

Calgary Herald

Tire pressure survey reveals sobering facts

Fri Jun 4 2010

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Section: Driving.Ca

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Column: On The Road

Source: Calgary Herald

Illustrations: Colour Photo: Courtesy, Greg Williams / Measuring tire air pressure is as simple as removing the valve stem cap, pressing the tire gauge firmly onto the valve, and removing it. The sliding scale at the end provides the reading.

This isn't good news. A recent national study commissioned by the Rubber Association of Canada shows Calgarians are quite frankly lousy at maintaining proper tire inflation. In fact, the statistics are downright depressing.

According to the study, the number of vehicles with at least one tire under-or over-inflated was highest in this city -- 67 per cent versus 49 per cent nationally.

As well, the number of vehicles with at least one tire underinflated by 20 per cent or more, which is a hazardous condition, was higher in Calgary than the national average -- 13 per cent versus 10 per cent across Canada.

And, the number of drivers who incorrectly use the air pressure stamped on their tires' sidewalls to determine inflation pressure, or who don't know how to determine the correct inflation pressure for their tires, was also highest in Calgary -- 61 per cent versus 35 per cent nationally.

Yikes. So, what's the problem?

"Tires are not a sexy subject," says Gilles Pacquette, communications manager for the Rubber Association of Canada.

"They're round, they're black, and they're not failing all over the place.

"Tires are a well-engineered product that will take some abuse, and they're not something people think about too much."

That being said, the survey, which was conducted by DesRosiers Automotive Consultants, did find that more drivers across the country are currently paying better attention to their tires.

For example, as noted, the survey found that nationally 49 per cent of the vehicles inspected had at least one tire that was under-or over-inflated. In 2003, a similar Rubber Association driver survey found that 71 per cent of vehicles tested had one or more improperly inflated tire.

Late in 2009, teams of engineering students helped conduct the survey, interviewing motorists, taking tire pressure readings and measuring tread depth as drivers visited service stations in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Sherbrooke and Fredericton.

"Obviously," Pacquette says, "we need to put more

emphasis on partnership and education and try and get the message out."

That message is 'be tire smart and play your PART', an acronym that stands for Pressure, Alignment, Rotation and Tread. Basically, all four elements are critical in maintaining a level of road safety, fuel efficiency and environmental protection.

"Properly inflated tires deliver the exceptional performance that tire makers want every consumer to have," says Glenn Maidment, president of the Rubber Association of Canada.

"Drivers need to know that improperly inflated tires increase stopping distance; lessen vehicle stability, particularly when cornering; waste fuel and shorten tire life.

"All it takes to get the outstanding performance your tires are designed to deliver is a reliable tire gauge and five minutes each month to measure and, if necessary, adjust your tire pressures."

According to Pacquette, it's possible to save two to three per cent on a fuel bill and potentially get an extra 15,000 kilometres from a set of tires simply by maintaining tire air pressure.

There are two main things to know about tire air pressure. First, is how to properly use an air gauge, and second, where to look for the correct tire pressure for a particular vehicle.

"I had a guy in Toronto take an air pressure gauge and literally poke the tire with it -- he had no idea what to do with it," Pacquette says. "While that sounds funny because I'm in the industry, there are people who don't know how to use one."

If you don't know how to use an inflation gauge, ask someone who does to show you how. It's simple, and it doesn't take long to check all four tires. A tire that is underinflated can be topped up with air at a local service station, or invest in an inexpensive small-capacity compressor from Canadian Tire.

The Rubber Association provided these four steps to ensure proper tire inflation.

-Step One: Find the recommended inflation pressure for your tires on the vehicle placard. Check the owner's manual for its exact location.

-Step Two: Remember to only measure pressure when the tires are cold. If you have been driving,

wait three hours before measuring tire pressure.

-Step Three: Use a tire gauge when measuring pressure. Remove the cap from the valve stem, press the tire gauge onto the valve and take the pressure reading.

-Step Four: Add air until the recommended air pressure is achieved (continue to take readings with your pressure gauge). If you overfill the tire, release air by pushing on the metal stem in the centre of the valve, then re-check the pressure.

Let's help ensure the next time there's a tire inflation study, Calgary does better.

Have an auto related item to share for the column or What's Next? Contact Greg Williams at 403-287-1067 or gregwilliams@shaw.ca.

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