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Canadians getting message on tire inflation

The Hamilton Spectator

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The number of cars rolling on improperly inflated tires has fallen dramatically since 2003, advancing both road safety and fuel efficiency, according to a comprehensive study released by the Rubber Association of Canada.

The study, conducted for the RAC by DesRosiers Automotive Consultants, found that 49 per cent of the vehicles inspected had at least one tire that was under- or overinflated.

In 2003, a similar RAC driver survey found that 71 per cent of vehicles tested had one or more improperly inflated tire. The percentage of drivers with one or more tires severely underinflated by 20 per cent or more, a potentially hazardous condition, also declined significantly to 10 per cent from 23 per cent in 2003.

The survey's not-so-good news is that fewer Canadian drivers (30 per cent versus 39 per cent in 2003) are taking monthly measurements to ensure their tires are inflated to the vehicle manufacturer's recommendation, a practice that is critical to ensuring optimum tire safety, performance and fuel efficiency.

The RAC attributed the rising number of vehicles with properly inflated tires to the dramatic upswing in winter tire changeovers in recent years, public education about the fuel efficiency benefits of proper tire inflation and the growing use of tire pressure monitoring systems.

The survey, which was national in scope, tested driver knowledge and attitudes about tire inflation and maintenance. Motorists in Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Sherbrooke and Fredericton were interviewed at service stations by engineering students, who also checked tire inflation levels and tread depth.

The study also found that significantly higher numbers of Canadian drivers understand that tire underinflation wastes fuel. When asked why tire inflation was important, the top two reasons cited by four in five drivers surveyed were safety and fuel efficiency. In 2003, the top two reasons given were safety and longer tire life.

While the survey's findings clearly show that Canadian drivers are more knowledgeable about their tires, the study also revealed major information gaps that need to be filled.

The survey, for example, found that, while 52 per cent of drivers knew how to locate the vehicle manufacturer's recommended tire pressure (owner's manual or vehicle placard), nine per cent did not know and 26 per cent wrongly believed that the pressure stamped on the sidewall, which refers to the maximum pressure a tire can contain under maximum load, was the recommended inflation level.

As well, 59 per cent of drivers interviewed made the serious mistake of relying on a visual inspection to tell them if their tire pressures should be measured. In fact, a tire can be under- or over inflated by 20 per cent or more and look normal.





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