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The Industry's Leading Publication
April 2024, Volume 105, Number 4

Program groups offer an assortment of benefits and incentives to help independent tire dealers. Read about the programs — and compare their offerings — beginning on page 20.

Photo: MTD

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Moving in the right direction

PRICING, SUPPLY AND OTHER FACTORS ARE HELPING DEALERS
— AT LEAST FOR NOW

By **Mike Manges**

A remarkable thing happened during the first quarter of 2024: no tire manufacturer publicly announced a price increase — at least to my knowledge.

After living through several years of rapid-fire hikes, MTD readers are reporting that consumer tire pricing has stabilized — one of a few trends bringing much-needed relief to their businesses.

John Wood, sales manager at Warren Tire Service Center Inc.'s location in Queensbury, N.Y., recently told me that tire prices have reached a reasonable equilibrium.

"I wouldn't say I've seen prices drop, but I've seen them hold pretty steady," he said. "For a while, they were jumping up every month. It was getting out of control.

"I've heard talks of some (tiremakers) doing small increases again, but not the way it was a couple of years ago."

Price stabilization has benefited Warren Tire Service Center at the retail counter, he noted.

Improved tire supply has helped the 16-store dealership, too. Product availability "doesn't seem to be an issue anymore."

Another trend playing into Warren Tire Service Center's hands is the fact that people are keeping their cars longer.

Auto service "has been extremely good for us," said Wood. "Interest rates are so high, (people) can't afford to buy cars, so they're fixing what they have."

Rich Rogenski, co-owner of Westside Tire & Service, a three-store dealership based in Youngstown, Ohio, told me that tire pricing "has remained pretty stable within the last eight to 10 months."

This has helped his dealership, which is enjoying a very profitable year. "Customers appreciate stability," he said. And more customers are bringing cars to his dealership for service work.

"We're seeing (customers) keep their vehicles longer, running at higher mileages. We're seeing cars with as many as 300,000 miles on them," which has resulted in a nice uptick in maintenance work for Rogenski's business.

"Fluid exchanges — transmission, antifreeze, power steering — all of those components need to be serviced. It's much easier to explain to the customer how those services will (positively) affect their investment" when keeping cars running for as long as possible is the goal.

"Over the last 12 months, we've seen a dramatically different landscape" when it comes to tire pricing "compared to the timeframe after COVID-19, when (increases) were one after the other," Brett Matschke, owner of Muskego, Wis.-based Richlonn's Tire & Service Centers, recently told me.

One of his dealership's tire suppliers even implemented "a slight (price) readjustment" near the end of 2023.

Matschke said that when tire prices began to climb a few years ago, some of his retail customers were taken aback.



Pricing has stabilized at Warren Tire Service Center Inc.

Photo: Warren Tire Service Center Inc.

"They had bought tires three years before and were (now) coming in for replacement."

In some cases, they saw "a 30% price change and it was like, 'Holy cow!'"

This didn't necessarily surprise Matschke, who noted that prices on other consumer goods "were going up, too. Tires were just in line with that."

Like its tire sales, Richlonn's Tire & Service Centers' auto repair business is on the upswing, according to Matschke.

"It was already trending upward before COVID-19 kicked in," he explained.

Then the knock-on effect of the pandemic "caused the cost of cars to go off the charts, which convinced a lot of people to keep what they had. That's definitely been a positive thing for our business."

Will pricing remain stable throughout 2024? Matschke is optimistic that it will.

"Unless something weird happens globally to cause a problem with those resources (that) tire manufacturers are using, I don't think there will be a drastic change," he said.

Westside Tire & Service's Rogenski says he has some concerns about how the war in the Middle East, which is causing shipping issues, will shake out.

"If the war escalates, what will happen to the price of oil? I could be 100% wrong and I sure hope I am, but I think costs are going to escalate and naturally, the price of tires will go up with it."

That could very well happen. But for now, things seem to be heading in the right direction for tire dealers.

What are you experiencing at your business? We'd love to hear from you. ■

If you have any questions or comments, please email me at mmanges@endeavorb2b.com.

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Pricing issues remain critical to independent tire dealers, as evidenced by MTD readers' interest in price fixing allegations and a column in which tire dealers said tier-one prices are just "too high" for many customers to afford.

Photo: Ben Borchert

Tires of all sizes matter

It can be easy to focus on the retail segment of the tire industry, as the sheer number of outlets and their consumer-facing efforts are designed to be noticeable. But this month's list of the top stories on moderntiredealer.com is a good reminder that the tire industry is more than passenger and light truck tires. Changes afoot in the commercial tire segment, plus efforts by wholesalers to grow their businesses, are all important, too.

1. Photos: Scenes from the 2024 TIA OTR Tire Conference
2. Another price fixing complaint is filed
3. Southern Tire Mart at Pilot Flying J to add 30 outlets
4. Dealers say tier-one tire prices are 'too high'
5. Krcelic, Miller want to help tire dealers
6. WTD plans for 'substantial growth'
7. The daunting role of service managers
8. Titan acquires Carlstar in cash, stock deal
9. Big trends in winter tires
10. Corey Parks named president of Kal Tire

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3515 Massillon Rd., Suite 200
Uniontown, OH 44685
(330) 899-2200, fax (330) 899-2209
www.moderntiredealer.com

PUBLISHER

Greg Smith
gsmith@endeavorb2b.com
(330) 598-0375

EDITORIAL

Editor: Mike Manges,
(330) 598-0368, mmanges@endeavorb2b.com
Managing Editor: Joy Kopcha,
(330) 598-0338, jkopcha@endeavorb2b.com
Associate Editor: Madison Gehring,
(330) 598-0308, mgehring@endeavorb2b.com

PRODUCTION

Art Director: Erica Paquette
Production Manager: Karen Runion,
(330) 736-1291, krunion@endeavorb2b.com

ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES

Darrell Bruggink
dbruggink@endeavorb2b.com (608) 299-6310
Marianne Dyal
mdyal@endeavorb2b.com (706) 344-1388
Sean Thornton
sthornton@endeavorb2b.com (269) 499-0257
Kyle Shaw
kshaw@endeavorb2b.com (651) 846-9490
Martha Severson
mseverson@endeavorb2b.com (651) 846-9452
Chad Hjellming
chjellming@endeavorb2b.com (651) 846-9463

MTD READER ADVISORY BOARD

Rick Benton, Black's Tire Service Inc.
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Michelin highlights 'EV-ready' product strategy

APPROACH ALLOWS FLEXIBILITY, CUTS COMPLEXITY

“We care about giving people everywhere a better way forward,” Alexis Garcin, president and CEO of Michelin North America Inc., said during the company’s recent Sustainability Summit, which took place in Sonoma, Calif.

This philosophy underpins Michelin’s sustainability strategy, which includes the development of what company executives call “electric vehicle (EV)-ready tires” across its full product range.

Garcin told Sustainability Summit attendees that Michelin already has “road-ready passenger tires made with 40% recyclable and renewable tires.”

Michelin’s goal is to produce tires with 100% renewable and recyclable materials by the year 2050. A more immediate target is to have an EV-ready tire for every application.

“Our goal at Michelin is not to have to create a lot of EV-specific SKUs and there are a few reasons for that,” Katelyn Margetson, vice president of marketing for consumer products, Michelin, told MTD during the Summit.

“One, it allows flexibility in our business model. The evolution of the car parc is going to exponentially increase the amount of fitments and different types of tires out there. In addition, we have the demands that EVs put on tires. How do we solve for that? The third piece is this sustainability endeavor we’re focusing on with (our tire) materials.

“When you combine complexity with the demands of EVs and our aggressive approach on the sustainability front, we have to sit back and ask, ‘Over the next 10 to 20 years, how are we going to manage our portfolio in a way that continues to live up to our performance standards, while not constraining our business operations?’”

Margetson said this led Michelin to decide to design and manufacture “all of our passenger tires to be prepared for EVs. It means they’re going to be prepared for the heaviest vehicles and the highest amount of torque and not make it about, ‘I’m driving an EV or an internal combus-

tion engine (ICE) vehicle, what do I have to choose?’ We’re going right to what’s important for the driver. Is it range? Is it durability? We would rather the decision be made at that level.

“Michelin has been anticipating this transition going on 30 years,” said Margetson, adding that the U.S. vehicle market, in general, “is moving toward heavier vehicles.

“If we can design our tires to meet the needs of these vehicles, we’re solving it in other places, as well. It’s a win-win.”

In addition to simplifying the tire selection process for consumers, Michelin’s “EV-ready” product strategy also is helping dealers make replacement tire recommendations more easily, according to Margetson.

“What we have heard from many of our partners is that this dramatically simplifies things for their sales associates. Part of our job is how we demystify and decomplexify the situation,” which she added has been “a big challenge” for the whole tire industry.

During the Sustainability Summit, Garcin told MTD that while Michelin believes consumer EV adoption “will plateau” temporarily, long-term adoption of EVs “is a trend that’s not stopping. When you look at what’s happening across the globe, that trend is rising,” though he conceded that widespread acceptance of EVs “might take more time” in the United States due to its large geography and infrastructure requirements.

“We also see demand for hybrid vehicles steadily increasing. That’s why having what we call an EV-ready tire line is the best answer to address this market evolution.”

Garcin told MTD that tire dealers and distributors will play a critical role in educating consumers about Michelin’s EV tire strategy. “When you consider the way we go to market, we don’t own retailers,” he said. “We don’t own distribution. We rely on our (dealer) partners.

“What we’ll further invest in is making sure those partners are fully educated so they can explain to customers that not all tires are the same.



Alexis Garcin, president and CEO of Michelin North America Inc., said independent tire dealers will play a critical role in educating consumers about Michelin’s electric vehicle tire strategy.
Photo: MTD

“At a time when the sustainability piece is becoming more important” in the tire industry, “for Michelin, this is nothing new. And I think that’s the message we would expect our partners to share with consumers.”

Younger consumers, in particular, are “much more sensitive about (sustainability) and as those people become buyers of tires, I think they will be more receptive” to the concept of sustainable products.

Tire dealers, he noted, “will have to get used to those discussions, which are not easy because you need proof points.

“Dealers can help us convey the message that for Michelin, it’s about sustainability and performance. We do both at the same time.”

Michelin’s EV-ready concept also extends to commercial tires. Luigi Cumo, Michelin’s vice president of B2B marketing, cited the Michelin X Line Energy Z Plus medium truck tire as a product that is ideal for both electric trucks and diesel-powered rigs.

The Michelin X Line Energy Z Plus, which is in full production, delivers a significant rolling resistance improvement over its predecessor and can be retreaded up to four times. — Mike Manges



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VIP Tires enters new state

VIP Inc. dba VIP Tires & Service has expanded into its fifth state, Connecticut, with the recent acquisition of Joe's Tire Shop, located in Waterbury, Conn. The deal gives VIP Tires 70 locations throughout New England.

DRC Tires hires Fabrizio

DRC Tires has named industry veteran Ed Fabrizio as its director of factory sales, U.S. Based in Vietnam, DRC Tires, which was founded nearly 50 years ago, is a supplier of commercial truck, off-the-road, agricultural, industrial and specialty tires and has plans to expand into other segments.

TBC rehires Shingo Aso

TBC Corp. has rehired Shingo Aso to lead corporate development initiatives, mergers and acquisitions, strategic alliances and new business development. This marks a return to TBC for Aso, who is taking on the role of executive vice president of corporate development.

FTS names CEO

Minoo Mehta, a 40-year veteran of the tire and automotive industry who formerly worked for Zafco International and Tires Direct, has joined Foreign Tire Sales Inc. (FTS) as its new CEO. The company says he will lead a focus on the Otani brand. FTS is the exclusive distributor of the Otani brand in the U.S.

DOJ, FTC show support

The U.S. Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission have submitted comments to the U.S. Copyright Office to support exemptions that ultimately support Right to Repair efforts. The federal agencies wrote in support of expanding exemptions to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, which would relate to the telematics data from a consumer's vehicle.

Apollo rolls out campaign

Apollo Tyres Ltd. has launched its new "Smart Tires for Not Smart Roads" campaign, which showcases road conditions that long-haul truck drivers frequently encounter. The company highlights how difficult road conditions are no match for Apollo's tires.

USTMA calls for record year of shipments

The latest tire shipments projection from the U.S. Tire Manufacturers Association (USTMA) predicts 2024 will be a record year, with 335.7 million units shipped.

This total would surpass the previous record in 2021, when 335.2 million units were shipped.

The newest USTMA figures project growth in five of the six categories tracked, with only original equipment truck tire units expected to drop from 2023 levels.

The replacement tire categories are all expected to increase in 2024, with the strongest growth shown in the truck tire segment.

2024 USTMA SHIPMENT PROJECTIONS			
Original equipment	2024 Forecast	2023 Total	Percent Change
Passenger	46.3	45.7	1.40%
Light Truck	6.0	5.9	2.60%
Truck	6.0	6.2	-3.30%
Replacement			
Passenger	220.2	219.2	0.50%
Light Truck	35.2	34.3	2.80%
Truck	22.0	20.8	5.90%
Total Shipments	335.7	331.9	1.10%

Figures in the chart above are rounded, and in millions of units.

Southern Tire Mart at Pilot Flying J to add 30-plus outlets

Pilot Travel Centers LLC has announced plans to add more than 30 Southern Tire Mart at Pilot Flying J locations within the next year.

Currently, Southern Tire Mart at Pilot Flying J operates 68 locations throughout the U.S.

"We are very excited about our partnership with Pilot and the opportunities moving forward," says Tommy Duff, who, along with his brother, Jim Duff, own Southern Tire Mart LLC, which is based in Columbia, Miss.

The Southern Tire Mart at Pilot Flying J expansion was part of a bigger announcement made by Pilot Travel Centers on March 5.

Southern Tire Mart and Pilot Travel Centers joined forces in January 2021 to establish the Southern Tire Mart at Pilot Flying J network.

"We're trying to make it as seamless as we possibly can for the customer," John Boynton, president of Southern Tire Mart at Pilot Flying J, told MTD in 2021.

"When they come into a Southern Tire Mart at Pilot Flying J, they should receive the same" level of service as they would find at a traditional Southern Tire Mart location.

"At Southern Tire Mart at Pilot Flying J, we're doing a lot more mechanical work than we would do at a Southern Tire Mart store," including preventive truck maintenance, truck inspections and more.

Speed of service "will be a key differentiator for us," said Boynton, who added that long waits "are probably one of the biggest challenges in the truck stop channel right now.

"The volume that goes through the truck stop channel — from a tires and service standpoint — is small compared to the traditional tire dealership model. But it is a highly trafficked channel and a critical supply point."

With more than 225 locations, Southern Tire Mart is the largest independent commercial tire dealership in the U.S., according to MTD research. Southern Tire Mart is also the nation's largest retreader.



With this expansion, the total number of Southern Tire Mart at Pilot Flying J locations will approach 100.

Photo: Southern Tire Mart LLC



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Ascenso names OEM leader

Ascenso Tires North America has added Douglas Duesing as its original equipment manufacturer sales manager for the North American market. He will focus on original equipment accounts across the continent.

Hankook goes to expo

Hankook Tire America Corp. is participating in the Electrify Expo, where it will showcase its full line of electric vehicle tires at select cities and sponsor the Demo District at the expo. Electrify Expo will visit Long Beach and San Francisco in California, plus New York, N.Y. and Austin, Texas.

Nokian looks for bad roads

For the third straight year, Nokian Tyres Inc. has invited drivers to vote on which state or province in North America has the worst roads for a chance to win a free set of tires. Drivers were invited to submit photos on social media to make their case.

McCarthy Tire wins awards

Wilkes-Barre, Pa.-based McCarthy Tire Service Co. Inc. has won the Best of the Best contest for the Wilkes-Barre Times Leader automotive awards. The dealership won gold in four categories — best employer, best auto repair, best car wash and best auto detail.

Kumho names VP

Kumho Tire USA has hired Jessica Egerton as vice president of marketing to develop and execute marketing and brand awareness programming for the Kumho brand. She is returning to the tire industry after a three-year absence. Kumho says her hiring is part of a new phase of growth in the U.S.

Tirecraft Ontario uses AI

Tirecraft Ontario is moving customers from traditional emergency roadside service phone calls to the company's ERS AI platform. The artificial intelligence-powered solution has been designed to streamline the service truck dispatch process and connect fleet dispatch and drivers with the nearest service provider "in a matter of seconds" to reduce downtime.

Yokohama to build another tire plant in North America

Yokohama Rubber Co. Ltd. (YRC) plans to build a new consumer and light truck tire plant to serve the North American market.

The YRC board has approved plans to build the plant at the Alianza Industrial Park in Saltillo, Coahuila, Mexico.

"This is a clear signal that Yokohama is committed to the North American market," says Jeff Barna, Yokohama Tire Corp. president and CEO. "The increased production capabilities will supplement existing global capacity for tires destined for our region."

The plant represents an initial capital investment of \$380 million. Construction on the 150-acre site is scheduled to begin during the second quarter of 2024. Tire production is expected to start in early 2027, with a planned annual production of five million tires. The company said the site also allows for future expansion.

Yokohama already has one other passenger and light truck tire plant in North America, a factory in Salem, Va., that began production in 1968.

The company says its latest three-year management plan "aims to maximize the sales ratios of high-value added tires by expanding sales of Yokohama's global flagship Advan brand, the Geolander brand of tires for SUVs and pickup trucks, winter tires and 18-inch and larger tires." The plan also calls for continued work to develop and supply tires that "respond to specific trends in each regional market."

Titan expands capacity in Iowa factory

Titan International Inc. has invested \$2 million to expand its plant in Des Moines, Iowa, which includes the installation of two new 104-inch curing tire presses.

Titan says the expansion is part of a multi-year strategic capital plan to increase its capacity and better serve its tire dealers, as well as end users.

The new tire presses will accommodate Titan's recent expansion of its AgraEdge tire line. They will also help the company "continue to meet demand for key large ag sizes well into the future" and provide dealers with "faster turnaround time between order placement and delivery."

"By upgrading our manufacturing facility and investing in new tire machines, we are taking the first step towards achieving our overall growth goals," says Lester Brewer, vice president of Titan's North American tire operations. "This investment has allowed us to increase our output capacity for premium tires, positioning us to better deliver on the projected additional volume needed in the marketplace."

The new tire machines also incorporate some automation that offers safety protections for Titan employees, as well quality and productivity enhancements.

"The upgraded building and two new tire presses are the culmination of several years of investment in expanding the Des Moines plant capability and producing larger radial ag tires," adds Brewer. "This is just one more step along the line of our growth strategy. We have been telling everybody for five years that we're not done and we will continue to grow through new products."

Titan says the expansion and improvements will allow the company to introduce "multiple new product offerings" during 2024.



Titan has invested \$2 million in its Iowa tire plant. The investment includes the addition of two 104-inch curing tire presses.

Photo: Titan International Inc.

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Bites

Tires Plus will refresh

Bridgestone Retail Operations LLC has announced a phased roll-out of new logos and refreshed brand campaigns for its Tires Plus and Hibdon Tires Plus chains. There are nearly 400 Tires Plus and Hibdon locations throughout 22 states, all of which are part of Bridgestone's overall company-owned store network.

Conti appoints Schroeder

Continental Tire the Americas LLC has named Rob Schroeder head of region for the United States and Canada for the commercial tire specialty business of Continental. He will oversee the company's ag, OTR, material handling and port tire business in North America.

SRNA promotes in OE

Sumitomo Rubber North America Inc. (SRNA) has promoted Rick Zimmerman to director of original equipment (OE) for four-wheel and two-wheel businesses. Zimmerman has been with SRNA since 2013.

Titan holds summit

Titan International Inc. recently wrapped up another edition of its Titan University Summit, a sales training program for tire dealers. The company welcomed the largest number of first-time attendees in its history to the program, which included 20 classes.

GRI hires global director

Global Rubber Industries Pvt. Ltd. (GRI) has named Barry Guildford to serve as the company's global commercial director. He will lead global sales and marketing for GRI.

Community Tire leader dies

Michael W. Berra of St. Louis, Mo., area-based Community Tire recently died at the age of 81. Berra served in the U.S. Army from 1965 to 1969 before joining his father at Community Tire and managing all facets of the business. He was a past president of the St. Louis Tire Dealers Association, the Missouri Tire Dealers Association and the American Retreaders Association. "He had a decorated career in an industry he loved," according to his obituary.

Sun Auto Tire expands in Texas

Sun Auto Tire & Service is working to grow across "The Lone Star State." The company has opened five stores in the Houston metro area in the last year and says it will expand in the region beyond the 20 locations it already operates there.

Steve Powell, Sun Auto Tire's market leader in Houston, says the new stores "are just the beginning."

The company is also expanding in the greater Dallas-Fort Worth metro area. In March, it acquired Carrollton Complete Automotive, a single-store retail tire and automotive repair business in Carrollton.

Sun Auto Tire & Service CEO Tony Puckett says that the addition of Carrollton Complete Automotive "is another step in our commitment to be the leading automotive service and tire provider in the great state of Texas. Carrollton Complete Automotive is a fixture within the community and we are honored to have their resolute team become part of the Sun Auto family."

Carrollton Complete Automotive, which has been in business for 13 years, offers tires, as well as automotive services.

"I am excited to integrate the strengths of both Sun Auto and Carrollton Complete Automotive to continue to provide service with both passion and excellence," says District Manager Kristi Peterson. "We are excited to share the many benefits of being part of the Sun Auto family with the Carrollton Complete Automotive team and look forward to a promising future."

The addition of Carrollton Complete Automotive to Sun Auto Tire & Service's portfolio gives the Tucson, Ariz.-based company 436 stores throughout 21 states.



To mark its expansion in the Houston metro area, Sun Auto Tire & Service Inc. hosted a drawing and gave away a Ford Bronco Sport vehicle.

Photo: Sun Auto Tire & Service

Corey Parks named president of Kal Tire

Longtime Les Schwab Tire Centers Inc. leader Corey Parks has assumed the role of president of Kal Tire.

Parks replaces Robert Foord, who is transitioning to the role of executive vice chair of the board of Kal Tire, the company that his father founded. Foord has served as president for 15 years and has spent 37 years with Kal Tire.

Parks joined Kal Tire in September 2023 as a member of the company's senior management team. He has spent the last six months touring Kal Tire's Canadian store network, as well as visiting its international mining operations.

At Les Schwab, Parks most recently served as chief administrative officer, executive vice president, secretary and general counsel. Kal Tire says Parks has had hands-on operations experience in nearly every aspect of the business and has also worked closely with a family ownership group.

"Corey is an exceptional leader, communicator and relationship builder and he's someone who strongly aligns with the values and culture of Kal Tire," says Foord, who adds that Kal Tire will remain a private, family-owned business.

"Our family remains as committed as ever to the long-term success of the company and we are excited for him to join the team."

"This is a company I've respected deeply throughout my career, so I'm humbled and honored by the opportunity to build on the legacy of Robert Foord," says Parks.

"As we look to the future, I hope to offer not just continuity, but also new opportunities for team members around the world to excel in their roles and exceed every customer's expectations — even, and especially, as our industry evolves." ■



Corey Parks has been named the new president of Kal Tire.

Photo: Kal Tire

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Numbers That Count

Relevant statistics from an industry in constant motion

43%

Percentage of independent tire dealers who pay their technicians through salary and commissions

Source: MTD 2024 Facts Issue

Photo: Continental Tire the Americas LLC



33%

Percentage of independent automotive repair shops that said finding qualified technicians was their biggest challenge in 2023

Source: IMR Automotive Research

Photo: Black's Tire Service Inc.



45%

Percentage of the 2023 U.S. retread truck tire market share represented by the Bandag brand

Source: MTD 2024 Facts Issue

Photo: Dorsey Tire Co. Inc.



8,350

Number of truck tires retreaded per day by Southern Tire Mart LLC

Source: MTD Top 50 Retreaders List

Photo: Southern Tire Mart LLC



335.7 MILLION

Replacement tire units expected to be shipped in 2024

Source: U.S. Tire Manufacturers Association

Photo: MTD



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By John Healy

Deferment cycle hangs on

WINTER HAS PROVIDED LITTLE HELP IN 2024

Sellout was flat in February, according to our check-ins with dealers. But flat is a relative improvement over January 2024, when retail sellout was down slightly. Dealers in the Northwest beat those year-over-year numbers, though, with double-digit growth compared to a year ago. On the downside, the Southwest region saw the softest regional trends, falling 1.6% year-over-year.

Among the positives are that independent dealers tell us there are increased levels of promotional activity, plus activity on both the high end (tier-one brands) and low end (tier-three brands.) Strength at both ends of the spectrum contributed to flat results in February.

In the negative column, dealers tell us that elevated price points and a lack of winter weather have both extended the ongoing trend of continued consumer deferment of tire replacement.

As we exit the winter period, it's clear an uptick of winter weather was not in the cards this year to drive an uptick in demand.

That makes it two years in a row.

Yet, we note that flat year-over-year sellout trends in February are still an improvement over the majority of 2023.

As we continue to lap the soft comparisons from last year, we would not be surprised to see sellout trends continue to gradually improve in the months ahead.

A MILES-DRIVEN BLIP

One important data trend that is linked to the demand for tires and automotive services is that of miles driven. Those numbers turned negative in February following three straight months of positive data.

While on the surface this appears troubling, we note the soft result was largely driven by severe weather in California. The state represents nearly 12% of all registered vehicles in the U.S. and in February 2024, local officials urged drivers to stay off the roads due to weather events. With that knowledge, it seems logical that overall miles driven for the nation took a dip during the month. From our view, we see this as more of a one-off event than the making of a new trend.

In the raw materials category, costs grew 1.4% in January and 3% in February. This follows a year-over-year decline of 3.6% during the fourth quarter of 2023. If the costs of 2024 were to hold constant, these figures would equate to a 3.4% year-over-year increase for the first quarter. Both natural rubber and carbon black prices have risen in the early months of 2024.

DEFERMENT HANGS ON

Independent tire dealers suggest consumer demand for passenger and light truck replacement tires was slightly positive on a net basis compared to February 2023. Of our contacts, 5% saw positive demand

trends in February, while 7% of contacts reported a drop in demand for the month.

On the positive side, we saw a step up in demand for tier-one brands, along with dealers who reported an increase in manufacturer-assisted rebates and discounts in the marketplace.

That contrasts with the ongoing negative trend of consumers continuing to defer tire replacement while prices are elevated.

MIX IN THE MARKET

Even while dealers continue their refrain that consumers are trading down and deferring services, this month's look at the best performers results in a bit of a surprise. Tier-one tire brands were the most in-demand in February 2024. That simply indicates the customers who were buying tires in February were undeterred by higher prices and were committed to purchasing premium brands. Still, we didn't have this on our bingo card since tier-one brands had been in last place for the last six months.

Tier-three brands were in second place in February, while tier-two brands took the bottom spot. The demand for tier-three tires matches what we hear from dealers, but tier-two landing at the bottom of our rankings is unusual. This is the first time it's happened since June 2023, and it bucks both near- and long-term trends.

Tier-two tires were the most in-demand products for half of 2023 and have historically been the leaders in our 10-plus years of surveys.

While our tire tier rankings can be volatile from month to month, we expect tier-two brands to shift back into high-in-demand status in the months to come. ■

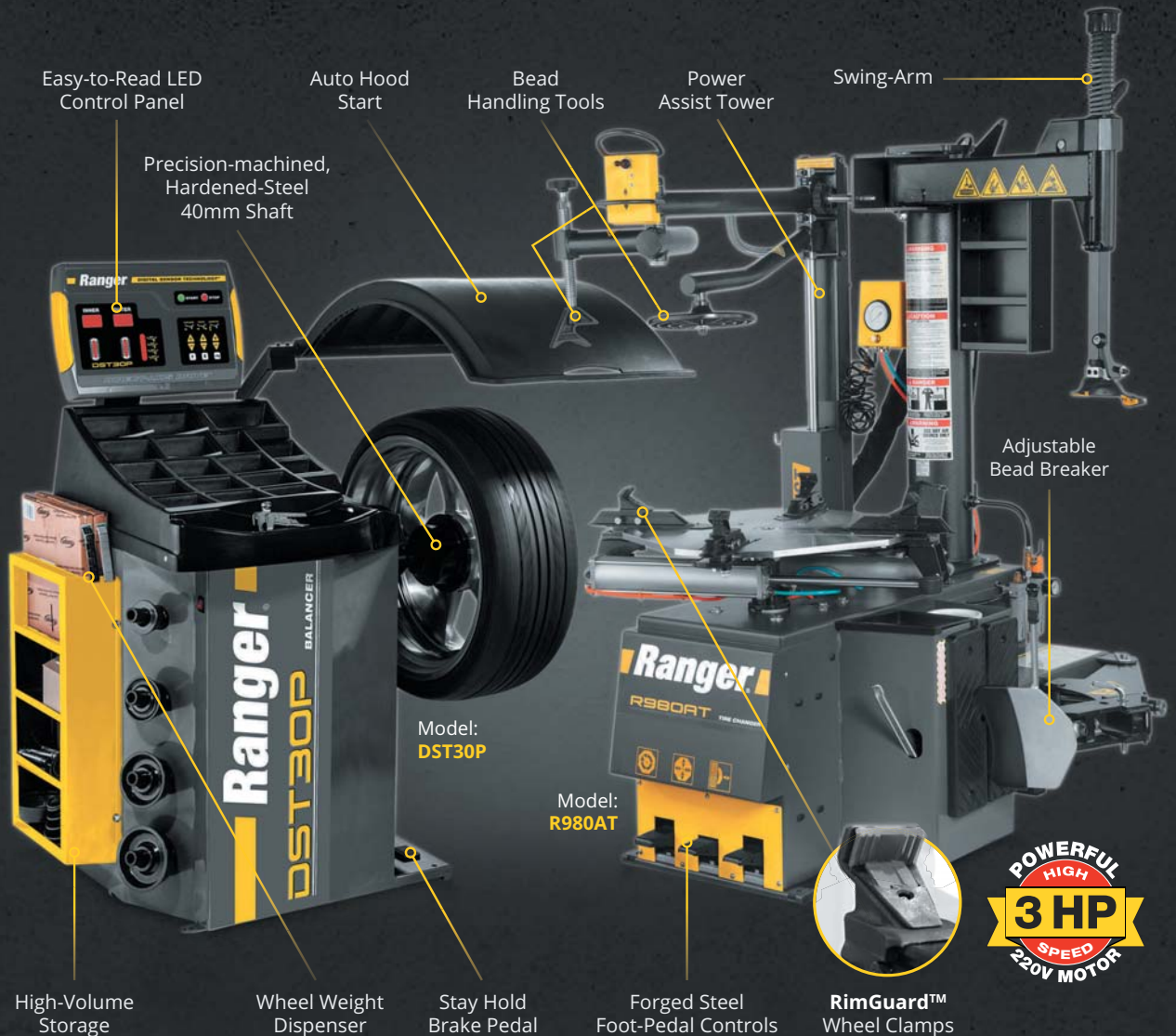
Snapshot of Dealer's PLT Tire Volumes (Year-Over-Year Change)

	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Dec-23	Jan-24	Feb-24	Average
Increase	13%	44%	40%	31%	40%	38%	40%
Flat	49%	12%	20%	13%	13%	29%	26%
Decline	38%	44%	40%	56%	47%	33%	34%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

SOURCE: NORTHCOAST RESEARCH ESTIMATES

John Healy is a managing director and research analyst with Northcoast Research Holdings LLC, based in Cleveland, Ohio. Healy covers a variety of subsectors of the automotive industry. If you would like to participate in the monthly dealer discussions, contact him at john.healy@northcoastresearch.com.

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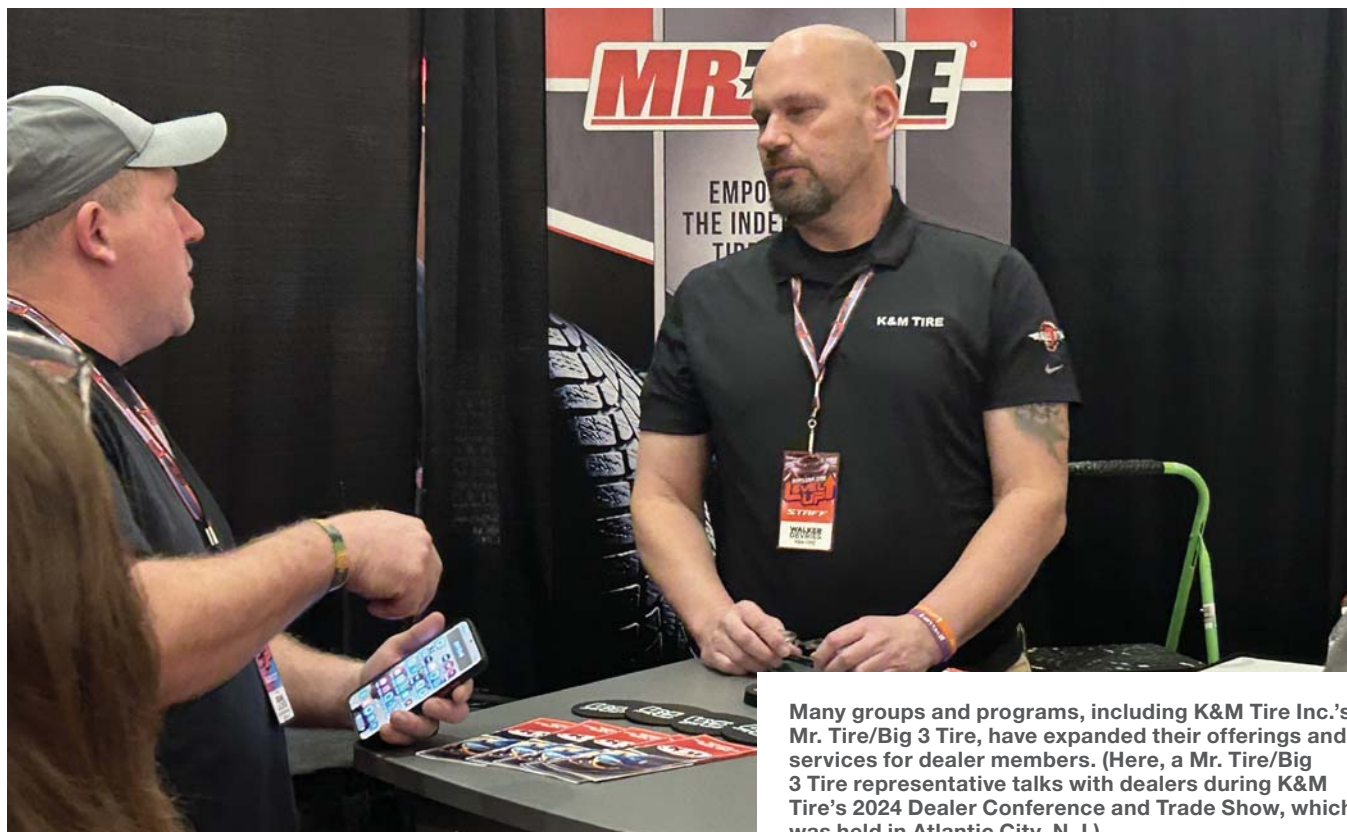
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Many groups and programs, including K&M Tire Inc.'s Mr. Tire/Big 3 Tire, have expanded their offerings and services for dealer members. (Here, a Mr. Tire/Big 3 Tire representative talks with dealers during K&M Tire's 2024 Dealer Conference and Trade Show, which was held in Atlantic City, N.J.)

Photo: MTD

Help has arrived

DEALER PROGRAM GROUPS ADD TO OFFERINGS

By **Mike Manges**

Looking to expand your buying power, network with fellow dealers, enjoy a protected territory, invest in training, beef up your marketing and more? Chances are, there's a tire dealer program group that can help.

"More and more independent tire dealers are turning towards program groups to make the most out of their purchases," says a representative from BKT USA Inc.

"Independent tire dealer program groups offer a comprehensive suite of benefits and incentives tailored to support dealers in effectively managing their operations and maximizing profitability," says Bridgestone Affiliated Retailer Nationwide Network Program Manager Mike Bruns.

Hankook Tire America Corp. officials say programs give dealers who can't meet minimum criteria to be direct customers the ability "to have a relationship with

distributors and wholesalers in which all groups profit."

"Program groups are attractive options for independent tire dealers," says Lynn Sweeney, senior director, sales operations, for Yokohama Tire Corp.

"In today's dynamic retail landscape, program groups help independent tire dealers stay competitive," notes Debbie Richards, head of programs and planning, passenger and light truck tires, for Continental Tire the Americas LLC.

"Independent tire dealers are increasingly seeing the need for access to great products, marketing support and business tools that improve their operation and customer experience," says a representative from Point S USA.

"Leveraging the collective power of other independents who have already vetted these offerings ... is a way to have these economies of scale."

"Groups that offer programs fueled by consolidated purchasing power will continue to grow for a couple of reasons," says Jason Rook, president and CEO of the Independent Tire Dealers Group LLC (ITDG.)


"First, they offer negotiated manufacturer pricing based on the buying power of all members. Second, they offer another layer of security to the independent dealer who wants to go into the market with a consistent product screen."

"As larger dealership group consolidations increase, the remaining smaller and independent tire dealers band together for purchasing power and other scalable benefits," says Aaron Murphy, senior vice president, CMA LLC/Double Coin.

"In addition, the buying power of groups allows for more cost-effective ways to source products and services."

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Dealer/program groups

NEW TO THE PROGRAM

A number of program groups — and their administrators — added to their offerings during the past year.

In 2023, ITDG grew its direct manufacturer programs, while adding new and larger distributor programs “to assist retail operations in creating consistent product offerings through multi-channel access to brands,” says Rook.

K&M Tire Inc. rolled out several new boost programs for its Mr. Tire/Big 3 Tire group members, focusing on seven brands: Continental, Cooper, Falken, Hankook, Kumho, Mastercraft and Yokohama.

“Two of the programs offer an additional monetary incentive for dealers who also sell and service commercial TBR tires, increasing the potential benefits and back-end profit-building enhancements and much more,” says Gene Bova, Northeast regional program manager, K&M Tire.

K&M also has partnered with Garage Gurus to offer training.

Point S realigned its market program “to capitalize more specifically on the digital aspects of targeted backyard marketing,” says a Point S representative, with the goal of “driving a dealer’s marketing spend directly to zip codes associated with the store’s location or to conquest other areas within their store footprint.”

Point S also added “a new form of co-op ownership, allowing a non-branded store to become a member with slightly less benefits than full membership, but still allowing them access to Point S purchasing power.”

Hankook introduced a new tier to its One program during the third quarter of 2023 to provide members with the potential to earn more rewards.

American Kenda Rubber Industrial Co. Ltd.’s Traction program continued its Double Dollar promotions.

During 2023, Bridgestone Americas Inc.’s Bridgestone Affiliated Retailer Nationwide Network published a self-serve dealer performance dashboard on its dedicated portal, affiliatedretailer.net, and also expanded partnerships with social media reputation management services, nationwide warranty providers and others.

Yokohama launched a new spiff program for its Advantage members called Advantage Insider Rewards. “2023 also marked the 20th anniversary of the Yokohama Advantage Associate Dealer Program, so we celebrated with special promotions throughout the year,” says Sweeney.

Kumho Tire USA Inc. added quarterly bonus promotions to specific products that qualify on the company’s Kumho Tire Premium Fuel Program, in addition to core bonus awards.



Youngblood Automotive & Tire of Austin, Texas, won an award from the Independent Tire Dealers Group LLC (ITDG) last year. (Pictured are Michael Youngblood, the dealership's owner, left, with Chris Barry, vice president of sales for ITDG.)

Photo: ITDG

Maxxis International-USA upgraded point-of-sale materials and relaxed volume bonus requirements for its Accelerate group members. “The Accelerate website is always evolving, as well, to improve dealers’ portal experience, while communication through quarterly e-blasts and performance updates both heighten program awareness and ensure that dealers take full advantage of every aspect of the Accelerate program,” says Matt Clak, associate director, marketing, for Maxxis.

Nexen Tire America Inc. says it made adjustments to its Next Level program’s entry-level tire order requirements.

WHAT’S NEXT?

To serve their members more effectively, several program groups are planning to add benefits during 2024.

The Hankook One program has adjusted requirements for each of its tiers to incentivize dealers to continue growing their partnership with Hankook, which also plans to engage with more dealers at events and roll out enhanced promotions.

BKT will continue to add more products and review pay-out tiers to better meet the needs of its associate dealers.

Giti Tire (USA) Ltd.’s GT Radial Smart program gives dealers the opportunity to earn cash rewards by reaching quarterly targets. Rewards are disbursed in various forms, such as virtual or physical cards, checks and more.

In addition, GT Radial Smart dealers will receive marketing tools and resources in the form of point-of-sale materials, signage and product training. At the end of the year, they will have the chance to catch up on their targets and receive awards, along with an additional volume bonus.

Continental will invest in additional support, strategic partnerships and analytical insights for its Continental Gold dealers.

Kumho Tire USA says it will continue quarterly promotions through its Premium Fuel program, while also enhancing store merchandising and point-of-sale material offerings for members. Premium Fuel members also will have access to new items through the Kumho store that they can purchase using rewards points.

Toyo Tire U.S.A. Corp.’s Driven program now has five PCR/LTR tire payout levels, with a minimum of at least 60 units per quarter to earn payouts on all Toyo PCR/LTR purchases.

BTS Tire & Wheel Distributors’ BTS Partners Program will offer new training opportunities at no charge to its aligned partner dealers and will provide additional earning opportunities on various tire brands. Members will be able to earn credits and accruals for equipment purchases, plus discounted pricing on all tire supplies and equipment.

ITDG says it’s working to ensure that its members have access to alternative programs in the face of possible tariffs and will expand its exclusive tire brand offerings in 2024.

ITDG also is implementing programs to help members stay on the cutting edge of retail, wholesale and warehouse technology, while offering expanded training programs to create a turnkey experience for dealers.

K&M Tire’s program enhancements from 2023 will remain in place for its Mr. Tire/Big 3 Tire members. The company also plans to offer several exclusive PLT consumer rebates, several sell-in purchase incentive promotions, parts rebates, oil programs, ag and commercial tire volume

bonus programs, boost programs and more.

Yokohama Advantage associate dealers can now participate in a tire purchase program that allows them to be reimbursed for Yokohama tires on their personal vehicles and an advanced marketing program allows associate dealers to be reimbursed for certain donations when they support a charity of their choosing.

CMA LLC/Double Coin will launch a new dealer portal in 2024.

Sumitomo Rubber North America Inc.'s (SRNA) Falken Fanatic program will allow dealers to earn up to \$10.50 per tire, with the additional \$2 per unit, on the Falken WildPeak and Azenis lines, with bonuses earned on payable tires when levels are attained. Falken Fanatic members also will have access to SRNA's Falken TV program.

In 2024, the Nexen Next Level program has increased unit payouts from \$3 to \$4 on most PCR tires and from \$5 to \$6 on most LTR tires.

The Bridgestone Affiliated Retailer Nationwide Network will maintain standardized collaborations with ven-

dor partners, while featuring partners on a monthly and quarterly basis, in an approach designed to facilitate co-branded giveaways aimed at promoting a diverse range of offerings more effectively.

The group also will continue to introduce expanded vendor opportunities throughout the year.

U.S. AutoForce LLC says it will focus on introducing new technologies to bring opportunities and efficiencies to its Tire One dealers.

Turbo Tires Wholesale LLC will continue to expand its new Lexani Ignite associate dealer program to reward its dealer base for prioritizing and selling Turbo's Lexani, RBP and Lionhart brands. Turbo reports that more than 100 dealers enrolled in Lexani Ignite within the first 10 days of the program. The company projects that more than 1,000 dealers will be enrolled in the program by next month.

TireHub LLC recently introduced its new TireHub Plus program, which offers incentives to members. These include a tire protection plan, marketing funds, customer financing, a retail pricing tool,

product assortment data, a dealer benchmarking tool and training.

Titan International Inc. is continuing to strengthen and grow its sales and training programs for dealers. These include Titan University, Titan Rewards, Tire Industry Association safety training and access to Titan's dealer portal, The Hub.

Exxpress Car Care Centers has changed its name to Exxpress Tire Network, while adding a loyalty program for dealers who choose Exxpress Tire Delivery as their primary distributor for a manufacturer's associate dealer program.

Tire Solutions Inc. reports that it is wrapping up construction on its latest warehouse addition to provide enhanced service to its Tire Solutions Installer dealers. Tire Solutions also will launch a new website in 2024, as well as two new uniform national account programs.

In the franchise category, RNR Tire Express, at select locations, will expand its offerings to include brakes and other front-end services that will utilize the company's flexible payment options. ■



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National Independent Groups

Program/administrator	Enroll- ment fee	Monthly/ annual fees	Min. purchase	Volume discounts	Protected territories	Exclusive tire brands	Insurance	Credit card	Ad support	Warranties	Training	Min. invest- ment	No. of members	Contact
ATD Activate (American Tire Distributors Inc.)	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	activate@atd-us.com
Hercules Power Program (American Tire Distributors Inc.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	2,500+	info@herculesfire.com
Hercules Flex Program (American Tire Distributors Inc.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	730+	info@herculesfire.com
Independent Tire Dealers Group (Independent Tire Dealers Group LLC)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	1,100+	Chris Barry/charry@itdusa.com
Lexani Ignite (Turbo Wholesale Tires LLC)	No	No	*	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	100	Christina Gamet/christina@turbotires.net
Mr. Tire/Big 3 Tire (K&M Tire Inc.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	1,700+	Brian Goring/brian.goring@kmtire.com
Point S USA dba Point S Tire & Auto Service	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	346	Clint Young/clintyoung@pointstire.com
Tire Alliance Groupe (Tire Alliance Group Ltd.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	3,900+	Jim Nasoulis/jimnasoulis@tirealliance.com
TireHub Plus (TireHub LLC)	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	www.tirehub.com
Tire One (U.S. AutoForce LLC)	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	2,000+	Jon Napoli/jnapoli@usautoforce.com
Tire Pros (American Tire Distributors Inc.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	655	Greg Bell/gbell@atd-us.com
Tire Solutions Installer (Tire Solutions Inc.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	230	Cody Lang/codyl@mytiresolutions.com
Tread Connection International (Tread Connection LLC)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	35	Henry Spence/hspence@treadconnection.com

Regional Independent Groups

Program/administrator	Enroll- ment fee	Monthly/ annual fees	Min. purchase	Volume discounts	Protected territories	Exclusive tire brands	Insurance	Credit card	Ad support	Warranties	Training	Min. invest- ment	No. of members	Contact
BTS Partners Program (BTS Tire & Wheel Distributors)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	250+	Frankie Underwood/frankie@bistire.net
Express Tire Network (Express Tire LLC)	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	400+	Stephen Clave/stephen.clave@expressfire.com
Independent Tire Dealers (Community Wholesale Tire Distributing Inc.)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	195	John Krajewski/john.krajewski@communitytire.com
United Tire & Service (United Tire & Service LLC)	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	12	Greg Mynaugh/greg@unitedtire.com
Xpress Tire and Auto Service (Conrad's Tire Service Inc.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	126	W. Dan Cochran/dcochran@xpress-tire.com

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Tire manufacturer programs

Program/administrator	Enroll-ment fee	Monthly/annual fees	Min. purchase	Volume discounts	Protected territories	Exclusive tire brands	Insurance	Credit card	Ad support	Warranties	Training	Min. invest-ment	No. of members	Contact
Accelerate (Maxxis International - USA)	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	1,700+	www.maxxis.com/accelerate
Advantage (Yokohama Tire Corp.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	2,400+	yokohama@ansira.com
Alliance (Michelin North America Inc.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	www.michelinman.com
BKT Growing Together Associate Dealer Program (BKT USA Inc.)	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	700+	Alexa Sherry/alexa.sherry@lkt-tires.com
Bridgestone Affiliated Retailer Nationwide Network (Bridgestone Americas Inc.)	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	5,400+	Michael Bruns/brunsmichael@bfsusa.com
Cooper Mastercraft Century (Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.)	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	3,400	Jack Powers/john_powers@goodyear.com
Cooper Medallion (Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.)	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	5,100	Jack Powers/john_powers@goodyear.com
Delinte D-Shield/Landsail 50K/RH (Sentry Tire USA)	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	*	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4,000+	Nick Gutierrez/nickg@sentrytire.com
Double Coin (CMA LLC/Double Coin)	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	1,700+	Aaron Murphy/aaron.murphy@cmaintl.com
Driven (Toyo Tire U.S.A. Corp.)	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1,400+	Cezika Concha/conchac2@toyotires.com
Falken Fmatic (Sumitomo Rubber North America Inc.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	15,000+	Randy Pulido/rpulido@falkentire.com
Continental Gold Retailer Program (Continental Tire the Americas LLC)	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	3,500+	Pltgold@conti-na.com
Goodyear G3X Network (Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	3,300	Jack Powers/john_powers@goodyear.com
Goodyear Tire & Service Network (Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.)	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	1,500	Jack Powers/john_powers@goodyear.com
GT Radial Smart (Giti Tire USA Ltd.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	*	*	*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	1,800+	Ruby Vizzaino/ruby.vizzaino@us.giti.com

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Tire manufacturer programs (cont.)

Program/administrator	Enroll- ment fee	Monthly/ annual fees	Min. purchase	Volume discounts	Protected territories	Exclusive tire brands	Insurance	Credit card	Ad support	Warranties	Training	Min. invest- ment	No. of members	Contact
Hankook One (Hankook Tire America Corp.)	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	4,000	hankooksupport@channel-fusion.com
Kenda Traction (American Kenda Rubber Ind. Co. Ltd.)	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1,800	Ryan Lewis/rlewis@kendausa.com
Kumho Tire Premium Fuel Program (Kumho Tire USA Inc.)	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	2,500	Sevda Arjomand/sarjomand@kumhotireusa.com
Mickey Thompson Marketing Alliance (Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.)	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	N/A	mtma@mickeythompsonstires.com
Next Level (Nexen Tire America Inc.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	10,000	Greg Karson/gkarson@nexentireusa.com
Nitto Enthusiast Circuit (Nitto Tire USA Inc.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A	support@nittoenthusiastcircuit.com
Titan Strong Seller Associate Dealer Program (Titan International Inc.)	No	No	Yes	Yes	*	*	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A	corp.marketing@titan-intl.com

Franchise groups

Program/administrator	Enroll- ment fee	Monthly/ annual fees	Min. purchase	Volume discounts	Protected territories	Exclusive tire brands	Insurance	Credit card	Ad support	Warranties	Training	Min. invest- ment	No. of members	Contact
Big O Tires LLC (TBC Corp.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	470	www.bigofranchise.com
Car-X Tire & Auto (Monro Inc.)	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	152	Dan LeGault/dlegault@carx.com
Express Oil Change & Tire Engineers (Mavis Tire Express Services Corp.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	193	www.expressoil.com/franchise
Midas International LLC (TBC Corp.)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	1,160	Kevin Northrup/kenorthrup@tbccorp.com
RNR Tire Express (SPF Management Co. LLC)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	193	Tracy Cintron/tcintron@rnrtires.com

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What's next for the retread market?

RETREADERS OFFER MIXED PREDICTIONS FOR 2024

By **Madison Gehring**

Some of the country's largest retreaders are forecasting that demand for their products will be "flat" or "steady" in 2024.

"We are forecasting a fairly flat year for 2024, with a small increase at some of our newer stores," says Jon Langerak, president and CEO of Bryon Center, Mich.-based Wonderland Tire Co. Inc.

Bob Feldbauer, president and CEO of Logan, Utah-based Jack's Tire & Oil Management Co. Inc., agrees that 2024 will be a "slower year."

"We are expecting a 20% decrease in market demand for 2024," says Daniel Horn, vice president of sales for McCarthy Tire Service Co. Inc., which is headquartered in Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

Pete Glesing, president of commercial sales and operations at Best-One Tire, which is based in Monroe, Ind., agrees that there will be a decline in demand, but only expects that decline to be present during the first two quarters of 2024.

The decrease in demand for retreaded tires can be attributed to "the market softening (and) freight demand slowing," according to Bruce Chamblee, chief operating officer at Dorsey Tire Co. Inc., which has locations in Georgia and South Carolina.

Chamblee expects to see a "steep decline" in demand versus 2023 levels.

Another factor for the expected decline in demand is the fact that 2024 is a presidential election year, according



"We are planning for a year of growth in the retread market between 5% to 10%," says Jeremy Benton, vice president of commercial division and manufacturing at Black's Tire Service Inc.'s Carolina Retread division.

Photo: Black's Tire Service Inc.

to Noah Hickman, president of Oak Hill, Ohio-based H&H Industries Inc., which specializes in retreading OTR tires.

"It will be harder to forecast the market with the uncertainty of the election," he says.

Not all retreaders are projecting that demand will decrease in 2024. Some tire dealers are expecting a rise in demand.

"We're planning for a year of growth in the retread market between 5% to 10%," says Jeremy Benton, vice president of commercial division and manufacturing at Black's Tire Service Inc.'s Carolina Retread division.

Bob Berlin, president at Pete's Tire Barns Inc., which is headquartered in Orange, Mass., says he expects growth in retreaded tire demand at his dealership to be up 2% to 3%.

Over at Conlan Tire LLC in Mulberry, Fla., demand should increase 15% to 20%, according to Steve Bobovnik, Conlan Tire's director of corporate operations.

Continental Tire the Americas LLC dba BestDrive LLC is also expecting to see growth in its retread business, according to Shaun Uys, head of Continental U.S. market truck tires, replacement.

"We expect a moderate increase in demand for retreads in 2024 based on conditions and forecasts within the industry and will continue to expand our capabilities and network to meet whatever demand we may experience," says Steve Phillips, director of tire sales and plant operation, retread, for Love's Travel Stops.

The majority of retreaders who recently talked with MTD say their retreading production was down or flat in 2023. However, some saw growth.

Bobovnik says that retread production at his company was up 30%. "Customers wanted to stock less new tire inventory because of excessive stock inventory in their warehouses from the previous year."

Langerak says that Wonderland Tire's orders increased during 2023.

And supply chain issues caused Dorsey Tire to experience more demand from customers.

"It was also affected by the conversion programs on large fleet customers, who shifted away from bias tires," says Chamblee.

Horn says McCarthy Tire's retread production was up 20% last year.

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Retreading



Bob Berlin, president at Pete's Tire Barns Inc., which is headquartered in Orange, Mass., says his company continues to invest in its retreading operations.

Photo: Pete's Tire Barns Inc.



"Staffing has traditionally been the biggest challenge in years past, but that has eased," says Rice Tire CEO Chris Chase. He says the biggest challenges of 2024 are "profitability when dealing with national account reimbursement from tiremakers and competition from imports."

Photo: Rice Tire



Wonderland Tire Co.'s plant in Lebanon, Tenn., has undergone several expansions, including the installation of a new monorail system, relocation of precure chambers and the addition of eight new AcuTread presses. The plant produced its first AcuTread product this past February.

Photo: Wonderland Tire Co.

TARIFF WATCH

Retreaders also report they are keeping an eye on tariff developments.

The U.S. Department of Commerce is in the process of determining whether tariffs should be levied on medium truck tires made in Thailand. A preliminary ruling is expected in May.

Retreaders who recently talked with MTD appear to be split on whether tariffs will impact their businesses.

"I expect the tariffs to help show the extended value of retreading quality casings," says Benton. "Along with this, we forecast that casing pricing will continue to increase

and it will have an effect on casing supply."

Berlin says tariffs should "positively help retreading" because retreads will be positioned as "a better, cost-effective option" for fleets.

Some retreaders believe tariffs will not impact their business.

"Importers will shift production away from tariff countries as they have done in the past," explains Chamblee. "What we expect to see is new countries enter the import medium truck category as an alternative to Thailand-made truck tires."

Horn and Feldbauer say they expect little to no impact.

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McCarthy Tire Service Co. Inc.'s retread production was up 20% last year, according to Daniel Horn, the Wilkes-Barre, Pa.-based retreader's vice president of sales.

Photo: McCarthy Tire Co. Inc.

Gary Van Blaricom, president of Heartland Tire Group, which is based in Davenport, Iowa, agrees that factories will move to other locations so there will be little change.

"It depends on the level of any tariff," says Love's Phillips.

"As a significant number of TBR tires are produced in Thailand, imposition of high tariffs could pivot more volume to retreads and it also could create short- or intermediate-term availability issues with new tires, as new tire manufacturers adjust to changing conditions in the market.

"In any event, retreads can and will continue to offer a valuable economic component for any commercial fleet's maintenance program."

ONGOING CHALLENGES

When asked about the biggest challenges facing retreaders, a common theme stood out: staffing issues.

"The biggest challenge for 2024 is a reliable and consistent labor force," says Bobovnik.

Benton says finding "good, quality team members" is a top priority at Black's Tire.

Keeping plants full will be another challenge.

"Managing our current retread demand carryover from year-end and slower production numbers will be a big challenge," says Feldbauer.

Berlin agrees that managing demand fluctuations will be a challenge, but notes

that his company continues to invest in equipment. Pete's Tire Barns recently installed three Bandag tread splice builders to "help ensure a more uniform quality and a matched tread splice."

"In 2024, the industry is operating in a challenging environment, where we have incurred significant increases in material and labor inputs over the past several

years, just like the customers we serve," says Phillips.

"Value and quality are important components to retread producers and our customers and we will continue to expand our capabilities to produce high-quality retreads and focus on opportunities to meet the commercial product and service needs of our customers." ■

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Love's Travel Stops discusses its strategy

TRUCK STOP CHAIN IS SIXTH LARGEST RETREADER IN THE U.S.

By **Mike Manges**

Love's Travel Stops continues to invest in its commercial truck tire and retreading business.

The company is the sixth largest retreader in the U.S. with six plants and estimated daily output of 2,400 medium truck tire retreads, according to MTD's 2024 Top 50 Retreaders list. And it continues to add Love's Truck Care and Speedco locations.

In this MTD exclusive, Eric Daniels, vice president of Love's Total Truck Care, provides insight into the commercial tire operation at Love's, including plans for its retreading business. (Love's sells Michelin, Continental, Bridgestone, Goodyear, Yokohama, Hankook and Double Coin truck tires.)

MTD: In early-2023, Love's announced plans to open 15 Love's Truck Care and Speedco locations and two retread plants during this year, while also adding 75 service trucks. Can you bring us up to speed on those openings and additions?

Daniels: Last year, Love's opened nine new Love's Truck Care/Speedco locations, adding 27 service trucks, as well as our first six truck wash locations at new and existing Love's Truck Care/Speedco locations.

Part of our newest distribution center/retread operation in Natalia, Texas, came online late last year and the facility became fully operational earlier this year. (*Editor's note: the Natalia plant replaced an existing retread shop in Laredo, Texas, where Love's maintains "a tire delivery presence," according to Daniels.*)

Natalia has much more capacity and is a more strategic location to deploy Love's retread tires and merchandise to locations across the region through Love's distribution network. Love's currently has six distribution centers/retread plants across the country.

We are planning to open a seventh distribution center in Utah, which will be fully operational later this year and will



"Love's currently has six distribution centers/retread plants across the country," says Eric Daniels, vice president of Love's Total Truck Care.

Photo: Love's Travel Stops

add a retread operation to that location at a later date.

MTD: In terms of production and pounds of rubber used per year, Love's is one of the 10 largest truck tire retreaders in the U.S. Why has it been a priority to develop that part of Love's business? Does Love's still use the Oliver system?

Daniels: Love's focus on the retread space is part of its overarching goal to elevate our value for customers, including owner-operators and fleets. We saw the business opportunity in recycling worn commercial truck tires from customers and running them through a best-in-class process to provide a safe, quality product that drives profitability beyond our national tire brand partners.

Oliver brand tread rubber products are utilized in Love's differentiated retread process.

MTD: What's your go-to-market strategy for both Love's Truck Stops and Speedco?

Daniels: Both Love's and Speedco offer fast, clean, friendly service to customers over the road. We act as a one-stop shop for professional drivers, casual drivers and RVers through a nationwide network of

locations. The company is investing in technology, vertical integration and people in both organizations. In the travel stops, that includes technology such as Love's Connect, our mobile app; vertical integration in fuel and private brands; and leadership development training. In Truck Care & Speedco, that includes technology, such as Shop Connect CORE, our point-of-sale system; vertical integration in retread tires; and Love's Truck Care Academies.

At our more than 400 Truck Care and Speedco locations, we focus on meeting the truck service needs of professional drivers. We offer warranty work for Freightliner and International trucks, light mechanical services and emergency roadside assistance to best serve our customers. In most cases, Truck Care and Speedco services are offered at Love's Travel Stops locations. We aim to be that one-stop shop for casual and professional drivers.

MTD: In general, do you foresee greater competition within the truck stop channel for new commercial truck tire and retread sales?

Daniels: We do see our competitors planning growth in the tire/maintenance space, in terms of adding locations. ■

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Top 50 Retreaders

2024 MTD Top 50 Retreaders in the U.S.

2024 RANK	COMPANY	HEADQUARTERS	NUMBER OF PLANTS	LT TIRES	TRUCK TIRES	OTR TIRES	INDUS-TRIAL TIRES	POUNDS RUBBER USED (Millions)	PROCESS	TOTAL POINTS
1	Southern Tire Mart LLC	Columbia, Miss.	28	12	8,350	0	5	55	Bandag (precure)	29,245
2	Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., dba Goodyear Commercial Tires & Service Centers	Akron, Ohio	35	0	5,700	18	0	37.8	Goodyear (UniCircle, precure)	20,778
3	Pomp's Tire Service Inc.	Green Bay, Wis.	26	200	4,600	0	30	N/A	Bandag (precure)	16,440
4	Best-One Tire	Monroe, Ind.	20	0	3,900	0	0	24	Bandag (precure)	13,650
5	Snider Tire Inc., dba Snider Fleet Solutions*	Fort Mill, S.C.	9	200	3,300	0	0	22	Michelin (Pre-Mold)	11,890
6	Love's Travel Stops & Country Stores Inc., dba Love's Truck Solutions LLC	Oklahoma City, Okla.	6	0	2,400	0	0	N/A	Oliver, Love's	8,400
7	McCarthy Tire Service Co. Inc.	Wilkes-Barre, Pa.	13	10.5	2,147	0	0	19.7	Bandag	7,535
8	Purcell Tire & Rubber Co.	Potosi, Mo.	5	210	700	100	40	9.5	Michelin, Goodyear (UniCircle, precure, mold cure, Flex-cure), segment mold cure, precision cut treads, Oliver, MRT	7,407
9	Service Tire Truck Centers Inc.*	Bethlehem, Pa.	5	20	1,150	0	2	8	Michelin, Oliver	4,059
10	Bauer Built Inc., dba Bauer Built Tire*	Durand, Wis.	6	10	1,100	0	0	8.5	Michelin (Pre-Mold, Custom-Mold)	3,867
11	Bob Sumerel Tire Co.	Erlanger, Ky.	7	0	1,100	0	0	5.5	Bandag (precure)	3,850
12	Parkhouse Tire Inc.	Bell Garden, Calif.	3	30	1,050	0	8	7	Bandag (precure)	3,726
13	Earl W. Colvard Inc., dba Boulevard Tire Center	Deland, Fla.	4	0	1,022	0	0	6.5	Bandag	3,577
14	Les Schwab Tire Centers Inc.	Bend, Ore.	1	0	1,000	0	30	8	Precure and Marangoni Ringtread	3,500
14	T&W Tire LLC*	Oklahoma City, Okla.	4	0	1,000	0	0	7	Michelin (Pre-Mold, Custom-Mold)	3,500
16	Conlan Tire LLC	Mulberry, Fla.	3	0	980	0	0	8.1	ContiLife Cycle)	3,430
17	Atlanta Commercial Tire Inc.*	Forest Park, Ga.	2	5	890	0	12	4.9	Bandag (precure)	3,124

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Top 50 Retreaders

2024 RANK	COMPANY	HEADQUARTERS	NUMBER OF PLANTS	LT TIRES	TRUCK TIRES	OTR TIRES	INDUS-TRIAL TIRES	POUNDS RUBBER USED (Millions)	PROCESS	TOTAL POINTS
18	H&H Industries Inc.	Oak Hill, Ohio	1	0	0	65	5	4.5	Mold cure, sculpture, NeXus precure	2,990
19	Border Tire LLC*	El Paso, Texas	3	0	850	0	0	4.8	Michelin, Oliver	2,975
20	B.R. Retreading Inc.*	Glasgow, Ky.	1	0	0	55	10	3.5	Segmented radial molds, Marangoni (cut tread)	2,530
21	Custom Bandag Inc.*	Linden, N.J.	3	96	672	0	0	3.7	Bandag (precure)	2,515
22	Pete's Tire Barns Inc.	Orange, Mass.	3	55	645	3	8	3.95	Bandag (precure)	2,489
23	Continental Tire the Americas LLC, dba BestDrive LLC	Fort Mill, S.C.	5	0	700	0	0	5.2	ContiLife Cycle	2,450
24	Jack's Tire and Oil Management Co. Inc.	Logan, Utah	5	20	615	0	0	4.5	Michelin (Pre-Mold)	2,187
25	New Holland Tire Inc.*	Terre Hill, Pa.	2	19	450	10	0	2.7	Daeho/Elgi (precure), Bandamatic	2,067
26	Ziegler Tire & Supply Co.*	Massillon, Ohio	2	0	560	0	0	4.6	Michelin (Pre-Mold, Custom Mold)	1,960
27	Wonderland Tire Co. Inc.	Byron Center, Mich.	4	10	525	0	0	4	AcuTread (mold cure), Pre-Q, Marangoni	1,855
28	Valley Tire Co. Inc.*	Charleroi, Pa.	1	40	500	0	0	3.2	Michelin (Pre-Mold)	1,818
29	Community Tire Co.*	St. Louis, Mo.	1	120	30	30	30	2.5	Mold cure, segmented mold cure	1,689
30	Craft Tire Inc., dba Shrader Retreading*	Uniontown, Pa.	2	0	0	36	0	2.5	Marangoni (Mammoth) and Cima computer cut tread	1,656
31	RDH Tire and Retread Co.*	Cleveland, N.C.	1	0	0	35	5	4.5	Marangoni cut tread, mil cut tread	1,610
32	Superior Tire Service Inc.*	Salem, Ore.	2	60	360	5	6	3.4	Michelin (Pre-Mold), Oliver (Pre-Mold)	1,592
33	Colony Tire Corp.	Edenton, N.C.	1	0	450	0	0	2.7	Micheli (Pre-Mold)	1,575
34	MTI Retreading Co. Inc.*	Grand Rapids, Mich.	1	5	400	0	0	2	Michelin (Pre-Mold)	1,409
35	White's Tire Service Inc.*	Wilson, N.C.	1	27	310	4	0	2.7	Mrangoni Ringtread, Vipal	1,315
36	Gem City Tire Inc.*	Dayton, Ohio	1	38	351	0	0	2	Goodyear (precure, UniCircle)	1,293

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Top 50 Retreaders

2024 RANK	COMPANY	HEADQUARTERS	NUMBER OF PLANTS	LT TIRES	TRUCK TIRES	OTR TIRES	INDUS-TRIAL TIRES	POUNDS RUBBER USED (Millions)	PROCESS	TOTAL POINTS
37	Commercial Tire Inc.*	Meridian, Ohio	4	18	348	0	12	2	Bandag (precure)	1,249
38	Barnwell House of Tires Inc., dba East Coast Retreaders LLC*	Central Islip, N.Y.	2	25	340	0	12	3	Goodyear (precure, UniCircle)	1,233
39	Heartland Tire Group, dba Eastern Iowa Tire Inc., Heartland Tires and Treads of Omaha, Heartland Tires and Treads of Kansas City, Davis County Tire, Weldon Tire	Davenport, Iowa	4	0	340	0	20	2.4	Bandag (precure)	1,190
40	Bergey's Retread Technologies Inc.*	Franconia, Pa.	1	1	325	0	10	2.3	Mrangoni (Ringtread precure), Continental ContiLifeCycle, Bergey's Prima	1,139
41	Parrish Tire Co.*	Winston-Salem, N.C.	1	10	320	0	0	2.7	Bandag (precure)	1,137
42	Donald B. Rice Tire Co. Inc. dba Rice Tire	Frederick, Md.	2	10	310	0	0	2.2	Goodyear (precure/UniCircle), Acutread	1,102
43	Trac Tire Services LLC*	Florence, Ky.	1	0	300	0	0	2	Goodyear	1,050
44	Dorsey Tire Co. Inc.	Pooler, Ga.	1	0	297	0	0	1.69	Bandag	1,040
45	Daniels Tire Service Inc.*	Santa Fe Springs, Calif.	1	29	273	0	0	2.4	Goodyear (UniCircle, precure)	1,005
46	Shrader Tire and Oil Co.*	Toldeo, Ohio	2	0	275	0	0	N/A	Michelin (Pre-Mold)	963
47	Black's Tire Service Inc. dba Carolina Retread	Whiteville, N.C.	1	30	259	0	1	1.25	Goodyear Precure and UniCircle	958
48	Ozarko Tire Centers Inc.*	West Plains, Mo.	2	0	265	0	0	1.9	Michelin (Pre-Mold)	928
49	Beasley Tire Service Inc.	Houston, Texas	1	20	240	0	0	2	MRT	874
50	Steve Shannon Tire Co.	Bloomsburg, Pa.	1	0	220	0	0	1.5	Pre-Q	770

Footnotes

* – estimated; N/A – not available

Here's how the points are calculated: Each April, Modern Tire Dealer ranks the "Top 50 Retreaders in the U.S." based on the average amount of tread rubber used to retread different types of tires. Twelve pounds of rubber, on average, are used to produce one light truck tire retread, while 24 pounds are used to produce one medium/heavy truck tire retread. An average of 324 pounds is used to build one OTR tire retread. MTD awards one point for every seven pounds of rubber used per retread. Each light truck tire retread equals 1.7 points, each truck tire retread equals 3.5 points, and each OTR retread equals 46 points. The point total does not include industrial tires. Numbers are rounded to the nearest point.

Cornering the market

ADVANCE TIRE USES PRIVATE BRAND, PROGRAMS TO SET ITSELF APART

By **Mike Manges**

Jerry Bruner had been selling other companies' industrial and OTR tires for years — investing a significant amount of money promoting their brands.

As Bruner's business, Millstone, N.J.-based Advance Tire Inc., continued to expand its customer base, the second-generation tire dealer eventually asked, "Why am I building a following for someone else?"

That question sparked a process that led to the creation of Advance Tire's own private industrial tire brand, Contender — a development that has been a key driver of the dealership's growth.

"We wanted to be in control of our own destiny," says Bruner. "And we wanted the customer to come to us to buy the product."

He says finding reliable manufacturers that could build a private label line to spec was relatively easy thanks to already-established connections with overseas factories.

"I had built solid relationships with companies that were building these types of tires."

Today, three factories — located in China, Taiwan and Sri Lanka — manufacture Contender-brand tires.

Having a high-quality private label helps Advance Tire differentiate itself from its competitors, while navigating the unpredictable ebb and flow of supply.

Bruner says this was particularly beneficial during the COVID-19 pandemic, which upended logistics for many dealers.

"We had several factories to pull from" when COVID-19 struck and overseas shipping fell into turmoil. "We weren't just another fish in the sea."

NEW REVENUE STREAMS

"When people think of industrial tires, a lot of times they think of forklift tires," says Bruner.

While Advance Tire sells plenty of tires for forklift applications, OTR tires

for recycling applications are the company's bread-and-butter. That includes solid aperture tires.

"We hooked up with an off-shore aperture tire manufacturer around 20 years ago," says Bruner. "We saw a need for their product" and added the company's line to Advance Tire's portfolio.



"We wanted to be in control of our own destiny," says Jerry Bruner, owner of Millstone, N.J.-based Advance Tire Inc. (pictured, middle of back row.)

Photo: Advance Tire Inc.

"Around that time, we also were doing a lot of urethane tire fill work. That's how we originally grew our business. My father was filling tires before it became popular."

As time went on, "we talked an initial group of dealers into letting us do (tire filling) for them," says Bruner.

"We started covering New Jersey and grew that to where we were going into Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, Md.

"We piggybacked our aperture tire business onto that same model," he adds. "As aperture tires became more accepted and as customers began asking for them, we had more dealers reaching out to us and placing orders."

Advance Tire already had developed a lucrative sideline selling aperture tires directly to steel mills, demolition contractors, waste transfer stations and other end users.

"They knew they could reach out to us and we'd have the product in stock. And some of these companies don't have OTR presses, which are massive and expensive.

You (also) need to have the right tooling," as well as skilled operators.

"Anytime you're changing a solid OTR tire, it's a fairly in-depth process," says Bruner. "Large solids have to be put together with a press, which sometimes cannot be done on-site.

"It's very inconvenient for a customer to have to shut down his machine for two or three days, especially when you're talking about a front-end loader he might have spent a half-million dollars on."

Bruner developed a wheel exchange program for Advance Tire's solid OTR tires customers, which proved to be another game-changing service for the dealership.

"Having rims that we can put together and then putting tires on those rims and shipping them to customers is huge. That allows us to send those tires anywhere.

"I don't have to block a guy's machine up, bring his rims all the way back from Michigan, press them in my facility and then ship them back," says Bruner.

The wheel exchange program has turned out to be "a much more economical, convenient process for the customer. And the main thing I like about the program is that it has allowed us to grow our footprint. We can send tires all over the country and sell to a much bigger market."

Never one to rest on his laurels, Bruner says that anticipating — and responding to — the ever-changing needs of customers will continue to contribute to Advance Tire's ongoing success. "We'll continue to adapt." ■

OTR Tire Conference focuses on training, safety

OTR TIRE MARKET IS POISED FOR GROWTH

By **Mike Manges**

Technician training and safety took center stage at the 2024 Tire Industry Association (TIA) OTR Tire Conference in Las Vegas, Nev.

The three-day event kicked off with several presentations, including a panel in which three OTR tire safety experts emphasized the importance of following proper procedures when servicing OTR tires and wheels.

“Mine site fatalities spiked in 2023,” Jeff Faubion, compliance specialist at Bridgestone Americas Inc., told conference attendees.

Faubion was joined by Roy Galyer, training manager for Australia-based Klinge Holdings Pty Ltd., and Russ Devens, director of safety and risk management for Wilkes-Barre, Pa.-based McCarthy Tire Service Co. Inc.

Panel moderator and TIA Chief Technology Officer Kevin Rohlwing revealed that four tire service-related deaths occurred last year in the U.S. The fatalities involved two commercial trucks, one light truck and a farm tractor — all of which



OTR Tire Conference attendees were treated to a real-time simulcast of an OTR tire and wheel service session, hosted by Matt White, director of off-road tire service for TIA.

Photo: MTD

fell off their jacks, he said. The incidents “are an indication that the people doing these jobs — for whatever reason — are taking shortcuts or they’re going out there untrained,” said Galyer, who speculated that the common denominator across all four tragedies was “a lack of process.”

“There’s no reason” why people who service OTR tire and wheel assemblies shouldn’t be trained, said Devens, who added that his employer, McCarthy Tire, gives its technicians complete “stop work authority” when they encounter dangerous situations.

Another panel during the first day of the 2024 TIA OTR Conference discussed tire chain selection and maintenance.

“Chains allow for additional product (service life) and added value” for end users, Brian Cohn, president of OTRUSA.com, told attendees.

OTR tire dealers “really rely on service and chains are a service product,” he noted.

Selling, installing, maintaining and servicing tire chains can be “a revenue gen-

erator for tire dealers,” said Al Atkinson, North American product manager, Pwag Chain Inc., a sentiment echoed by fellow panelist Faith Sedele, the CEO of Las Zirh Tire Chains, a company based in Turkey.

MARKET GROWTH

The global OTR tire market will expand at a compound annual growth rate of 4.9%, a representative from Smithers told OTR Tire Conference attendees.

Within the overall market, “we see the best opportunities in the mining sector,” said Ciaran Little, vice president, Americas and Asia Pacific information division, Smithers, during his presentation, “The Current and Future Outlook for Off-the-Road Tires.”

Combined, the mining, construction and port tire segments are projected to grow at a rate of 5.6% annually through 2029, according to Smithers estimates, with the Asia Pacific region, led by China, serving as “the main driving force” behind this ramp-up.



Ciaran Little, vice president, Americas and Asia Pacific information division, Smithers, told attendees that the North American mining tire segment is expected to experience a compound annual growth rate of 2.4%.

Photo: MTD

Demand for OTR tires all of types in North America will remain healthy, noted Little, who added that the mining tire market in the United States and Canada will expand at an annual rate of 2.4%, with 85% to 87% of total OTR tire activity in the region “attributable to the U.S.”

Smithers believes the transition away from fossil fuels to metals and minerals for the development of renewable energy will be a key trend that will continue to impact the mining tire market in North America.

Other North American mining tire market trends include continued radialization and increased end user dependence on onsite tire management systems, Little explained. “We’re (also) seeing a trend toward larger trucks.”

Looking beyond mining tires, Smithers projects that the construction, port and industrial tire segments in North America, combined, will grow at an annual rate of 3.1% through the year 2029.

“We’re expecting to see an increase in infrastructure spending,” which will supercharge overall construction tire demand and small OTR tire demand in particular, Little told attendees.

During his presentation, Little also provided a summary of radial and bias ply OTR tire performance requirements and cited the ongoing expansion of Yokohama Rubber Co. Ltd.’s OTR tire business and Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.’s decision to divest its OTR tire unit as significant developments within the OTR tire segment.

In addition, he discussed the continued electrification of off-highway equipment across the gamut of OTR tire applications, adding that excavators are expected to be among the first construction machines to electrify.

“And we’re seeing sustainability start to make inroads into the OTR tire market.”

A NEW AWARD

During the OTR Tire Conference, TIA President Keith Jarman announced the establishment of the Marvin Bozarth ETS (Earthmover Tire Service) Technician of the Year Award, which honors Tire Industry Hall of Fame member and former executive director of the American Retreaders Association Marvin Bozarth, who died in 2022.

Bozarth was a noted champion of tire service technician training and education.

In addition to being members in good standing of TIA, award candidates must have completed 200-Level TIA ETS and



This year’s OTR Tire Conference, like past OTR Tire Conferences, included a golf outing. More than 500 people representing 38 states and more than a dozen countries attended the 2024 OTR Tire Conference. According to TIA officials, 90% of this year’s attendees have attended the event for more than a decade.

Photo: MTD



Purcell Tire & Rubber Co. sent Mason Hess, Joni Jacobsen (both pictured here) and several other employees to the OTR Tire Conference. Hess, the director of Purcell Tire’s global mining division, is a past TIA president.

Photo: MTD

Commercial Tire Service training programs, said Jarman.

TIA member companies also will be able to nominate candidates.

The winner of the award will be selected by TIA’s board of directors and chosen by an anonymous committee comprised of OTR tire manufacturers and suppliers.

OTR Tire Conference attendees also were treated to a live, in-the-field demonstration of OTR tire and wheel service, beamed from a remote location. The demo was hosted by Matt White, TIA’s director of off-road tire service, and involved the installation of tire chains.

David Stevens, managing director of the Tire Retread & Repair Information Bureau, moderated a panel discussion called “Everything You Need to Know About OTR Retreading.”



Russ Devens, director of safety and risk management for Wilkes-Barre, Pa.-based McCarthy Tire Service Co. Inc. (right); Roy Galyer, training manager for Klinge Holdings Pty Ltd. (left); and Jeff Faubion, compliance specialist at Bridgestone Americas Inc., (not pictured) discussed OTR tire technician safety as part of a panel.

Photo: MTD

Panelists included Mike Berra, president of Community Tire Retreading; Rusty Hatten, who works in operations and sales at H&H Industries; Darryl Moore, director of remanufacturing and sustainability at Kal Tire; Mike Jacobsen, vice president of manufacturing at Purcell Tire & Rubber Co.; and James John, president of Shrader Retreading, a division of Craft Tire Inc.

Speaking in turns, they walked attendees through videos that showed various stages of the OTR tire retreading process.

Echoing panelists’ comments, Stevens said he sees “massive opportunities for the OTR tire retread market.”

More than 500 people representing 38 states and more than a dozen countries attended the OTR Tire Conference, according to TIA officials, with 90% having attended the event for more than a decade. ■

The popularity of 45-degree lugs

ON- AND OFF-ROAD VERSATILITY IS A FACTOR



Photo: BKT USA Inc.

Modern Tire Dealer has partnered with AG Tire Talk to provide answers to insightful questions that farm tire dealers have about farm tire technology. This is the next installment in our ongoing series, which is designed to help farm tire dealers better connect with their customers. A trending question, followed by answers, will appear in our Commercial Tire Dealer section every other month. For complete answers, click on www.agtiretalk.com.

QUESTION: On large ag equipment, why is continuous angle 45-degree lug so popular? Are there applications where you would recommend a lower or higher degree angle or multi-angle lug design? Are there specific applications where you would recommend a departure from traditional lug design in order to improve performance?

NICK PHILLIPPI, product manager, technical support North America, Ascenso Tires North America: On a 45-degree lug, the longer length of the bar lug, along with percentage of center line overlap, all play into improved ride and wear, just as much as the angle.

On the other hand, lower bar lug angle tires provide more forward and reverse traction. However, road performance is poor.

Specific applications like sprayers, carts and planting tractors benefit from more broken hybrid tread patterns — the more roading, the greater the benefit.

Ascenso provides hybrid tires in the MDR1000 for large tractors, the UTR240 for utility tractors and the VDR901 for self-propelled sprayers.

A tire design is usually built using a triangle matrix where traction, ride and wear are the key elements of design consideration and the more you prioritize one, the more the others suffer.

Why are 45-degree lugs on R1- R1W tires becoming dominant? Probably because it seems to meet the sweet spot of traction and ride and gives a good net-to-void ratio for wear.

Is this always true? That all depends on the use. The less the angle, the better the forward traction. Remember when things were slow and forward traction was it?

Zero degrees in soft soil is the highest traction per square inch in both forward and reverse, but oh what a ride on the road! Plus you have no lateral traction.

I don't believe 45 degrees should be thought of as the best to optimize both field and road as much as most think.

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The challenge is always what is the need 90% of the time?

I think the market is putting too much into the 10% of the time on most vehicles that are in use.

A sprayer, cart or a planter or silage packer tractor, as most farmers today have task-specific vehicles, should consider broken tread designs.

Any time you add center ride pattern tread, you will have much better road wear and driver comfort and handling.

DAVE PAULK, manager, field technical services, BKT USA Inc.: Farmers must travel greater distances on highways to get from farm to farm.

Tractors have become heavier and travel at faster speeds than in years gone by. Farm equipment such as planters, cultivators, etc., are heavier and higher-horsepower tractors are needed.

As the equipment and uses of equipment have changed, farm tires and tire technologies have changed to accommodate the uses.

Some of the older farm tire technologies don't seem to stand up to today's demands as well, since more on the road use is required. A tire and a tread pattern must be used that's good in the field and does a good job when highway travel is needed.

The 45-degree angle tread pattern is a good fit for field and highway use.

This tread pattern runs well on the highway as the curved center lugs allow even wear and good contact with the road. This helps by minimizing the uneven wear caused by highway use. This tire allows a comfortable ride on the road.

The 45-degree angle is good in the field as it cleans out well and provides good traction for pulling heavy implements.

With the correct air pressure, it gives a good footprint to minimize soil compaction.

When transitioning from the field to road, the 45-degree angle lug is a good tread pattern for both uses.

Lower-degree angles seem to do well in the field, but do not handle the roads as well.

Higher-degree angles are somewhat better for highway use, but give up some traction in the field.

The 45-degree angle tire seems to be a good fit between high angle and low angle lugs and works well in both applications.

Running on the road is a necessity to



A 23-degree lug angle is usually flatter, while the 45-degree lug has more of a vertical point, according to Chris Neidert of Yokohama TWS.

Source: Yokohama TWS

move equipment from one field to another. Unfortunately, the more farm tires are used on the highway, the faster they wear out. Starting and stopping and the contour of the road are contributing factors for causing tire wear on the road.

Although the tread rubber in most farm tires is compounded to improve tire life when running on roads, their main purpose is to perform well in the field.

The R1/R1-W design provides good traction in the field.

The lugs generally clean out well because of the lug design.

When the tractor is used in dry dirt and/or mainly on the highway where traction isn't a huge concern, a user may look at a hybrid tire to get better tread wear and prolonged tire life.

Hybrid tires, such as the BKT IT696 or IT697, are a good option for heavy highway use.

They do provide a moderate amount of traction in the field, but don't clean out as well as an R1/R1-W design in wet dirt. Because they have a blockier tread design and more tread rubber on the road, they are a good alternative for highway use.

GREG GILLAND, vice president, global agriculture, Maxam Tire North America Inc.: When reviewing tire tread designs for traction across various applications and surface conditions, the best traction available for any operation in softer soils or cropped fields would be a flat or horizontal traction bar like a military tank tread or tracked dozer.

The horizontal traction bar effect on ride, fuel efficiency and slip rates quickly moved the agricultural industry to the traditional R-1 chevron design.

Early tire tread designs adopted the 23-degree lug angle that improved the ride, while ensuring good field traction and improved fuel efficiency.

The 45-degree lug concept was initiated by tire manufacturers in Europe as the tractor applications were significantly different than in North America.

European applications demanded more time on the road, transporting to the market or simply moving from the farm to the field — in many cases, towing implements or cargo.

This application requirement in Europe pushed tire manufacturers to adopt the 45-degree angle chevron design for all powered machinery using R-1, R-1W, R-2, and even R-4 agro-industrial products.

This design has become the industry standard as all agricultural tire manufacturers have adopted the 45-degree lug angle as the optimal design for core farming with both radial and bias ply constructed tires.

From the smallest, below-65 horsepower machinery to the latest plus-700 horsepower machinery rolling off the OEM production lines, the 45-degree lug radial chevron tread from R-1 to R-4 is leading the product performance expectation to deliver the value that farmers and growers are seeking in their tires.

The Maxam radial agricultural product offering is centered on our AgriXtra tread design that is uniformly standard-

ized across all our standard and VF R-1/R-1W tires.

The 45-degree lug bar allows our tires to deliver improved traction, stability, endurance and improved wear.

Beyond the field work environment that requires the efficient transmission of the machine engine torque and flotation, the growing market evolution is requiring that agricultural tires deliver the performance traditionally expected, as crops are harvested and brought to market by a tractor.

As agricultural machinery continues to grow in weight, engine horsepower and transmitted torque, the tread design — coupled with the growing need for increased flexion (IF) and very high-flexion (VF) technology — is rewriting the rules.

This gives the structural components of the tire a larger impact on the performance and value the tire must deliver.

Therefore, IF and VF technology tires perform at top-tier rates when coupled with the 45-degree lug tread designs, delivering the load, speed, heat resistance and endurance demanded now and in years to come.

Beyond the use of the 45-degree lug design with or without improved materials such as IF or VF construction, we are seeing more modified tread designs that increase the contact area of the tires. By increasing the width of the lugs or by reducing the void-to-lug ratio areas by adding more lugs in the traditional void area, IF and VF technology can increase the contact patch.

This is specifically occurring in agro-industrial applications that may include the use of utility tractors, mower tractors, backhoes, compact wheel loaders and telehandlers.

We are seeing the evolution of the R-1 tread design beyond the 45-degree lug concept from the traditional chevron tread design to a multi-purpose (MPT) tread design that emphasizes more rubber contact or additional lugs in the void areas.

The goal of these modern designs is to deliver just enough traction to ensure the soil conditions can be met while delivering more contact area.

This results in a higher tread endurance

required of harder or more demanding surfaces historically reserved for more robust construction application-oriented tires or tread designs.

What is clear is that the concept of the 45-degree lug on R-1 to R-4 tires — even with more lugs, like the evolving MPT tread concept — has successfully met the market need for traction, constant contact and machine productivity.

DAVID GRADEN, operational market manager, agriculture, Michelin North America Inc.: There are three primary options when it comes to lug angles of large ag tires.

Typical ag tires are designed with a 45-degree lug angle.

However, in the 1950s, Firestone introduced the 23-degree lug angle and in the early 2000s, a new hybrid lug design was also introduced to the market.

Let's start with the benefits of a 23-degree lug design.

Imagine, if you will, an ag tire with 23-degree lug angles.

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In general, the lug angle takes up less linear (front to rear) space than a 45-degree angle.

Therefore, more lugs can fit around the tire, which means it's possible for more biting edges to come into contact with the soil.

In perfect conditions (i.e. flat land and dry soil), this could be a good fit for you. Unfortunately, it seems these conditions are rarely the case for most farmers across North America.

Let's now look at the 45-degree lug angle and understand why this is the standard for most ag tires.

It's true that with this lug angle, less lugs can fit around the tire, leading to fewer individual biting edges.

However, each lug is longer and continues to circle around the tire a bit more than the 23-degree lug.

This introduces four benefits: smoother ride, stubble resistance, better mud evacuation in less-than-ideal conditions and greater stability and traction on slopes.

Smoother ride is a result of the circumferential lug bar — meaning the lug contin-

ues around the tire from the center to the outside edge with the next lug overlapping in its contact with the ground.

With a 23-degree lug angle, you tend to feel more of a choppy ride, caused by less lug overlap and voids between the lugs.

Stubble resistance also tends to be better with a 45-degree lug angle due to its sweeping angle outward from the center of the tire to the outside of the tire.

Depending on the leading edge of the lugs and rubber compounds, this can be a drastic improvement compared to a 23-degree lug tire.

Mud evacuation is significantly improved with a 45-degree lug angle versus a 23-degree lug angle.

The reasoning for this applies to all tires, including passenger and commercial vehicles.

Basically, when pushing through liquid (mud and water), the liquid will always take the path of least resistance as a tire rolls forward.

That path of least resistance is straight forward.

You can't design a tire with zero-degree lug angles because you wouldn't have any tractive capacity to move forward.

At Michelin, we have determined that the 45-degree lug angle is best for this scenario.

In fact, we have added a "hinge" between the lugs, which aids in the release of mud and compacted soil between the tire's lugs.

Greater stability and traction on slopes are a big benefit of the 45-degree lug design. If an operator must travel parallel to a hillside, there is more resistance to slipping sideways down a hill because there is more lug edge resisting the downward slope.

Finally, let's discuss the hybrid lug design and the pros and cons associated with it.

Many years ago, when I was an ag territory sales rep in Iowa and Nebraska, I remember Alliance launching a new sprayer tire with a hybrid design.

At first, I didn't think this idea would take off, but I was proven wrong. The design did take off.

Over the next 10-plus years, we have seen many new and innovative hybrid lug designs hit the market.

In fact, Michelin has developed a few of its own, but for very specific applications.

One example is the Michelin Roadbib tire. Whereas this tire still isn't a good fit for high torque applications and all soil conditions, it is an excellent design for 80% road travel — like manure spreading contractors — and silage packing. Additional benefits to this design are improved fuel economy on the road, higher speed index, very long tread life and an impressive smooth ride.

In summary, farming conditions from year to year are not predictable.

Tires are a very large investment and detrimental to the performance and overall efficiency of the machine.

The 45-degree lug design is the best option for most conditions.

Add the Michelin standard R1W lug depth and you've covered all possible soil conditions an operator will have to work through.

If you're a contractor and spend most of your time on the road, between farms, consider a hybrid lug design for improved fuel economy and speed.

KEN BRODBECK, vice president of technology, Precision Inflation LLC: First, there are three traction ag patterns: R-1, for

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general traction work; R-1W, which is like R-1, but with extra tread depth for longer life; and R-2, for rice and cane farming, with twice the R-1 tread depth.

Most tire companies make several versions of the R-1 and R-1W in various tread patterns.

These are the general basics: lower bar angles provide more traction, (such as) 23-degree in North America; higher bar angles, 45-degree; (and) wear longer in high road usage, like Europe.

Curved bars start with a high bar angle in the center and then move to a lower angle out to the shoulder.

Both low and higher bar angle in the same pattern.

And if you really want the best tread for both field traction and road transport, you need a tire with this footprint — and a central tire inflation system (CTIS).

CTIS optimizes the field footprint, (providing) maximum traction, maximum flotation, minimize soil compaction, (tire pressures at 12 psi or less beat tracks) and maximize fuel economy.

A CTIS optimizes the road footprint, maximizes fuel economy, minimizes tread wear; can carry heavy hitch loads like front fold planters, (helps) tires run cooler and steering/stability at road speeds is greatly improved.

CTIS makes every tread pattern the best for both field and road.

JAMES CROUCH, national product manager — agriculture and forestry, Yokohama Off-Highway Tires America Inc.: The continuous angle tractor tire lug dates back to the era of steel wheels.

It's an enduring design, but some tire manufacturers have innovated more effective patterns that update tire technology to better serve today's modern machinery.

One of the most basic innovations has been a multi-angle lug.

It uses a shallower angle along the edges of the tread to maximize traction and a sharper angle, as well as overlaps and wider nose designs in the (tire's) centerline to reduce wear and improve road handling characteristics.

With our Alliance brand of farm tires, Yokohama Off-Highway Tires has taken many of our R-1 designs to the next level by breaking the curved lug into blocks.

That creates more biting edges for traction and allows us to increase the surface-to-void ratio toward the centerline for even better roading, while maximizing void along the edges for grip and self-cleaning. You'll see this "hybrid tread" pattern on tires, like our Alliance 363 and 550 R-1 radials, and modified versions on a wide range of I-2s and I-3s, including our flotation radials and implement tires.

Not surprisingly, there's a lot of engineering and construction skill that goes into hybrid tread.

Too much movement would create excess heat and cracking, so we've innovated tie-bars, lug angles and multi-step designs.

After all, we left steel wheels behind 100 years ago.

It's high time our tread patterns start to catch up with all the other innovations we've made in tires over the past several decades.

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CHRIS NEIDERT: ag marketing, training and development manager, Trelleborg and Mitas Tires, North America, Yokohama TWS: Let's establish some understanding of what we are talking about with the term lug angle: 45-degree and 23-degree lug angles are the most common. The number comes from the angle of the lug in reference to the horizontal.

A typical 23-degree tread lug is usually flatter, or more towards the horizontal, and the 45-degree lug will point more towards the vertical.

Trelleborg and Mitas have always maintained the preference of a 45-degree lug angle is the best for both worlds — in field performance and on-road performance. This tread design has a European

influence since European farmers do a lot of roading.

This is due to the smaller farms in Europe and the need to travel from field to field on the "road."

This design offers good field performance and a very good smooth ride on the road.

Our feeling is with lower degree lugs, meaning the lugs being more angled towards the horizontal, a washboard effect is created. The effect contributes to a rougher ride.

What are benefits of lower degree/higher degree angle?

Dry soil operation. The lower degree lug angle may lend itself to better traction in dry soil. (We're not) sure how many areas of the country continually operate in dry soil. If the grower does operate in that type of soil, chances are they will still need to road the tractor to get to their next field. The washboard ride will come into play.

Sidehill operation. The 45-degree lug angle is the better choice for farming on hillsides. This is because this lug angle will help the operator keep the equipment in the rows.

The lower angle lug tires contribute to equipment side slippage or dog-tracking. This can let the equipment run over existing crops.

Traction. 45-degree lug tires have wider lug spacing. This will enable the tire to clean out when operating in wet, sticky and muddy conditions.

The lower lug angle tires tend to pack up with mud and debris in these conditions. Traction will be compromised.

Poor road performance/improved road performance. Continuing our theme on the 45-degree lug angle is the best of both worlds (in field and on road), the higher the lug angle the better the ride.

As the lug angle moves more towards the vertical, the lug face will stay in contact with the road longer as the tire moves through the footprint. This longer lug contact will provide a smooth transition from lug face to lug face. This will make for a smoother ride than a lower angled tire.

The lower lug angle tire will have gaps between lug contact with the road, creating that washboard effect and a rougher ride. ■





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How to overcome resistance to change

LISTEN TO YOUR EMPLOYEES AND GIVE THEM A VOICE

By **Dennis McCarron**

Has it ever seemed that when you try to change something at your dealership, like a process, or add something new, like tire protection plans, that it goes well at first, but then it dies a quick death?

That is what's known as resistance to change.

Most people are predisposed to want things to remain the same, even if the existing process, policy or procedure stinks. Let's dive into how to make your dealership more open to change.

Adapting to change is 95% mental and 5% physical. Most owners have an idea — or have attended a meeting or read a book — and think, "That's a great idea. I'm going to do that in my shop."

They proceed to tell all their employees how they are going to do things differently because "this will make things better."

They explain the steps, give a little guidance and the next day change is underway!

And in about two weeks, change will again be underway because everyone is going to go back to the way they used to do it.

Employees who are directed to change will almost invariably start the change process with suspicion. ("Why does the boss want to change this? Why is it always me who has to do most of the work? Oh, great — another thing to try and sell.")

If an employee starts the learning process with suspicion, he will look to find flaws and will seek its failure — unless, that is, there's an immediate "a-ha" moment from the start.

The "a-ha" moment is an extraordinarily powerful moment for the mind. There are all sorts of endorphins and pleasure receptors in the brain that break out in a dance with the revelation that "Hey, this really works!"

But if it takes time to see the benefits of change, employees usually look for reasons for not changing.

Think about converting from paper inspections to digital vehicle inspections (DVIs.) You hold a meeting. You announce, "We are switching to DVIs." You hand out the tablets. You do a little training and you launch.

The first day, someone or maybe even a few will complain that "this takes too long. The old way was faster." Well, yeah — the first time you tried to ride a bike, walking was faster, too.

The element most crucial to getting to a change culture in your company is to not be the only person who comes up with ideas and imposes them on employees.

Sometimes when bosses say, "This will make it better," they really mean, "This will make me more profit, but add work to your load." And employees know that.

Change needs to be discussed. Change needs to get talked about and debated. Concerns need to be addressed — to the satisfaction of the employee, not the boss.

Having a discussion about change instead of just implement-



In order to get a change to stick, you have to invest the appropriate time to prepare your team before that change occurs.

Photo: MTD

ing it might intimidate some tire dealers. They could be afraid employees will win the argument and change won't happen. But if you don't have the discussion, you will only get two weeks of change.

Employees are the ones doing the work every day. They are the masters of the process or system that you're trying to change. Listen to them. Hear them out. Give them a voice.

Then take their opinions and think about them for a few days. Use critical thinking to vet their concerns and see which ones have merit.

Develop a plan for a roll-out — if it still makes sense to try to change — that includes what to do if different concerns come up. Make the process predictable as much as possible, as predictability during change is the most soothing path.

If employees can anticipate certain hurdles, they are much less likely to give up.

Don't be afraid to make changes to the plan while you are rolling it out. Almost all plans require a little tweaking after implementation.

Challenge assumptions and get your team involved to figure out a way to keep most of your plan in place, when and where it makes sense. And if the plan fails for good reason, that's OK. Failure is a great educator.

In order to get a change to stick, you have to invest the appropriate time to prepare your team before that change occurs. ■

Dennis McCarron is a partner at Cardinal Brokers Inc., one of the leading brokers in the tire and automotive industry (www.cardinalbrokers.com.) To contact McCarron, email him at dennis@cardinalbrokers.com.



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Uncertainty in presidential election years is a drag on M&A

WHY THIS ELECTION YEAR WILL BE DIFFERENT

By **Michael McGregor**

Since getting into the deal business in 2002, I have observed dealmaking activity in five presidential election cycles. This year's will be my sixth.

When advising tire dealers and other clients on the timing of their exits, my advice has always been that it's generally preferable to exit in the years prior to a presidential election year than in the year in which an election will be held.

My thinking was that uncertainty in an election year likely has an impact on deal volume and perhaps values. I figured that it's time for me to see if I was right. Turns out, I was.

I ran across an analysis of the six presidential election years, 1996 through 2016. In every year, the value of total deals announced in the 12-month run-up to a presidential election was less than the next 12 months after an election. It turns out that it's nothing to lose sleep over. It looks to me that the difference in the year prior and the year after is somewhere between 5% to 8%. Clearly M&A activity is lower, but how can we be sure that the slowdown is related to uncertainty?

Digging deeper, I found an academic study that examined the role that political uncertainty plays in U.S. business mergers and acquisitions activity. The authors used U.S. state gubernatorial elections as their stand-in for political uncertainty and discovered that the number of transactions involving target companies in election year states decreased by 9.6% in the six-month run-up to the election. This decrease is particularly felt by smaller, private firms.

In addition, the authors discovered that the number of deals made by acquirers based in election year states also decreased by 9%. The financially weak, less-profitable acquirers tended to move towards the sidelines more.

Lastly, the authors found that "serial" or repeat acquirers tend to shift their timing of acquisitions to avoid political uncertainty.

Delving even further into this whole issue of uncertainty, I found plenty of studies that support the premise that uncertainty negatively impacts bank lending activity, interest rates charged, IPO activity, tax change expectations and even corporate responsibility programs.

Despite all this, I'm predicting that 2024 will defy this trend toward lower deal activity in an election year for several reasons.

First, we're coming off the worst year since 2013 for M&A activity, overall. Total value of M&A in the U.S. was down by a quarter last year to \$2.7 trillion. High interest rates, conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East and stress in private equity portfolios has acquirers being more selective and willing to take a pass when valuation expectations seem high. We're definitely seeing this among our smaller tire dealership clients. It dipped so low, however, that it's going to bounce higher this year.

Second, recent economic reports show a brightened economic picture. The latest inflation report finds it being close to the Fed's target rate of 2%, growth in the economy exceeded 3% and the Fed has signaled it will start reducing interest rates and consumer spending remains strong.

Third, private equity had \$2.59 trillion in dry powder on the sidelines at the end of 2023, according to S&P. As interest rates decline, they'll leverage this with the \$1.3 trillion in the private credit space and put it to work. If the stock market stays high, this will allow room for valuations to move higher.

But my last point deals directly with the whole uncertainty theme of this column. I believe that the circumstance of this presidential election is different from every other one over the last 100 years, at least.

'We will have two well-known entities running for president.'

We will have two well-known entities running for president. If the incumbent wins the election, we pretty much know the policies that his administration will pursue. We've just had three years of history to draw the trend line regarding economic policy, social issues, foreign policy, environmental policy, etc. Everyone paying attention should know that they are in for more of the same.

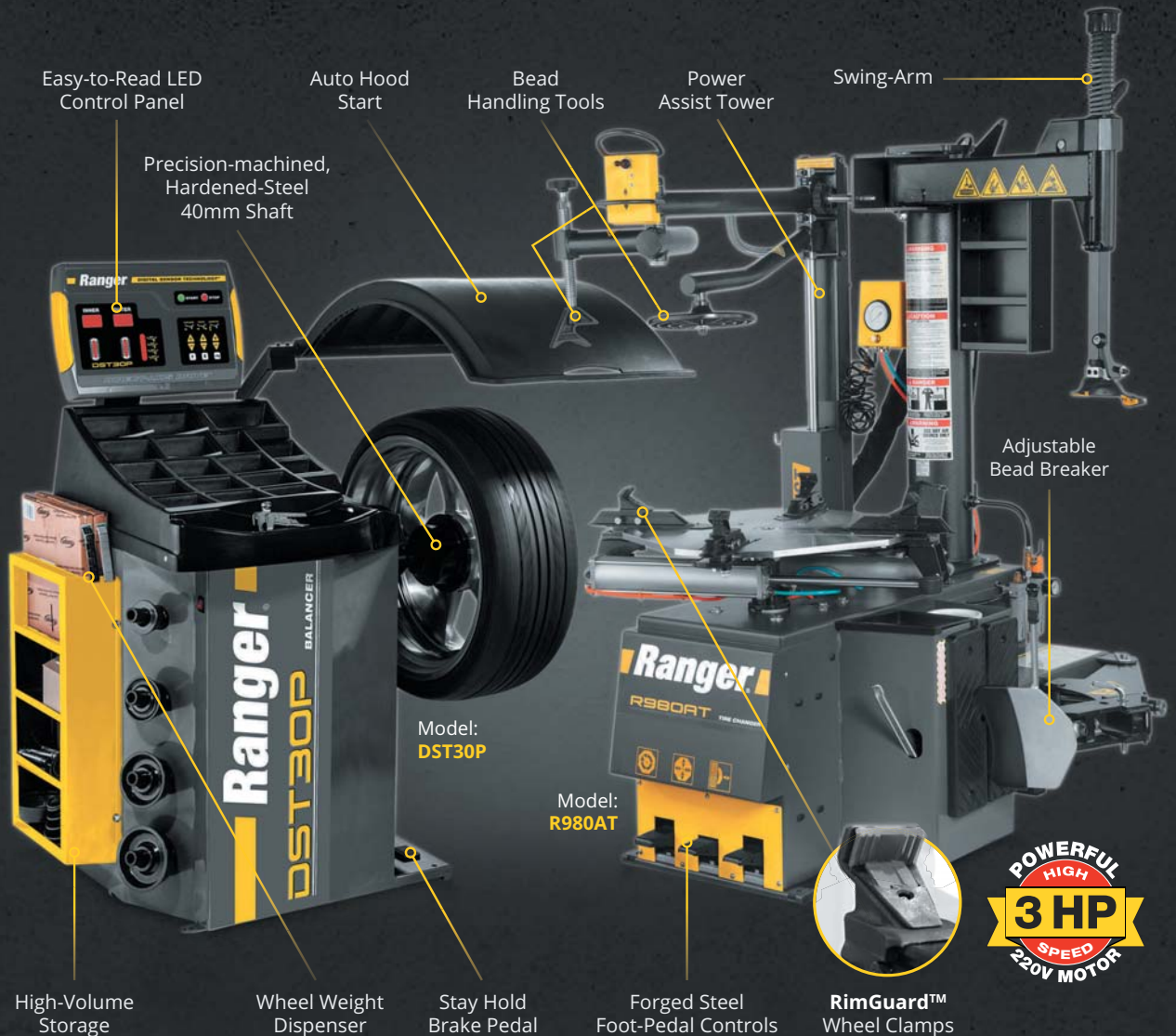
And with former President Trump as the challenger, as with the incumbent, both supporters and non-supporters have a pretty good idea as to what to expect should he be re-elected president. Just look back to 2016 through 2020.

So where's the uncertainty? Where's the surprise? Both of these politicians have shown us who they are, what they stand for and how they operate. We all know this and can make our plans for each scenario. Perhaps changes to Congress will have a greater impact on uncertainty, but I'm also betting Congress stays split and gridlocked.

It's easy to be a prognosticator if you're never held accountable. I just made a note in my calendar. On Jan. 31, 2025, I promise to follow up and report back on what really happened. In the meantime, I'm taking bets. ■

Michael McGregor is a partner at Focus Investment Banking LLC (focusbankers.com/automotive/tire-and-service). He advises and assists multi-location tire dealers on mergers and acquisitions. For more information, contact him at michael.mcgregor@focusbankers.com.

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Success is in the details

WHY YOU NEED TO PROFESSIONALIZE YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

By **Randy O'Connor**

We're all accustomed to calling our colleagues to get info on the industry's pulse. We also commiserate with our colleagues in an effort to feel better about what is or is not happening within our own walls.

From time to time — certainly not always — the chatter we gather is actually a result of widespread symptoms that span markets.

Warren Buffet once summed up the end result of these conversations by saying, "Only when the tide goes out do you see who has been swimming naked."

I'm certainly not guaranteeing a receding tide, but it seems this might be a good time to change our discussions towards what we should already have done and will need to do to ensure continued success. So what's next? Details, that's what.

When markets flow freely, they do so because consumers feel less pressure to discern the penny from the nickel. The end result is that your attention to detail doesn't matter quite as much.

But when markets pull back, so do the pennies. Attention to detail then becomes really important.

In an ideal situation, the details at your business are handled tightly on a daily basis.

That said, even the most detail-oriented tire dealership gathers dust and sometimes needs a wash and a fresh coat of wax.

Getting through to customers at the right time, with the right value, is always important. Customer relation management (CRM) is vitally important before the traffic slows, not just when it slows.

Let's assume you see a customer's car five times a year. That's about one visit every two-and-a-half months.

If your CRM offers and reminders aren't dialed in, you'll likely see a delay when business slows. Get your CRM dialed in today.

Your market strategy consists of your value package, your competitive advantage and your loss leader.

If your value package isn't clearly communicated in all of your customer touches, you may lose.

If your competitive advantage isn't expressed, backed up and communicated with every transaction, you may lose.

If your loss leader isn't timely and priced right, you may lose.

Align your CRM with your market strategy and you'll create a win/win.

When's the last time you recorded and listened to your team on the phone? If it's been a while, even for those who have phone training programs, I bet you'll be disappointed — and so are your customers.

I phone-shop throughout the country regularly and I bet that very few of your team members are asking for the sale in any meaningful and effective way.

How about the way your team presents vehicle inspections? Impressed? I sure hope so. How about your warranties?

If you want to elevate your business to being best-in-class, you



Your team should be setting expectations up front in order to level-set the customer. If you can't deliver on your promises, renegotiate. Then provide updates to support your promises.

Photo: Ben Borchert

have to professionalize your customer experience across every step of their journey. That means your team has to understand the customer's journey.

We've all gone to the doctor's office and been placed on a treatment journey with zero promises of when that journey will end. Your customers' experience is no different.

Your team should be setting expectations up front in order to level-set the customer. If you can't deliver on your promises, renegotiate.

Once you're on a level playing field, provide a few updates to support your promises or renegotiate them again.

People buy because the perceived value is greater than the perceived investment.

If they leave your business having a reduced sense of value for the time invested, their perceived investment — regardless of actual price — goes up.

You can pressure-wash every corner of your shop, service your equipment, paint your bay doors and spit-shine your showroom, but none of those things will resonate with customers if you aren't delivering on the promises you make.

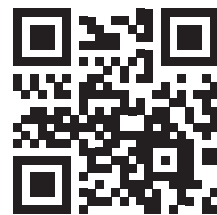
Professionalizing the customer experience will ensure you're not left exposed when the tide recedes.

In the meantime, you won't be so stressed when calling colleagues to commiserate about the market. Instead, you'll be handling the customers they don't have.

Remember, success is in the details. ■

Tire and auto industry veteran Randy O'Connor is the Owner/Principal of D2D Development Group (Dealer to Dealer Development Group.) He can be reached at randy@d2ddevelopmentgroup.com. For more information, please visit www.d2ddevelopmentgroup.com.

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Family and work balance

CARING FOR YOUR LOVED ONES REQUIRES A PLAN AT YOUR BUSINESS

By **Craig Van Batenburg**

Does every day go the way we planned? Especially if you are married with kids at home, there will come a day when you will be tested. Your priorities will be called into play and you, not someone else, must answer the call.

Most of the time, we can go to work and earn a good living, come home at night, rejoin our families and enjoy what family brings us. If our day at work was productive and not totally insane, our mood can be altered quickly on the ride home so we can meet our loved ones with a smile, hug and energy for listening. Some days are better than others.

Hopefully, you work a five-day week, but in the busy season six days may be the norm at your dealership.

No matter what your off-work routine is — sleeping in, visiting relatives or cooking a great meal — it's the balance in life that makes work "work." So life goes on day after day and we think we have it all together until you get that call.

'Learning better ways to manage your business will allow you more financial freedom and availability. With that, you can be there when your family needs you.'

In November 1992, the phone rang at my shop. Deb, my wife, broke the news that Mike Landy, her father, had a heart attack and life changed in an instant.

Keeping herself together, she made the flight arrangements and I headed home to pack while she drove to the airport.

We were both at work that day. My dear friend, Terry Barter, a business owner himself, took over running Van Batenburg's Garage, my business, for the week I was away.

I didn't have a very good emergency plan at work, but I did have some great friends.

After the funeral, life was different, as it always is after the loss of a parent.

On March 31, 2005, I was scheduled to teach a class in Boston, Mass., an hour from my home.

Two weeks earlier, I had alerted Peter Orlando that my mother, Shirley, had taken ill.

On the morning of the class I reviewed my notes, packed my car early and went off to see my mother before I headed to Boston. She didn't look well, so I stayed a few hours.

The doctor said, "Go onto Boston as your mother is stable." A gentle hug, a kiss goodbye and out to my car.

One hour later, my cell phone rang and the nurse said, "Turn back."

I called Peter. He taught our Boston class and I held my mother's hand as she took her last breath. It was, as you might imagine, a moment I will never forget.

I missed the next two weeks of classes. None were canceled as other trainers I knew stepped in and took over. This time, I had a plan. This time, I was as prepared as one can be.

On Nov. 29, 2007, Lillian Landy, my wife Deb's mother, finished her journey on earth. Just as before, Deb and I put our jobs on hold and attended to more pressing matters.

My son, Mike, learned on the fly, without an adult, at age 15 that "Make sure that when the family calls, you are ready to leave your daily duties behind."

My father, Raymond, died in a violent car crash at age 50. I was 20 years old.

On Feb. 2 of this year, my older brother, Scott, died of cancer. That one still hurts.

The staff at my current company, Automotive Career Development Center, stepped up and I was able to stay away from work most of February.

It is with the wisdom of age that tire store owners and managers have learned — or will learn — that small business ownership is a gift. But you need a plan when you get the call.

Life comes at us — the good and the bad — sometimes all at once. Over my desk is a handwritten note that says "Success at the expense of faith, family and friends is failure." These are good words to live by.

If work is taking up the time your family needs, slow it down a bit. Delegate one more thing. Leave your desk or work bench a little messier at the end of the day so you can get home. Clean it up tomorrow.

Watch less TV or watch more with your kids. Make Friday night date night for you and your loved one. Get a babysitter. Figure out ways to spend a little more time at home.

Make the changes in small steps, but make them.

As with Mike, Raymond, Shirley, Lillian and Scott, we only have a finite time to live. Don't waste it.

Learning better ways to manage your business will allow you more financial freedom and availability. With that, you can be there when your family needs you.

There is no greater gift on earth. ■

Craig Van Batenburg is the CEO of Van Batenburg's Garage Inc., dba Automotive Career Development Center (ACDC), which is based in Worcester, Mass. A 50-year automotive service industry veteran, Van Batenburg provides training for facilities that service — or want to service — electric and hybrid vehicles. For more information, see www.fixhybrid.com or email him at craig@fixhybrid.com.

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BRIDGESTONE

SHOWCASES TIRES AT
WINTER DRIVING SCHOOL

By **MTD staff**

Steamboat Springs, Colo., has been the home to a winter driving school since 1983.

Since 1993, Bridgestone Americas Inc. has been a primary sponsor of the school, now called the Bridgestone Winter Driving School. The company uses the school as a showcase for its Blizzak line of winter tires.

MTD was recently invited to the school to drive on Blizzak tires and learn more about how Bridgestone positions the Blizzak line within its total portfolio.

Bridgestone also provided an overview of new tires that have been launched that contain the company's ENLITEN technology.

In setting the stage for the event, Davis Adams-Smith, director of communications for Bridgestone Americas, said that "one in five tires throughout the world are produced" by Bridgestone.

He also pointed to the company's ENLITEN technology as a core strategy with Bridgestone's new tire lines.

ENLITEN was first used with the company's Potenza Race tire launch.

This was followed by the Bridgestone Turanza EV tire in 2023, the company's first replacement tire designed specifically for electric vehicles (EVs).

The Turanza EV also was Bridgestone's first replacement tire in North America to feature ENLITEN technology.

Bridgestone then launched the Potenza Sport AS, an ultra-high performance



Bridgestone Americas Inc. recently put its winter tires, including this Blizzak DM-V2, through the paces during its Bridgestone Winter Driving School in Steamboat Springs, Colo., where Bridgestone officials also discussed ENLITEN technology.

Photo: MTD

all-season tire designed for dry and wet performance. The product targets sports cars and sports sedans.

In addition, the Potenza Sport AS is Bridgestone's first ultra-high performance all-season tire incorporating Bridgestone ENLITEN technology.

Adams-Smith said that the company intends to launch a new all-terrain tire that will contain ENLITEN technology sometime this year. Also coming at a later date will be a new Blizzak tire that features ENLITEN technology.

Will Robbins, director of consumer product strategy, Bridgestone Americas, explained how Bridgestone views the U.S. tire market.

For all of North America, Bridgestone estimates that the winter tire segment totals 11 million replacement units.

As a sidenote, Robbins said that 40% of passenger replacement tire sales in Canada are winter tires.

When asked about how Bridgestone is approaching EV tires, Robbins said that the company's "goal is not to have an EV-only tire.

"We want to have all of those capabilities — improved rolling resistance, wear, low noise — for all our tire lines."

PRODUCT OVERVIEW

During the event in Steamboat Springs, Rachel Swenson, senior product planner, Bridgestone Americas, presented an over-

view of the company's current Blizzak line, as well as two other lines.

The Blizzak WS90 is designed for sedans and minivans and comes in 52 sizes, fitting wheels ranging from 14 inches to 19 inches in diameter.

She said the company's Blizzak DM-V2 is designed for SUVs, CUVs and light trucks. It's currently available in 60 sizes, fitting wheels ranging from 15 inches to 22 inches in diameter.

Both tires use Bridgestone's patented multicell technology, a new-generation compound featuring silica enhancements for improved grip on snow and ice, said Swenson.

MTD asked specifically at what point do Blizzak tires lose their traction capabilities. Bridgestone representatives said that Blizzak tires have two wear bars. The first is at 50% tread depth and that's where the multicell technology falls off.

"It's when you'll begin to lose maximum traction," said a Bridgestone official, adding that the 2/32nds wear bar is the "must-replace" bar.

Another Bridgestone tire, the WeatherPeak, is a touring tire with all-weather capabilities according to Swenson.

And the Bridgestone Alenza AS Ultra is designed to deliver a balance of wet, winter and wear performance.

It comes in more than 49 sizes, fitting wheels ranging from 16 inches to 22 inches in diameter. ■



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Focus on Dealers

'We have a shortage of skilled workers'

CHAPEL HILL TIRE PARTNERS WITH APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

By **Madison Gehring**

"We have a shortage of skilled workers and it's not just in the tire industry," says Terry Govoreau, human resources director for Chapel Hill Tire, an 11-location dealership based in Chapel Hill, N.C. "It's across the board."

This is why Chapel Hill Tire has partnered with the North Carolina Triangle Apprenticeship Program (NCTAP), an initiative designed to help the next generation of auto service workers get into the industry.

The program provides up to four years of academic and hands-on training.



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Working with the North Carolina Triangle Apprenticeship Program, Chapel Hill Tire recently held tours at its Apex, N.C., location. The company hosted more than 20 students and their parents across three weekends.

Photo: Chapel Hill Tire

MANY BENEFITS

"The young generation (is) into computers and gaming," says Govoreau. "Their parents want them to go to a traditional four-year school. And (programs that teach) skilled trades are not advertised like they used to be."

Govoreau says Chapel Hill Tire's partnership with NCTAP addresses all of these problems.

"A traditional college education isn't for everyone after they graduate," says Govoreau. "NCTAP helps give students a different education path. And it helps (their) parents feel better because their kids are still getting an education" through the organization.

Even though Chapel Hill Tire's partnership with NCTAP is new, the dealership has been actively trying to get young people into the tire and auto repair industries for years.

"Personally, I would go around and visit local high schools and talk to students," says Govoreau. "I would go to career fairs and tell them about the automotive business. I would also try and get them to realize the opportunity and potential in this business for someone who doesn't want a traditional" college education.

"But there's only so much one person can do."

WORK/SCHOOL HYBRID

The apprenticeship program — which is more hands-off for Chapel Hill Tire thanks to the involvement of NCTAP — is a work and school hybrid program. Participants will combine school work with hands-on work for a 40-hour week.

They start as general service technicians, learning the basics like balancing, rotating and repairing tires and checking various filters. All training is done under a master technician's supervision.

"If students have class eight hours per week, they will work at one of Chapel Hill Tire's locations 32 hours per week," explains Govoreau.

Participants get paid for a 40-hour work week and are classified as full-time Chapel Hill Tire employees, so they also enjoy full-time benefits. "Our main goal is to support young people, support this industry and support skilled trades." ■

GMC Acadia – 2023

DESCRIPTION AND OPERATION

The tire pressure monitor system (TPMS) warns the driver when a significant loss of tire pressure occurs in any of the equipped tires. It allows the driver to display the individual tire pressures and their locations on the driver information center. The Tire Fill Alert (TFA) feature — if equipped — provides visual and audible alerts to drivers to assist in inflating an

underinflated tire to the recommended tire pressure without the need to check a gauge or the instrument panel. TFA only functions once the tire pressure is low enough to trigger the telltale on the dashboard. When the driver starts filling the underinflated tire, the corner lamp nearest that tire will begin to flash. When the recommended pressure is reached, the horn sounds once and the turn signal lamps will stop flashing and briefly turn solid. If the tire is overinflated by more than 5 psi, the horn will sound multiple times and the turn signal lamp will continue to flash for several seconds after filling stops. To release and correct the pressure, while the turn signal lamp is still flashing, briefly press the center of the valve stem. When the recommended pressure is reached, the horn sounds once. Software Auto-location (SAL) — if equipped — is achieved by

correlating information from the sensor with information from the ABS system to make a location decision. Factors such as rolling radius, steering angle, etc. cause each vehicle wheel to rotate at a unique speed and differences in tire speeds help the software auto learn feature to assign sensor IDs to the correct locations. If a new sensor has been installed or tire rotated, the vehicle must be stationary for about 20 minutes before the system can start the process of calculating correct sensor locations. For this to happen, the vehicle will need to be driven at a speed greater than 12 mph for about 10 minutes.

TORQUE SPECIFICATIONS

Application	Specification
	Metric (English)
Tire Pressure Indicator Sensor Bolt	1.4 N.m (12.4 lb in)

TIRE PRESSURE SENSOR LEARNING

Tire Pressure Sensor Learn with EL-52545 (Preferred)

The EL-52545 allows the tire pressure sensors to be learned without transmitting

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RF data between the tire pressure sensors and the vehicle. When using the EL-52545 each sensor ID is learned to the EL-52545 and stored internally. The EL-52545 is then connected to the vehicle DLC using the OBD2 Interface Module, which is part of the EL-52545 kit. The stored tire pressure sensor information will then be loaded into the K9 Body Control Module. Using the EL-52545 to learn tire pressure sensors will prevent the vehicle from learning errant nearby tire pressure sensors from other vehicles in a service facility environment, especially if the tire pressure sensor batteries are low. This is the GM recommended method to learn tire pressure sensors.

1. Turn on EL-52545

2. Select RDR from the on-screen display
NOTE: Make sure the TPMS tool battery is sufficient to complete the TPMS learn process. Do not place the tool directly on the valve stem. The tool should be placed against the tire sidewall near the valve stem. The TPMS sensor learn activation procedure may have to be repeated up to three times before determining a sensor is malfunctioning.

3. If available, scan the QR code on the vehicle's tire placard or certification label. If QR is not available, select MMY from the on-screen display and manually input the vehicle information.

4. Approach the vehicle starting with the left front tire and read each tire pressure sensor information by pressing the green trigger button with the EL-52545 located near the valve stem. Read each tire pressure sensor in the order identified on the EL-52545.

If any sensors display "Sensor Not Compatible" on the EL-52545 screen, you will need to first make sure compatible sensors are installed on the vehicle.

5. If any tire pressure sensors do not respond: Replace the tire pressure sensor only after several attempts have been made to identify all sensors. Undetected sensor will be identified with "No Sensor Detected" displayed in the table. After sensor replacement, rerun RDR procedure. If all sensors respond, proceed to next step.

6. Verify the BAT value for each tire pressure sensor in the table on the EL-52545 is OK. If a sensor is not OK, replace the sensor and rerun RDR procedure.

7. Verify the pressure and temperature values are reasonable based on the ambient conditions and actual tire

pressure. If either value is inaccurate, replace the tire pressure sensor and rerun RDR procedure.

8. Ignition On/Vehicle in Service Mode.
9. Connect the EL-52545 OBDII Interface Module to the EL-52545.

10. Verify the OBDII icon is displayed on the EL-52545 and the green com LED is flashing on the interface module.

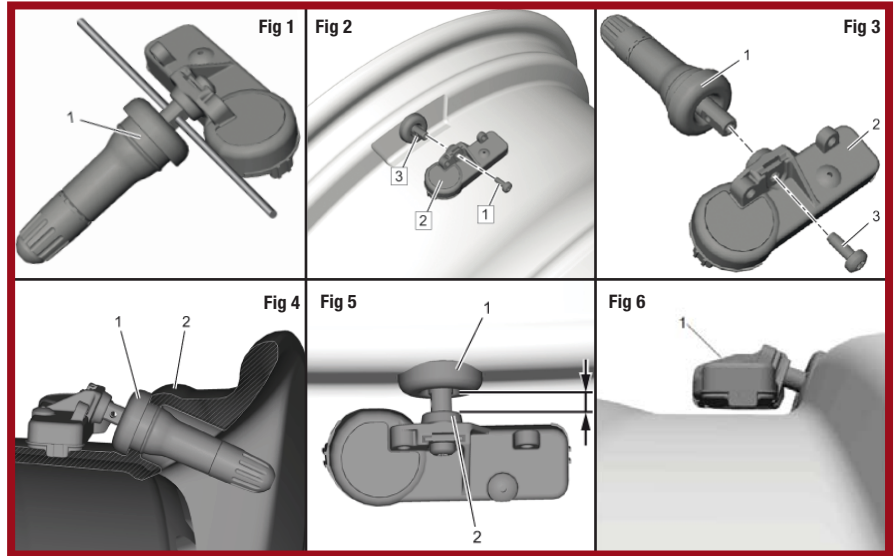
11. Connect the other end of the OBDII interface module to the vehicle DLC.

Tire Pressure Sensor Learn with EL-50448 (Alternative)

When EL-50448 Tire Pressure Monitor Sensor Activation Tool is used in activate mode, it produces a low frequency transmission that activates the sensor. When the BCM receives a transmission while in learn mode, it will assign that sensor's ID relative to the order it was learned.

In the event a sensor is activated and the horn does not chirp, it may be necessary to rotate the wheel so the valve stem is in a different position so the sensor signal is not blocked by another component. Make sure the TPMS tool battery is sufficient to complete the learn process. Do not place the tool directly on the valve stem. The tool should be placed against the sidewall near the valve stem. The TPMS sensor learn activation procedure may have to be repeated up to three times before determining a sensor is malfunctioning.

1. Ignition On/Vehicle in Service Mode. Using driver information center buttons or scan tool, initiate the Tire Pressure Sensors Learn mode. A double horn chirp will sound indicating learn mode



Photos: Mitchell 1

has been enabled. The left front turn signal will also be illuminated.

- Starting with the left front tire, activate the sensor by holding the antenna of the tire pressure monitor activation tool aimed upward against the sidewall close to the wheel at the valve stem location. Press and release the activate button. Ensure the transmit indicator on the tool indicates the sensor activation signal is being transmitted. Wait for a horn chirp. If the horn does not chirp, repeat the sensor activation sequence with the tool. Once the horn chirp has sounded, the sensor information is learned and the turn signal in the next location to be learned will illuminate.
- After the horn has sounded and the right front turn signal is illuminated, repeat the previous step in this order: Right front/right rear/left rear.
- When the left rear sensor has been learned and a double horn chirp has sounded, the learn process is complete.

TPMS REMOVAL AND INSTALLATION

Removal Procedure

- Raise and support the vehicle; remove the tire and wheel assembly and demount the tire from the wheel.
- Insert an anti-rotation pin through the hole in the valve stem as shown in Fig. 1.
- Following Fig. 2, hold the valve stem (3) to prevent it from rotating, then remove and discard the bolt (1) from the tire pressure indicator sensor (2). Do not twist the tire pressure indicator sensor to remove.

4. Pull the tire pressure indicator sensor straight off the valve stem.
5. Cut the inner seal off the valve stem.
Do not scratch or damage the clear coating on aluminum wheels with the tire changing equipment. Scratching the coating could cause the aluminum wheel to corrode and the clear coating to peel.
6. Remove and discard the valve stem by pulling it through the rim using a valve stem removal tool.
7. Clean all sealing surfaces.

INSTALLATION PROCEDURE

NOTE: The tire pressure indicator sensor is supplied assembled to a NEW valve stem. They must be separated before installation.

1. Remove the new bolt (3) from the tire pressure indicator sensor (2) and pull it straight off the NEW valve stem (1) as shown in Fig. 3
2. Apply lubricant to the new valve stem. Valve stems and bolts are single use items.
3. Using a tire pressure valve stem mounting tool, pull the valve stem through in

a direction parallel to the valve hole. Ensure the flat surfaces of the tire pressure indicator sensor and the tire pressure valve stem are located correctly.

4. Rotate the valve stem by hand to align the tire pressure indicator sensor. Do not tighten the bolt at this stage.
5. Assemble the tire pressure indicator sensor to the valve stem and install the new bolt hand tight.
6. Insert an anti-rotation pin through the cross-drilled hole in the valve stem.
7. Hold the valve stem to prevent it from rotating and tighten the bolt to 1.4 N.m (12.4 lb in).
8. As shown in Fig. 4, check the valve stem (1) to ensure it is fully seated on the wheel (2) as follows: The rim hole edge has to be completely in the notch of the valve stem. The valve and the rim hole have to be concentric.
9. Make sure there is a parallel gap between the valve stem (1) and the tire pressure indicator sensor (2) as shown in Fig. 5.

NOTE: The tire pressure indicator sensor must not be in contact with the wheel.

10. When correctly positioned there will be a parallel gap between the indicator sensor and the wheel. (See Fig. 6.)
- Tire pressure indicator sensors are shipped in the OFF mode. The sensor will exit its OFF state when the tire is inflated.
- The tire should not have contact with the tire pressure indicator sensor during installation to prevent damage to the tire pressure indicator sensor.
11. Mount the tire to the wheel.
12. Install the tire and wheel assembly.
13. Remove the support and lower the vehicle.
14. Perform the tire pressure indicator sensor learn procedure. ■

Information for this column comes from the tire pressure monitoring systems data in ProDemand, Mitchell 1's auto repair information software for domestic and import vehicles. Headquartered in San Diego, Mitchell 1 has provided quality repair information solutions to the automotive industry since 1918. For more information, visit www.mitchell1.com.





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Traction Dollars per Tire	\$1.00	\$2.00	\$3.00

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