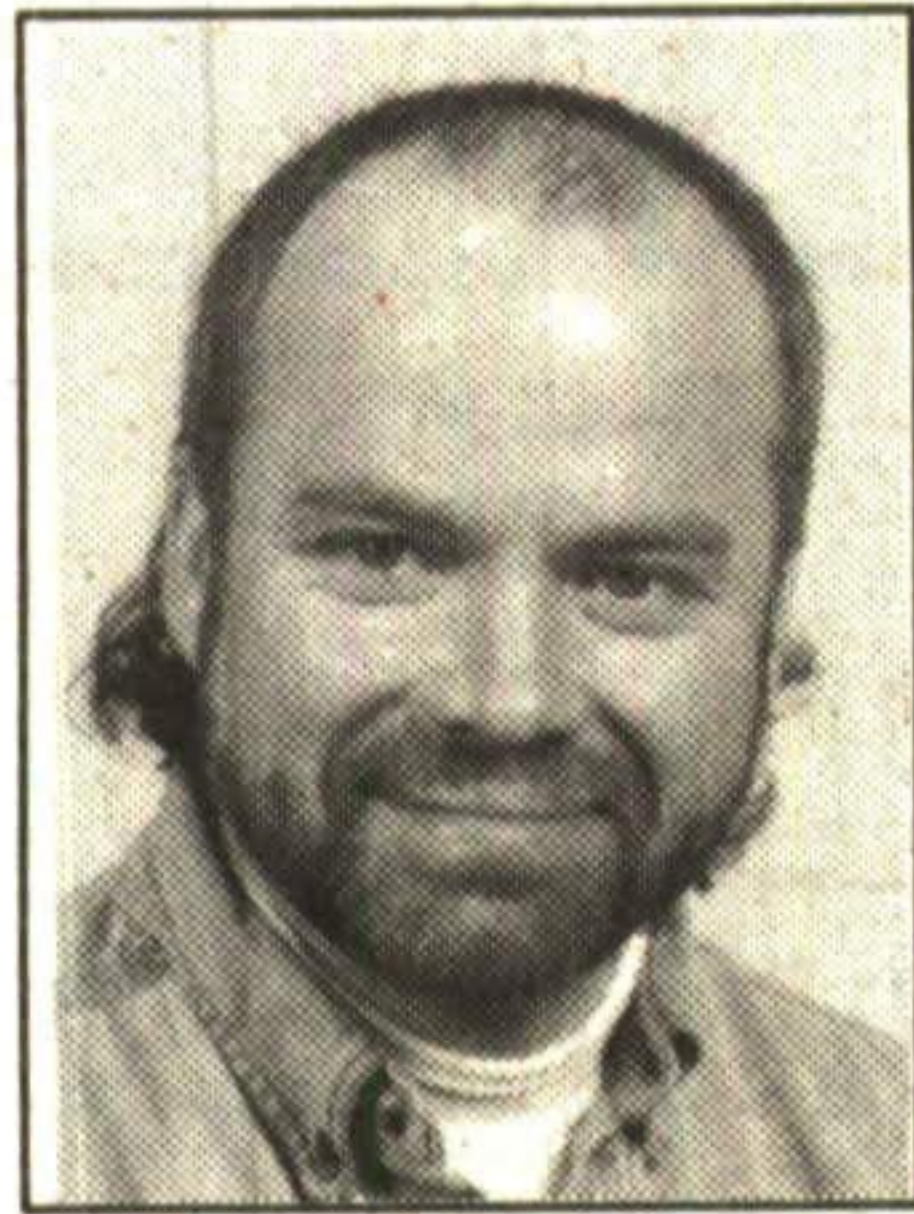
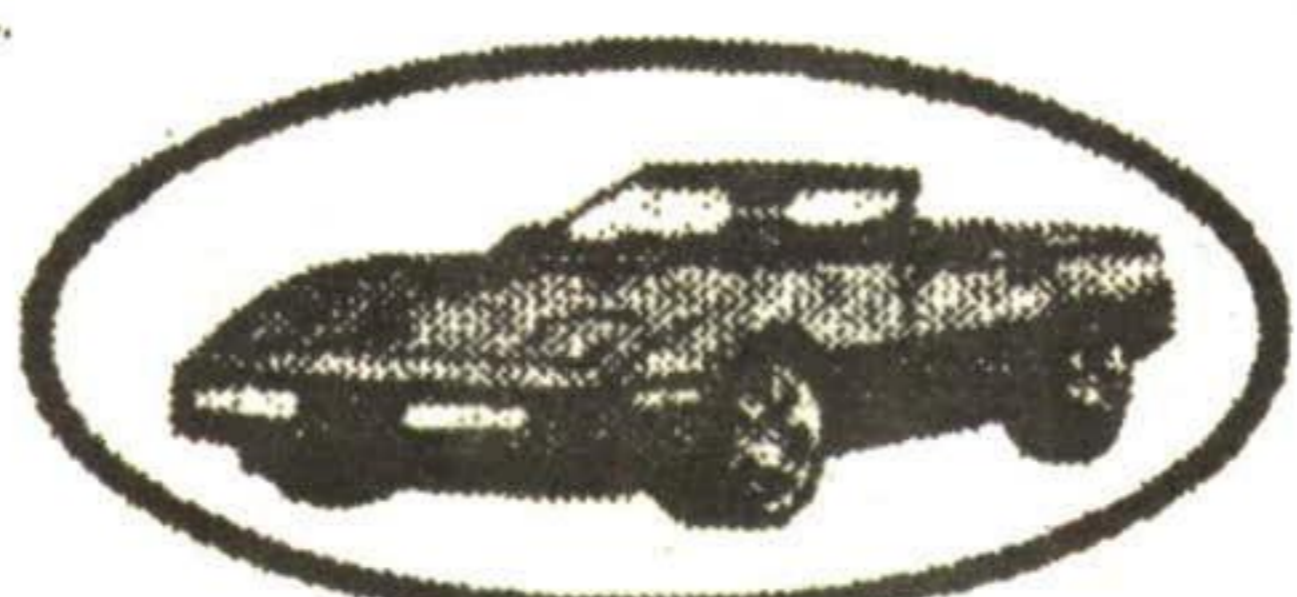


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The writing is on the wall

Motorists should read the writing on the wall - the tire sidewall, that is, says the Tire Industry Safety Council.

"Many motorists don't know that their tires' sidewalls contain such important information as the size of the tire, the maximum load and inflation pressures it can take, and other important safety and performance information," Council Chairman Thomas E. Cole says. The Council stressed the importance of tire sidewall markings and their meanings last October as part of its observance of National Car Care Month.

A typical tire sidewall might contain this string of markings: P205/60R15 89H. Here's what the letters and numbers mean:

The "P" means the tire is for passenger cars. The "P" is not required for all tires. Some passenger tires will not have it.

The "205" is the nominal width of the tire in millimeters.

The "60" refers to the ratio of the tire's height to width.

The "R" means it is a radial tire.

The "15" is an inch code that refers to the wheel (rim) diameter required.

The "89" refers to the tire's load index.

The "H" refers to the speed rating. In this case, this tire has a 130 mph maximum speed rating.

As noted, the 89 figure represents the load index, a code used principally in Europe. The load index is associated with the maximum load a tire can carry at the speed indicated by its speed symbol. It corresponds to the maximum rated load, in pounds or kilograms, which is also branded on the sidewall of the tire. Load indexes for most passenger car tires are in the range of 75 to 110.

Also as noted, the "H" is the speed symbol. In our example, the H speed symbol means the tire has a maximum speed rating of 130 mph (210 km/h). Tire speed symbols are simplified indicators relating to a tire's speed capability based on laboratory tests.

"Speed ratings are not applicable if tires are underinflated, overloaded, worn out, damaged or altered," Cole emphasizes.

Another piece of important information stamped on the sidewall is the maximum tire load capacity, expressed in pounds (lbs) and kilograms (kg), and the maximum inflation pressure, expressed in pounds per square inch (PSI) and kilopascals (kPa).

Other markings on the sidewall might include a B in place of the R - this means the tire is a "belted-bias" construction. A D in

place of the R would mean the tire has a "diagonal bias" construction. "The sidewall also includes information on the type of cord and number of plies in the sidewall and under the tread," Cole adds.

Also shown are the letters DOT. This means that the manufacturer has certified that the tire is in compliance with all applicable federal motor vehicle safety standards established by the Department of Transportation. Adjacent to this is a tire identification or serial number, comprised of up to eleven numbers and letters, which identify a variety of things. Here is an example: DOT MA L9 ABCD 352.

MA is the manufacturer's plant code.

L9 is the tire size code.

ABCD is a group of up to four symbols, optional with the manufacturer, to identify the brand or other characteristics of the tire.

352 means the tire was made during the 35th week of 1992.

The sidewall also contains tire "grades" required by the Department of Transportation, which are based on three performance factors: treadwear, traction and temperature resistance.

The treadwear grade is a comparative rating based on the wear rate of the tire when tested under controlled conditions on a specified government test track. A tire graded 200 would wear twice as long on the government test course as one graded 100, provided both were tested under the same specified test conditions.

"It's important to emphasize that consumer should not link treadwear grades with projected mileage estimates for their tires," Cole warns.

"The durability and performance of the tire tread is affected by a great many variables, including driving habits, maintenance practices, differences in road conditions and characteristics, and climate," Cole explains. "The treadwear grade should not be regarded as an absolute measure of tread life."

The traction grade is represented by the letters A, B and C (with grade A being the highest rating). The traction grade represents the tire's ability to stop on wet pavement as measured under controlled conditions on government test surfaces.

Finally, the temperature grade is also represented with the letter A, B and C (with grade A being the highest rating) and represents the tire's resistance to the generation of heat when tested under controlled conditions.

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