

Choosing retreads

Retreads are not covered by EU tyre labelling requirements, and won't be until at least 2024, so how else can operators ensure they are making the best choice? Terry Salter, tyre industry veteran of 35 years, and retread manager for Bridgestone UK & ROI since 2005, explains the situation to Lucy Radley before his retirement from industry last month

Salter begins: "To get value for money, I think you can follow the same sort of rules and principles on retreads as you do with new tyres.

So in simple terms, if you choose the same or a similar tread pattern as you would on new, then you're likely to get similar results as far as label grades are concerned. Obviously they won't be identical," he continues, "but having a consistent policy is a shortcut towards making sure you're in the right area."

For that to work, however, it's important that both the new and used tyres chosen are correct for the application. "In the UK, too many people opt for a general-purpose regional haulage tyre," Salter warns. "They then use it over distances it isn't designed for, or in some on/off road or pure urban applications where the tyre doesn't perform to its best." Tyre manufacturers develop ranges of tyres for a reason, in other words, although there will always be grey areas.

The biggest grey area is between regional and long distance tyres, but there are simple ways to help narrow the choice down. "Does the vehicle spend most of its time on trunk and motorway roads? Is it doing multi-drop or full loads? Those are the sorts of things which give you clues," Salter adds. "If you're based in Birmingham and trunking to Glasgow and back, that's going to be long-haul, whereas if you're going to Nottingham and Leicester and doing several drops, that's more regional."

When a mixture of work is involved, things get more complicated, so it's wise to seek advice from sales consultants. "Some of it you can do from a textbook, but some of it you





have to really go and look and see," Salter explains. "That's when you need people with a good technical knowledge, who can pick up when tyres are wearing inappropriately because they're on the wrong application."

IN POSITION

Once you've chosen your tyre, it's time to think about positioning, so as to get maximum life from it. "When I joined the industry years ago, there were quite a lot of fleets which only had one, or maybe two tyre sizes across the board, so mixing and matching was easy," Salter says. "Nowadays the steer and drive might be different to each other, and are almost certainly different to the trailer." This is why traditional casing banks are no longer the gold standard for fleets using retreads – modern testing facilities enable the best use to be got out of each casing, with premium casings designed to be 'reinvented' more than once.

Most people shy away from using retreads on steer axles, so when asked whether this is a sensible or outdated decision, he replies: "There's nothing legislation-wise to stop them going on. You do get some refuse and construction-orientated vehicles, usually ones doing more limited distances and speeds, that use them on steer axles, though it's more common on second steer than first."

AVOIDING STEER

The majority of retreads do, nonetheless, go on to drive and trailer positions, and sometimes a mix of retread and new will be fitted. This is an approach manufacturers such as Bridgestone like to foster when working with fleets. "You have a natural flow,

so that if you're fitting new to the steer axle, and you're getting new tyres coming into the fleet off of new vehicles, that gives you casings going into the supply chain to retread," Salter points out. "We also have customers who put new tyres on the third axle of trailers, again to provide casings to reuse."

Choosing the third, or last trailer axle to carry the new tyres is the most logical, as that one works hardest and wears out fastest. "If you're going to run new on any axle, that is the one I would recommend, then at the end it can be retreaded and go back on to one of the other axle positions. That balances out the wear quite well across the bogie – retreads normally last around 80-90% of the life of the new tyre."

You can, however, mix retread and new in any combination you want.

"You can even put new and retread on the same axle, and it certainly does happen," he points out. "Some fleets don't mind at all, and even ones that do, when you've got a breakdown on the side of the road, it's not an issue. I would always aim to have a set policy for each axle, however," he adds. "Again, you can mix and match on a drive, but I would wherever possible put on matched sets – and I would certainly put matched pairs on where they're twinned together."

Whichever way your operation works, the overarching advice is to keep it simple. "Whether you buy new or retread, treat them both the same," Salter concludes. "Choose the right one for the application, put the right amount of air into it and make sure its fitness for service is checked regularly." **TE**

MANAGING RETREAD CASINGS – MICHELIN ADVICE

"Pretty much every customer is looking to us for advice on casing management, with retreads forming an intrinsic part of this process," says Azeem Khan, UK & ROI retread manager at Michelin. "Even fleets which have previously always run a new-only policy are talking to us about the benefits of retreads."

There are five key sizes which, between them, account for 90% of the retread market in the UK: 295/80 R22.5, 315/70 R22.5, 315/80 R22.5, 385/65 R22.5 for truck, plus 275/70 R22.5 for bus. All are supplied as Michelin Remix tyres in these sizes.

Casings aren't always used to make the same product for their second life. "The retread market is predominantly for the drive axle and trailers," Khan points out. "So we can produce the Michelin Remix X Multi D or T, our biggest sellers overall, from a casing from a steer tyre or an off-road tyre in the same size." All casings go through Michelin's casing verification process before being retreaded, which includes x-ray imaging and shearography to check for any damage.

Nevertheless, the provenance and supply of those cases may concern some operators. "For the larger contracted fleets, we are in control of the casing assets, so they are returned to our site as wear dictates," Khan says. "For smaller independent fleets, it's all about relationships both with the fleet itself or the supplying dealer." This is something Michelin's teams work closely to develop, but if there is an imbalance in the system, they have a back-up plan. "If demand for retreads exceeds the natural input of casings, we have developed trading relationships with key casing agents which we utilise to top up our requirements."