32". Initial tire buying price is important, but O/O's fully understand that a low cost/mile is the better way to make the decision about which tires to purchase. During my trips to the truck stops I did not find even one O/O that bought the lowest price tire for his rig. However, I suspect if he or she is having a difficult time making ends meet, then the lowest price tire may be the only option for their short-term survival.

I asked all the drivers that I met a very simple question during our conversations...assuming that the cost/mile for individual tire brands was equal, which tire would you purchase? Every driver had their own "theory" as to why they like one brand over another....better traction, better miles, less prone to irregular wear. All of these are great reasons to pick one tire brand over another, but drivers forget some important facts: (1) Tires can perform very differently depending on the vehicle make/model (2) The route & load will affect tire performance as well and (3) Irregular wear can just as easily be caused by vehicle alignment issues as it can because the tire brand is somehow deficient. So, if irregular wear is obvious on individual units, fleets and O/O's need to look beyond just whether a particular brand might be right for their operation.

Owner-Operators tend to baby their tires much more than company drivers. Some O/O told me that they rotate their tires on a regular basis and check air pressures every morning. Fleets seldom rotate tires and checking pressures may occur only during a PM.

For fleets employing company drivers, a great idea would be to put on a Tires 101 course for them on a regular basis, not only on the first day that they join your company. Drivers know which tires have the best traction in the rain and snow; and their early input in identifying irregular wear can save your company big dollars. Getting your drivers' input on how tires are performing is critical to making intelligent tire purchase decisions.

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Q&A PSI ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

Q. Some of my trailer tires last 200,000 miles and are worn smooth & evenly when I take them out of service but other trailer tires barely make it to 100,000 and they have cupping and depressed wear. What can I do to get all my trailer tires to last 200K?

A. There are many factors that lead to irregular wear in trailer tires. One of the biggest reasons is that trailers have variable loads..they may go out fully loaded and during the day the loads become lighter. When tires are lightly loaded they tend to bounce up and down the highway which leads to uneven wear. Of course, low inflation pressure will also lead to severe irregular wear. Low tire pressure is a huge issue for trailers since trailers do not typically return back to the shop to be checked on a regular basis.