



It's important to inspect your tyres regularly

Tread carefully

John Wickersham explains how to look after the tyres on your caravan or motor caravan and the importance of regular replacements

IT'S THAT time of year again – the time when many owners park their caravans up for the winter.

However, the trouble with parking vehicles, including caravans and trailers, for any length of time is that parts of them can deteriorate. Tyres are one such example. I might add that the tyres on touring caravans, motor caravans and towcars are sometimes ignored completely.

This is a serious oversight and the Club urges its members to check their tyres regularly. For instance, if you turn to p627 in your *Sites Directory & Handbook 2009/2010*, you'll find a section covering inflation guidance, safety recommendations, legal issues and so on. The article here covers some further points.

NEW TYRES

Older, single-axle UK caravans used to be equipped with 13in diameter wheel rims and tyres. This can present problems as I found when my caravan tyre blew out on a French motorway a few years ago.

It transpired that my 13in tyres were seldom stocked in France and it took two days to get replacements. Caravanners rarely carried a spare back then – the

importance of carrying an extra wheel on board is now widely acknowledged.

About nine years ago, UK touring caravan manufacturers started installing 14in wheels. The side-wall markings on your tyres will confirm what size they are.

Size details are also given on motor caravan tyres and the photo below right shows a vehicle with 15in wheels. This example also bears a 'Camping' tyre (CP) marking and these products are purpose-made for motor caravans. Their special constructional features recognise that even unladen motor caravans are heavy.

TYRE MARKINGS

A tyre deteriorates surprisingly quickly – life expectancy is reckoned to be about five years. In fact, the Club advises that tyres "should never be used for more than seven years from their date of manufacture." But how do you find out a tyre's age?

Some tyres don't seem to include a mark indicating date of manufacture, while some markings need a bit of deciphering. I'm indebted to George Hinton, this magazine's former Deputy Editor, who pointed to the figure '2607' on a motor caravan I was testing. This >>



The last two digits on this caravan tyre's 185/70R14 size designation confirms it's for 14in rims



This motor caravan has 15in diameter rims and its tyres bear the 'Camper' (CP) designation



The 2607 mark on this motor caravan tyre indicates that it was manufactured in the 26th week of 2007



Pay particular attention to the sidewalls of tyres; cracks like this are a sign of pending failure



Another indication of tyre depreciation is cracking between the treads



It's surprising how often a tyre inspection reveals sharp objects trapped in the treads



When checking a caravan spare, confirm that it's the right size for your particular model



Access to carriers like the one on this Fiat Maxi can be tricky



Robust dial-type gauges are often recommended by specialists

seemingly meaningless figure indicated that the tyre was manufactured in the 26th week of 2007. It is important to note that shipping tyres from a factory and then moving them through a retail distribution system or vehicle factory means that tyres will never be 'brand new' when first fitted.

Also potentially confusing are markings that only apply to North American markets. Moreover, tyre information changes periodically and the Club's Technical Manager, Martin Spencer, advises that new tyres are likely to include indicators of noise emission levels and wear rates.

To keep abreast of changes, you can find information about tyre wall markings from the website tyresafe.org under the heading 'Tyre Safety Information'.

TYRE DETERIORATION

It's rare for a caravan's tyre treads to become badly worn. It's a shame, of course, to scrap a tyre that has plenty of tread depth, but it's the deteriorating side walls that usually prompt the need for replacement. When caravans are left stationary for a while, the same section of tyre wall takes all the strain, leading to long-term damage. Areas of weakness often go unnoticed, especially on the inside walls.

You can certainly minimise 'flat-spot' deterioration by moving your caravan a few centimetres forwards or backwards during long storage periods. Doing this every month – or better still, every fortnight – brings its rewards.

It's the same with motor caravan tyres, including heavy-duty products, and the photos at the top of this page show typical depreciation signs even though the tread depths are good.

CARAVAN SPARE WHEELS

As I have already mentioned, it's important to have a spare wheel. But have you checked your spare's condition, pressure and size details?

All too often, caravan spare tyres are retrospectively installed and their size can differ from those already fitted. I've met several owners who only discovered this when dealing with a roadside puncture. Also check whether a telescopic, tubular wheel carrier is sliding freely – many get rusted solid.

MOTOR CARAVAN SPARE WHEELS

Motor caravan spare wheels weigh far more than those designed for tourers and ease of access varies from vehicle to vehicle. If you have any doubts about your ability to retrieve, inspect or replace an underfloor spare, get it done by a dealer. A spare tyre's condition should be routinely evaluated during a vehicle's service, but it's better done more often than that.

TYRE PRESSURES

The life expectancy of a tyre is also dependent on it being inflated to the correct pressure. On motor caravans, compare both the vehicle manufacturer's and the converter's advice, and use a good

tyre gauge – many specialists recommend a dial-type product.

SAFETY BANDS

When a tyre punctures at speed the rim-sealing beads often fall into the well of the wheel. Consequently, the wheel rims then make contact with the road with the inevitable loss of grip. Companies such as Tyron manufacture 'safety bands' that fit into the wells – in the event of a puncture, the band keeps the tread in contact with the road surface. As a result the vehicle should be easier to keep under control.

LIQUID SEALANTS

Bear in mind that some motor caravans (and cars) are now supplied without a spare. That's worrying because some types of puncture can't be repaired using the sealant kits provided instead. It's therefore no surprise that the Club does not recommend the general use of liquid sealants for temporary puncture repairs. ■



This tyre is ruined but its Tyron band ensured that the tread remained in constant contact with the road



Some motor caravans are now supplied with a fluid repair kit rather than a spare wheel

FURTHER INFO

- See pages 627, 647 and 648 of the *Sites Directory & Handbook 2009/2010*
- The Club's free leaflet, *Caravan Tyres & Wheels*, is full of helpful advice. See caravanclub.co.uk/practical-advice
- The latest tyre marking data is available from tyresafe.org
- Tyron – call 0845 400 0600