



WASTE NOT WANT NOT

Tyres are ultimately the only grip fleet managers' trucks have on the road, but why do so many throw them away before they should? Ian Norwell goes to Paris to find out what can be done

In launching three new tyre service products, Michelin believes it is making sterling efforts to drag tyre management into the 21st century. That's not to say tyres are not sophisticated: they certainly are. But Michelin says the way they are monitored is archaic, compared to data flows from trucks and drivers.

Why does this matter? Serge Lafon, executive vice president for Michelin's truck products, suggests that tyres are a silent sapper of profits. "Most operators know that a tyre underinflated by only 10% adds 1% to their fuel bills, but there's a more insidious cost," he explained, at the launch of Michelin Tire Care, in Paris. "One third of breakdowns are due to tyre incidents, and 90% of those are pressure related."

Michelin Tire Care comprises a range of digital tyre management services designed to maximise the tyre's lifecycle. It's not about product: it's about utilisation. Michelin says its European data reveals that tyres are, on average, removed from vehicles with 4.8mm of tread still remaining, well above

regulatory limits. Lafon believes that can only be down to poor planning – particularly given that each wasted millimetre of tread equates to 15,000–20,000km of lost running.

Hence the new services. At the entry level, aimed at smaller fleets, TireLog is a free app that formalises and stores tyre checking data, reducing the manual slog. Michelin hopes this free service will present data clearly enough to convince fleet managers of the benefits of a premium tyre brand.

The final frontier

Capturing tyre data on the move, and so obtaining real-time assessments of tyre condition and pressure, is said to be less than a year away. The current culpability for breakdowns should then nose dive.

When this ability does finally arrive, and tyres achieve the kind of connectivity that other truck systems enjoy through telematics, they will be fully paid-up members of the technology club. Bring it on.

Moving up the line, iCheck and iManage are subscription-based services that offer speedier tyre measurement, along with data analysis. Lafon claims that iCheck cuts inspection times to a third of current operations. "And forewarned is forearmed. iCheck provides access to the right information at the right time." So the risks of vehicle downtime due to tyre problems are minimised; regrooving can be handled in good time; and every millimetre of tread can be fully exploited.

Michelin's iManage then takes that to the top level, with full-blown cradle-to-grave tyre management, analysis and reporting. Lafon says: "This digital innovation allows hauliers to use preventive maintenance, moving them away from a reactive approach."

The system employs RFID (radio frequency identification) and TPMS (tyre pressure monitoring system) data sent to the cloud. Costs are in the range €1–€9 per vehicle, and, at that price, the return on investment, not only in terms of tyre life, but also safety and fuel consumption, does look good. **TE**