



Under Pressure then, or are you just tyred out?

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Some 8.1 million UK motorists could be on the roads with dangerously soft tyres...

Kim Henson reports, and shares some of his tips to help you...

According to new research by AA Tyres (the AA's mobile tyre fitting service), more than one in four UK drivers (27%) - potentially in charge of up to 8.1 million of the 30 million licensed cars on our roads - haven't checked their tyre pressures in the last two months and could be driving on dangerously soft tyres, with poor grip, terrible handling and roadholding, an abysmal ride quality plus high fuel consumption and below par emissions performance being the results.



Worse still... Over two million UK drivers could be putting themselves and others at serious risk - 7% of respondents have either NEVER checked their tyre pressures (what????!!!) or haven't done so in the past six months.

Meanwhile, and unbelievably, drivers are more likely to have recently checked screen wash levels (56%) and their vehicle's bodywork for damage (47%).

Yet in 2015, one third (32.6%) of accidents in the UK (including 112 serious accidents and 14 fatalities) in which vehicle defects were a contributory factor were due to under-inflated, defective or illegal tyres. It is of course essential to frequently/regularly inspect the condition and tread depth of your vehicle's tyres, as well as taking their pressure readings...

The AA-Populus poll canvassed 20,033 AA members on when they last checked certain parts of their main vehicle. The research found that a much higher proportion of drivers had checked their screenwash levels (56%), windscreens (50%), condition of their bodywork (47%) and lights (43%) than the condition of their tyres - pressures (40%) and tread (36%) - in the last two weeks.

The worst culprits for failing to check tyre pressures were women and Londoners, with more than a third (35%) in both groups not making an assessment in the last two months.

The following regional breakdown shows, in ascending order, the worst offenders when it comes to checking their tyre pressures:

When did you last check the tyres on your main vehicle?

More than two months ago or never

London	35%
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Northern Ireland	32%
South East	29%
Eastern	27%
North West	25%

Source: AA Populus online poll

Mark Shankland, Managing Director of AA Tyres, comments: "It doesn't take much misuse of brand new tyres to go from safe to dangerous. Checking tyre pressures is the bread and butter of car management, so it's surprising that over a quarter of UK drivers have failed to do this recently."

He continued, "Sadly the accident figures bear out just how important it is to keep tyres correctly inflated - and just how quickly failing to do so can result in tragedy. On average, even if they are correctly fitted and undamaged, tyres can lose up to two pounds per square inch (PSI) every month - add in the potential of minor damage going unnoticed and you could be running on dangerously low levels before you know it."

Failure to make these checks even after a couple of weeks can have significant knock-on effect to your fuel economy and the comfort of your drive - and not least your safety.

It's important to check your tyres every couple of weeks. Before you do, make sure they're 'cold' and haven't been driven in the last couple of hours. The pressures inside your tyres naturally increase as they heat up, so making an assessment while they are warm could give a false reading. Use this opportunity to also check tread levels and signs of wear, cuts or bulges in the sidewall - which could be a sign that the tyre has sustained internal damage."



Kim's Tips:

1. Be careful if relying on forecourt tyre air pumps and pressure gauges, since these gauges have a hard life and are notoriously inaccurate.
2. In addition, by the time you reach a forecourt your car's tyres will already be warm, thus giving a falsely high pressure reading.
3. Ideally invest in your own tyre pump; manual foot pumps and electrically operated types are widely available. The electric ones run from a 12 volt socket or by direct connection to a car's battery. If using an electric pump connected to the car's battery, operate the pump only when the engine is running, since the pump will work more efficiently then (as the car's alternator is boosting available battery voltage). If you use the pump when the engine is not running, the car's battery may soon be drained of power, then your engine might not start... Keep the tyre pump in the boot too, since then, in the event of (say) a slow puncture, you may be able to re-inflate a soft tyre just to get you home, or to get the vehicle to the nearest tyre depot (in both cases with great care, and stopping at frequent intervals to re-check the pressures/re-inflate the affected tyre). Another point is that you may be able to help a fellow road user with a soft tyre (as I was able to do recently on the Isle of Wight, when I encountered an elderly driver whose car had a dangerously soft tyre; he had no pump nor a pressure gauge with him in his vehicle).
4. Obtain your own decent quality pressure gauge; these are inexpensive and easy to use.
5. Always replace the tyre valve's dust cap after pressure checks/re-inflation. These caps have the valuable function of keeping out dirt and water from the valve area.
6. Last, but not least, if you are thinking of investing in a manually-operated foot pump, it's worth considering a double-barrel type. These cost only a little more than a single barrel unit, and pump up tyres far more rapidly - especially useful on vehicles with large tyres!



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About AA Tyres

AA Tyres is the AA's mobile tyre fitting service, and provides people across the UK with a professional and convenient service.

The fitting service is completely free and customers only pay for the tyres once they have been fitted to the vehicle.