



Be safe and avoid inflated prices for your car's often-ignored feature

WHEN WAS the last time you paid any attention to those four rubber, circular things at each corner of your car? Probably when the MoT man shook his head at them, or when you pulled on to the hard shoulder of the road and looked forward to changing a flat in the rain.

Indeed, that's exactly why we should all be fascinated by tyres: they give us control. Without adequate ones, our cars would fall off the road. The Tyre Industry Council (TIC) – Britain's foremost tyre safety organisation – says that about 80 per cent of motorists are unaware of what constitutes illegal or unsafe tyres.

Chris Wakely, a consultant, said: "The core of our work is roadside tyre checks and about 11 per cent of cars have at least one defective tyre.

"Over the last 15 years I have probably inspected more tyres than anyone else in the

Your tyres could save your life, says **James Ruppert**, but when did you last check them?

country and what I have seen is frightening. We stopped one woman and found that there were four different sizes of tyres on her car.

"Then there was this chap with a Ford Scorpio with a huge slash in the tyre. He thought it was perfectly acceptable to repair it with some staples and super glue."

Clearly, knowledge is vital. The grooved tread on your tyre must be at least 1.6mm deep across the centre three-quarters of the tyre tread's width and around the outer circumference. The police can stop you for having incorrectly inflated

TYRES PRICES COMPARED		
	Pirelli P6000	Budget option
blackcircles.com	£60.32	£43.75
ATS	£71.81	£47.00
Central Tyre	£77.76	n/a
Kwik Fit	£84.49	£66.99
STS Holborn	£67.76	£42.69
AA Tyres	£92.87	£73.69
Etyres.co.uk	£59.38	£39.90

(price quoted for a popular 195/65 R15 91V tyre inc fitting)

tyres. And your tyres should be without cuts and lumps. It may not be illegal to have two different makes of tyres on one axle, but it would not be advisable. Mixing radials and cross-ply tyres is also not on.

Tyres should be examined for signs of under-inflation, wear, cuts in the treads and sidewalls, bulges, stones or foreign objects trapped in the tread

and for leakage at the valves. It also pays to be aware of what's going on in technology. Goodyear, for example, has Hydragrip, which is designed to perform better on wet roads. Run-flat tyres are becoming even more sophisticated. Michelin has launched what it claims is an innovation in tyre technology with its Pax System, which enables a driver to be in

full control of his vehicle even after sudden pressure loss, such as in the case of a puncture.

There comes a time, though, when you will have to buy some new tyres. The tyres are of the correct standard if they have the European "E" mark. We certainly found that there is no such thing as a fixed price; it is important to check that you are being quoted for fitting, including balancing and valves.

We asked tyre specialists to quote for a popular 195/65 R15 91V tyre as a branded Pirelli P6000 and as their cheapest alternative, fully fitted. We contacted conventional workshops such as Kwik Fit and found that STS Holborn were the cheapest, quoting for a popular size and a budget tyre. AA Tyres was the most expensive, but it is a mobile service which provides a three-year guarantee. The cheapest tyres were from

Etyres.co.uk and from blackcircles.com. If you need a tyre, Etyres.co.uk will fit a tyre at your home or work, while blackcircles.com is an online service where it is easy to find the tyre you want and get a quote for having it fully fitted at one of its workshops.

Chris Wakely reminded us why we should take our tyres seriously. He said: "We took a VW Golf to the Mira test track with several sets of tyres, from brand new down to others just within the legal limit.

"Essentially, once the tread depth went below three millimetres, braking performance dropped off a cliff."

There is also the small matter of three points and a £2,500 fine for breaking the law on safety. And the Association of British Insurers (ABI) has said that some companies may be unwilling to pay claims if an accident is due to faulty tyres.