



How old can tyres be before it is wise to change them?

Over time the suppleness of the rubber reduces so that by around 7 to 8 years old the ageing effect on the rubber will have reduced the flexibility of the rubber to something that begins to have characteristics similar to that of wood with consequent adverse effects on handling and ride. For most classic car enthusiasts doing modest annual mileages this will inevitably mean the tyres age well before they wear out. For many it will feel wrong to throw away tyres which appear to have plenty of tread remaining but with a high performance car which has a suspension package from an earlier age, good dry and wet grip and braking performance are essential together with supple rubber for a comfortable ride. But the age effect does not only affect the tread, the tyre walls also age and fine cracks can develop in tyres over 10 or 12 years old.

So be prepared for a tyre change well before 10 years and preferably at 7 or 8 years from new. If you are offered "brand new" tyres that have been in dark storage for a year or more and are claimed by the supplier to be "as good as new", then walk away as they will not be a wise purchase. Sadly there are reports that a few traders and service providers seem not only unaware of the age effect but either state, or by implication, recommend relatively unworn tyres over 10 years old as serviceable. In one case a trader insisted tyres well over 18 years old he was offering were "perfect and safe to use"!

Remember your classic car Insurance policy will include a condition that you maintain your car in a roadworthy condition – tyres well over their prudent service life may well be regarded as not meeting that condition and in the event of your making a claim, a vehicle inspection by an insurance assessor may well note that in their report and the insurer may regard that as a breach of the policy and decline to pay out.

See also the ROSPA advice on tyre ageing:

www.rospa.com/roadsafety/adviceandinformation/vehiclesafety/tyresafety/tyres-information.aspx#aging

How can I tell how old my tyres are?

The tyre sidewall markings have an elongated circle within which is the date of manufacture – week number and year. The E4 marking is an ECE type approval mark which demonstrates the tyre has been tested as high quality by the European Regulatory Authorities. All tyres for use in



the USA have the DOT code as required by the US Department of Transport (DOT). It specifies the company, factory, mould, batch, and date of production - 2 digits for the week of the year plus 2 digits for the year; or 2 digits for the month of the year plus 1 digit for the year for tyres made prior to 2000. So in the example above the 0508 indicates that tyre was made in the fifth week of 2008.

Case study: 18 year old tyres offered as serviceable

A relatively new owner of a classic MG reported he had purchased four new Michelin Pilots that he found for sale at an MG garage. He said "they assured me that they have been stored in the dark, show no signs of perishing and are perfectly safe to use." So he bought them but then found the tyre sidewall marking indicated they were manufactured 18 years ago. He added "advice from several MG enthusiasts has been the trader's assurances are not wise and that I shouldn't have purchased them, but also the garage should not have sold them. Any views?" A fellow MG enthusiast commented "the tyres are probably not fit for the purpose they were sold for, especially on a high performance car" Another enthusiast commented he had bought an MG which "came with a spare that had obviously never been on the car. So it had been stored in the dark for a similar time to these Pilots. The upper side of the tyre looked OK, but the lower had cracks in the sidewalls. Taking them back is the best advice."

The purchaser sought the advice of Michelin who replied saying "Michelin recommendations are that unused tyres over 5 years old should not be put into service and tyres fitted to a vehicle be removed 10 years from the date of manufacture. After ten years, the properties of the rubber start to deteriorate and therefore despite the fact the tyre may look in good condition, we would recommend its removal and replacement. The DOT you quoted is for 1993 which would make your tyres 18 years old." The original purchaser of the aged Pilots later

reported "many thanks for all the advice, full refund received, but they maintain they are fit for purpose and have them for sale again!"

Case study: 16 year old tyres good for 80mph!

An "hi-end" motor trader's advert for a low mileage MG RV8 manufactured in 1995 said "this car has its full set of original factory supplied tyres . . . but through lack of use one or two of the tyres have developed a 'flat spot' which makes it feel like a wheel is out of balance at about 80 mph, however this may well disappear once the car gets some mileage under its wheels!" Then "as you would expect of a car with this ownership and mileage . . . there is absolutely nothing wrong with this car in terms of its mechanical condition. Most certainly if you have not driven one of these before you will be very surprised at how fast (and slightly dangerous) they are to drive!" An MG enthusiast with an RV8 noted "using 16 year old tyres on such a powerful car, especially at high speeds (and as stated by the dealer, above the legal limit), can lead to a disaster. He also mentions that if you have not driven one of these cars before then it may be surprisingly fast and slightly dangerous? It definitely will be more than slightly dangerous on those tyres! I think this dealer has made very irresponsible statements and should know better!"

Fortunately cases like this are rare but the confidence with which these traders recommend old tyres as safe and suitable for high speeds on a powerful sports car is truly astonishing. Go to a reputable MG specialist or tyre fitter for replacement tyre advice for a classic car is the best advice and don't continue to drive on old tyres even if there seems to be plenty of tread left – wet and dry grip, braking performance and ride comfort can be seriously compromised by old rubber. Tyre walls can develop cracks and fail too. With most classic cars with modest annual mileages, the tyre will age faster than it wears so routine replacement at 7 to 10 year intervals is necessary.