



## **The Lost Art of Tire Knowledge**

**By Frank Ranelli, ASE Certified Automotive Tire Expert**

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([PRWEB](#)) May 8, 2003 -- The automobile tire is the least understood part of a modern vehicle. With all the technology that is employed in today's vehicles, the tire is, and continues to be, the one component that few people truly understand. It is often overlooked and dismissed as a simple device. This axiom is simply untrue. Even people in both the retail tire industry and the automotive repair sector have very little knowledge of tires.

When I began my career in the tire field, I was taught and held responsible for understanding how tire sizes work, what they mean and how to figure out optional sizes, tire height and width calculations, etc. I also had to know the features and benefits of every tire sold by the company. A complete vocabulary of tire nomenclature was a must. Terms such as VIP treatment and O.R.P.S. were part of every sales presentation I made or taught. This simply does not exist today.

To illustrate this, I recently called a large chain store that sold tires. I gave the person that answered the phone the make and model of the vehicle I owned and asked what tire I could put on it. After several minutes of typing on a computer in the background, she quoted me a price. I then asked her what optional sizes I could use. She sound perplexed by the question. Several more minutes passed and she then stated there were not any optional sizes I could use. I then gave her a tire size, which I knew was perfectly acceptable as an option, and asked her if she thought I could use it. She then told me that the computer didn't show that so it must not be acceptable and she wouldn't recommend it. I asked her how she knew this and she stated "I don't know. I just know what the computer says." □

The scenario above is all too common. Retail tire stores now often employ low paid "desk clerks" who have no real experience, training or understanding of tires and/or sizing applications. They are placed in front of a computer and taught to give out "mindless" information off of a computer screen. This many times not only does not present the consumer with the best options, but can result in miss-applications of incorrect tires being installed.

Automotive new car dealerships do not fair much better. I spent time employed at a Ford dealership and also administered their tire program for the service department. It was a frequent occurrence to have sales associates ask me to order a set of optional tires for a new car consumer, who perhaps wanted a different look or brand on their new vehicle, or to swap-out tires from another vehicle in the lot. When I would point out that what they were suggesting was not a correct application, the answer was typically, "It should work, they are both 15 inch." This statement, and paradigm suggests, that all tires are the same, as long as the rim sizes match. This could not be further from the truth. Today's vehicles are designed with intense scrutiny going into tire size selection during the design process. The rim size, in this case, 15 inch, is just that, the rim size and NOT the size of the tire.

More serious ramifications can also result from this lack of tire industry knowledge. Improper applications can result in accidents. I have seen instances where tire retailers recommend and/or install under-sized tires on vehicles. Without regard to the tire's load index rating and proper plus-sizing formulas, tires that do not adequately and safely carry the weight or load of the vehicle are being installed. The result is a tire that



generates too much heat internally and can result in a catastrophic failure of the casing. We all know, since the Ford Explorer / Firestone Radial ATX incident, the possible deadly results of a tire failure.

As cars and light trucks continue to advance in design and complexity, the tire, which is an intricate part of these vehicles, will advance in design and complexity too. A reversal of tires being treated as a simple commodity for profit is needed. Tire manufacturers, retailers and car dealerships must insist on in-depth training of those directly responsible for recommending, selling and providing information about the modern automobile tire.

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