

## Safety Tips #42

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### Getting TIRED?

We're not talking about fatigue here... we're talking about buying tires! What do we need to know to make a smart purchase when thinking about new tires? Compared to car tires, bike tires are not cheap, and they don't last long, either, a double hit to the ol' bankbook.

First, when is it time to get new tires? Because different bike tires have specific applications, if a bike was purchased used we would need to make sure that the tires already on it are a good match for the type of bike and for the type(s) of riding that will be done on it. Chances are that the tires are a fairly good match, but it's worth consideration. Another consideration is, are the two tires a good match for each other? Some tires don't pair well with others; relative tire sizes, compounds, and tread patterns need to match for the best pairing. And many bike tires need to be replaced *even if there is still a good amount of tread on them*. This is because bike tires have a shelf life, and can dry-rot and crack even if there are zero miles on them. This is most often seen on bikes that don't accumulate many miles per year, and it is most common on front tires, because they tend to wear out less rapidly than rear tires, therefore potentially staying on a bike for years and years. Check the sidewalls for age cracks as well as in between the treads. If you see cracking going on, it's time for a new tire. Tires have a code on their sidewalls that tell when they were manufactured, and we can use that as a basic indicator. When buying new tires, check the date code to see if they have been sitting around for a long time before you buy them "new".

Of course, the depth of a tires tread should be considered. The legal minimum tread depth is 2/32", which is not much, and not

very confidence-inspiring if one has to ride through a puddle of standing water, because of the risk of hydroplaning. I try to replace my tires before they get down to the minimum tread depth, as the idea of hydroplaning on a bike terrifies me.

Determine what type of tire (brand, model and size) is recommended by the manufacturer of the bike, and use that as a starting point. Many riders like to substitute tires of larger dimensions (especially rear tires) for the original size. I don't recommend this, as it usually has a negative effect on the handling. Some riders even put car tires on their bikes. I definitely do not recommend that! They may fit on the rim, but they are not made for the stresses that bikes dish out, like side forces that occur when the bike leans. And car tires don't have tread anywhere but on the bottom; again, not good for leaning. If you are considering going with a different type of tire than the one that came on your bike, check with dealerships and on-line forums to see what other tires are being used on your type of bike. Some tires are better than others on wet surfaces, some are better for touring and durability, and some are made for better handling and maneuvering. There are even tires that have multiple compounds, so they have a harder rubber on the center of the tread for durability and a softer compound on toward the sides of the tires for better grip when leaning. There is no magic bullet, so either go with the standard issue or do your research first before you make a change.

On my ElectraGlide, which comes with Dunlop tires, I have tried Metzeler Marathons. I found they have a better grip, especially in the rain, but wear out faster. Because I almost never ride in the rain, I went back to the Dunlops when the Metzeler wore out. On my Buell Thunderbolt (which usually goes through a set of tires in about 4000 miles!) I am now running Dunlop RoadSmart tires with multiple compounds in the hope they will last longer. I haven't had them on long enough to determine if my plan is working.

Quickie quiz: what's the most common reason for tire failure and/or premature wear? Underinflation. Check the pressure often, remembering that some tires and valves have slow leaks, and that

as the ambient temperature decreases (like, when it's Autumn heading for Winter!) the pressure decreases, too. This is the primary time of year to be more aware of the pressure in your tires.