

How to know when it's time to replace the car's tires

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EXTRACT

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Now that the long, cold winter is finally in the rearview mirror, motorists may think that they can finally set their minds at ease with regards to automotive maintenance, especially as it relates to their tires. After all, with the roads no longer slick with ice and snow, vehicles will be able to grip the road's surface with ease.

But as automotive experts point out, the spring season can bring with it its fair share of disasters waiting to happen, potentially leading to a local car insurance claim after encountering an accident resulting from bald or rundown tires.

Due to the runoff of melting snow or the occasional downpours that bring sheets of rain, Canada's streets can quickly be flooded with high levels of water. Over time, these events can wear away at the overall durability of tires.

When a tire is freshly installed, they often have a large degree of tread depth. This accommodates high water levels so that it can be wicked away relatively easily when driving at a safe speed. However, the older tires are - and the more frequently they're used - tread depth slowly wears away, lessening their overall effectiveness.

The question, of course, is what determines whether a tires have an adequate level of tread depth. Though there are a variety of ways in which to determine this, perhaps the easiest method is by pulling a penny from one's pocket and inserting in between the grooves of the tread. With the Queen's head facing down, motorists should not be able to see the very top of her head. The farther down the face they can see, the better the tread depth.

However, if the tip of the Queen's head can be seen, this is a telltale sign that the tires need to be replaced.

Can tires age without being used?

Because tires can be relatively expensive - often times in excess of \$100 for each tire - it's not unusual for motorists to go to a dealership that buys and sells used tires. While this can help today's consumers save money, they run into the risk of purchasing a tire that doesn't have the appropriate amount of tread depth.

This is a situation that a reader of the Toronto Star's automotive section, Wheels.ca, presented to automotive expert John Mahler.

Mahler notes that as a general rule, tires have a lifespan of about five to seven years, depending on when the tires were produced. In fact, even if the tires have never been used, they have a shelf life and should not be used if the manufactured date is five to

seven years prior. That's because as the rubber ages, the tires lose their overall flexibility and durability due to the oils and binding chemicals drying out.

To find this out, Mahler recommends asking the seller about when they were produced and where they were stored. If they were stored in a cargo container, it's best to avoid them, as these can produce excessively hot temperatures in the summer, impacting the quality of the rubber.

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