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THINKING of buying tyres on the Internet? You stand an excellent chance of getting a bargain, but make sure you do your research. Web-based tyre suppliers fall into three categories: those that simply sell, like a regular mail-order firm; those that fit at approved centres; and those that will come to your home or work to put the tyres on your car.

All should have easy-to-use sites, plus upfront pricing policies that don't hide hidden extras in the small print. The reality, as always, is less straightforward. In this report, we search dozens of the UK's top tyre websites for the

Where are Britain's cheapest tyres to be found? And how much will you pay? We go online to compare Internet prices with those on the high street

lowest prices, and compare them to the big high-street companies to see the savings to be made. We will also alert you to the pitfalls that await the unwary buyer, just to keep the suppliers honest.

How much should you pay?

Mail order

TYRE prices on the Web differ wildly – in some cases, by up to 100 per cent. We got sample quotes for popular tyres in two sizes – 195/65 VR15 Pirelli P6000 and Goodyear Eagle NCT5, and Michelin Pilot Sport 225/45 ZR18 – and the results made for interesting

reading. Of the outfits that are retail only, *Mytyres.co.uk* was consistently cheapest (and best-stocked) in both the 15 and 18-inch categories, offering the smaller tyres at £46.60 each, and Michelins at £153.60.

Tyres-online.co.uk had some decent deals and the most user-friendly site, but as with *Tyre4u.com* couldn't match *Mytyres* for value, plus added an extra (and not very obvious) £9.40 in delivery charges on to each order. German firm *Autothek.com* was more competitive, beating *Mytyres*' price on Michelins by £4.47 – but you can pay only in Euros, and the lack of Far Eastern budget brands in its listings was disappointing.

Fitted

FOR all-inclusive fitting, *Etyres.co.uk* came out on top, charging £51.63 for the Goodyears and £56.62 for the Pirellis. This seems great value when you consider it will fit them at your home or place of work – until you read the small print on the order form saying that the so-called 'optional' wheel balancing costs £5 a tyre. And at £196.62, its price for the Michelins was expensive.

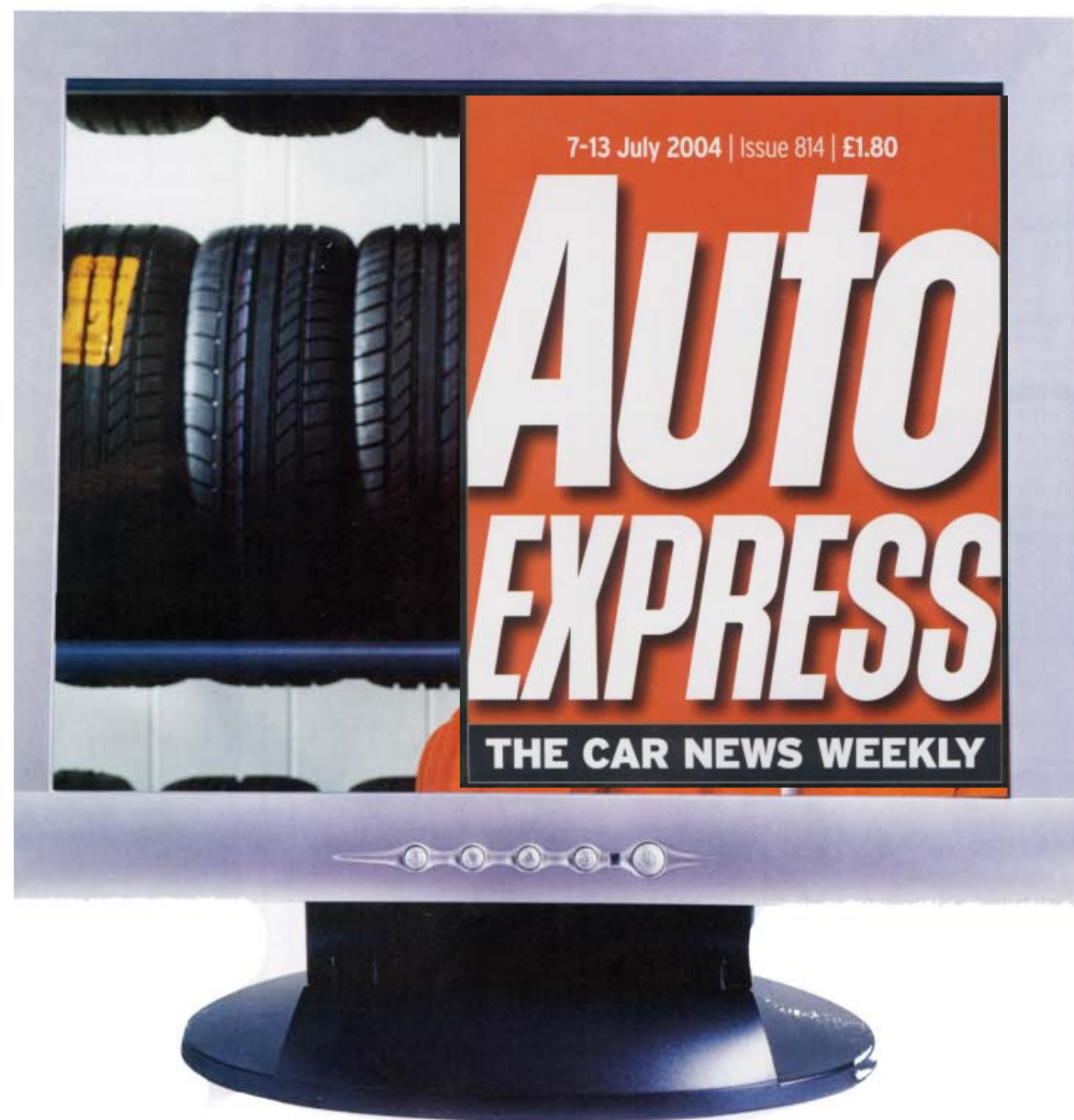
Tyres-online came second in terms of value in the 15-inch fitted class, quoting £61.63 for the Pirellis, but it was also expensive for the Michelins (£208.80). Mobile fitting specialist *Tyresdirect2u.com* was not too hot at the budget brands

but had a very good deal on the Michelins – only £170.11 for each tyre. As ever, it pays to shop around.

Web vs high street

SO how did the big high-street names fare? Not very well. Kwik-fit offered us the Pirellis fully fitted at £87 (£11 for fitment and balancing) and the Michelins at £227 per corner. ATS, National and HiQ were slightly less expensive, but still well off the pace set by their web-based rivals – yet nowhere near as bad as the AA. It wanted £92.87 to fit the Pirelli P6000 (double the unfitted items at *Mytyres*) and an incredible £308.57 for

Netting a tyre bargain



Price watch



Pirelli P6000 (unfitted)
Cheapest online:
 Mytyres.co.uk £46.60
Cheapest on the high street:
 ATS £69.99



Goodyear NCT5 (unfitted)
Cheapest online:
 Mytyres.co.uk £46.60
Cheapest on the high street:
 HiQ £58.99



Michelin Pilot Sport (unfitted)
Cheapest online:
 Autothek.com £149.16
Cheapest on the high street:
 National £153.00

the Michelin Pilot Sports. Not one of the big names has proper price listings online, either, requiring you to phone up.

Getting a discount

THERE are huge savings to be made by playing suppliers off against each other, so if you've got a price from a website that's significantly cheaper than that quoted by your local dealer (or indeed another website), then mention it.

When National, for example, learned that a site had beaten its price on the Michelin Pilot Sport tyres by £62.40 (albeit unfitted), it immediately knocked £54 off its per-corner quote. That's a saving of 25 per cent or, if you're buying a full set of rubber, a massive £216 – simply for the price of a phone call.

Independent fitters

IF they don't offer a fitting service, most retailers will put you in touch with someone who does. Many independents will charge between £5 and £9 a tyre, making it a cheaper option than Kwik-Fit (£11 a corner), but not necessarily somewhere like National (£9 a tyre).

And keep your eyes peeled for extra charges, such as valve/balancing (as much as £15 a corner), disposal of old tyres (typically £1 each) and an alloy wheel surcharge (£1 a rim). Not every firm is as upfront about such charges as *Mytyres*, so it's worth phoning them first for a comprehensive quote.

We found that mobile fitters, such as *Eventmobilitytyres.com* and *Tyresdirect2u.com*, can be a good option for those too busy to go to a specialist, and in the case of *Etyres* are the most cost-effective, too. Check with the company first, as not all cover the whole of the UK. □

Top five tyre websites



1. Mytyres.co.uk (retail only)



2. Autothek.com (retail only)



3. Etyres.co.uk (mobile fitters)



4. Tyres-online.co.uk (retails and fits at approved centres)



5. Tyresdirect2u.com (mobile fitters)