



## The Truth About Performance Tires

By Frank Ranelli, ASE Certified Automotive Tire Expert

**NEW!**

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([PRWEB](#)) May 8, 2003 -- What is a performance tire? Who needs a performance tire? Why do I need a performance tire? These are all questions that I am asked on a daily basis. To understand these answers, we need to look at the history of the performance tire first and then discuss today's tire market, both original equipment and replacement.

In the early 1980's Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company outfitted a few high performance cars, namely the Chevrolet Corvette, with their race inspired Gatorback tire. The tire's roots were based in formula one racing. The tire's design was radically different than most other passenger car tires and was an instant success with enthusiasts. The tire featured a very low profile side wall, large tread blocks for dry traction grip, a very stiff sidewall and a nylon cap over the steel belts to hold the tire together at high speeds. (This nylon cap act very much like a girdle does; it holds the insides of the tire in at high speeds.) The tire received a unique sidewall rating, called a speed rating, and it was designated with a 'V'. This 'V' meant the tire had been safely tested in the laboratory to stay together at speeds up to 149 mph. Thus, the modern day high performance tire was introduced in America.

This tire was an instant hit. It also found its way on to the rest of the eighties muscle car craze, such as the Chevrolet Camaro IROC-Z, the Pontiac Trans-Am and the Ford Mustang. The tires were very costly, even by today's standards. It was not uncommon for them to cost over \$200.00 each. This was an immense price for a tire considering the average tire cost right around \$45.00 at the time. Soon, other tire manufacturers followed and began to make high performance tires like the Goodyear Gatorback. New speed ratings followed: 'H' was up to 130 mph, 'S' was up to 112 mph and so on. A few years later, the 'Z' speed rated tire was introduced which was 'unlimited' or over 149 mph.

Now that we understand the birth of high performance tires, let's take a look at how they found their way on to almost all modern cars. Automobile manufacturers soon realized that performance tires enhanced their vehicles in ways that had not thought of previously. They handled better, cornered better, stopped better, steered better, were safer during a panic stop for control and worked well with the new anti-lock brake technology that was emerging. Quickly, every car manufacturer wanted to equip their vehicles with high performance tires. The important point here is the general American public was not ready for performance tires. They were used to the



big-car, slushy feeling automobiles of the 1960s and 1970s. Performance tires made the car ride stiffer and harder. They cost a lot more and they wore out very quickly. Asian and European automobile manufacturers stayed the course and vehicles like BMWs and Porsche came exclusively equipped with high performance tires, though.

During this time tire manufacturers began to produce a bevy of intermediate high performance tire known as touring tires. These were designed to appease the ride and wear issues for the typical sedan owner. Within a few years, we had a whole list of high performance tire categories: Ultra-high performance, performance, touring, cosmetic performance, touring performance and so on.

As technology marched on, automobile manufacturers, ever pushed by the government and other issues, began to equip nearly everything with a performance tire. Your family mini-van was not immune from being equipped with performance tires. The reason: They help sell cars because of the benefits they add to the cars steering and braking, consumers liked the look and safety agencies approved of their added benefits too.

The backwash to all of this was that the unsuspecting American consumer would buy a four door family sedan, not knowing it was equipped with high performance tires, and would receive sticker shock when he went to replace his tires for the first time. Instead of a few hundred dollars for a set of new tires, five, six, or even seven hundred dollars for four new tires was not uncommon. This created, in my opinion, the most often repeated statement by a tire consumer in modern history, "but, not a performance driver and my car is not a performance car." Consumers became angry and looked for ways to decrease the cost of their tires. They tried everything from changing to incorrect tire sizes, to lowering the speed rating or worse yet, just simple driving on bald tires because they could not afford them.

Since we are on the subject of speed rating, lets discuss those briefly, as well. First, speed ratings are no longer called speed ratings. How they get tested still remains the same, but there was so much negative feedback from consumers about speed ratings and what they represented, they are now called performance ratings. See, a car equipped with a V-rated tire will stop, handle and steer better than a car not equipped with performance tires, even at regular driving speeds. By changing a cars performance rated tires to a lower, (or high) will dramatically alter the way the car drives and feels. The average sedan owner might not think he needs performance tires, but he does, even at regular driving speeds. High speed driving or racing has nothing to do with it.

The truth is we are all performance drivers. Everyone benefits from performance tires. They are safer, stop better, react quicker, steer better and stand less of a chance blowing out on the highway. They react and work much better with modern ABS systems and todays sensitive steering and suspension systems.

Today, automobile manufacturers program into the onboard cars computer system critical tire data, such as height and rolling resistance. Tires are designed as a very intricate part of the vehicle. Much like the fender for a 2003 Buick Park Ave is the only fender that will fit and work correctly; tires are treated with the same care and design. What the manufacturer equipped the car with, in both size and performance rating is what should always be put back on. Failure to do so can result in erratic handling of the vehicle, a check engine light on or worse yet and accident.

The truth about performance tires is that every car and every driver is a performance driver. There is no getting around it. Performance tires are here to stay and so is the cost associated with them. The American consumer needs to understand that tires are a critical design criteria and choice for their automobile by the engineers that



design them. They will continue to be expensive and the average cost of all tires will continue to climb due to technology and not good old inflation.

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