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## **Driving dangerously? Most drivers don't know if their tyres are illegal**

UK drivers are putting themselves at risk of avoidable road collisions and hefty fines by not regularly checking the condition of their tyres and not knowing when a tyre becomes illegal and unsafe, research conducted by the RAC with charity TyreSafe has found.\*

Only 39% of drivers know that the minimum tyre tread allowed by law is 1.6mm, meaning a majority (61%) may be driving on one or more dangerous, illegal tyres which would put them at risk of being given three penalty points

and fined £2,500 per tyre. And while two-thirds (66%) of respondents claimed they knew what the legal limit was, four-in-10 (41%) of this group subsequently got the figure wrong.

But perhaps of more concern is the fact that as many as a quarter of drivers (26%) only check tyre tread when they remember to do it or directly before taking a car for its MOT, while 5% never do and wait for their car to fail its annual roadworthiness test before taking any action. Just a third (33%) said they check tyre tread at least every month, with 17% saying they do so every other month and a similar proportion – 15% – only checking them about every six months.

Of those who don't check their tyres regularly, half (50%) say it is because doing so simply 'doesn't cross their mind', while four-in-10 (40%) say they rely on a garage or mechanic to do it for them – a risky practice given how infrequently this is likely to be for most people. A quarter (25%) of this group say they know checking their tyres is important but 'just don't get round to doing it very often' while 15% run the gauntlet because they have not (yet) experienced a tyre-related problem while driving.

When asked what would encourage them to check their tyres more often, almost half (48%) of these drivers said a regular reminder on the in-car display would nudge them into action. While tyre pressure monitoring systems (TPMS) – which alert drivers when one or more tyres loses pressure – are common in vehicles, such regular reminders to check tread and pressure are not.

But a third (34%) of this group said nothing would get them to change their behaviour, suggesting some drivers simply don't believe their tyres will ever let them down or become illegal – despite tyre-related issues being one of the top reasons for calling out an RAC patrol. In 2024, the RAC logged in the region of 340,000 tyre-related breakdowns.

The RAC's research findings also show the extent to which a majority of drivers are in the dark when it comes to knowing the severe penalties for driving a vehicle with dangerous or defective tyres. Despite 70% of drivers claiming they know what the penalties are, only 16% correctly stated that driving on illegal tyres can lead to a fine of up to £2,500 per tyre (so up to £10,000 for four tyres). A larger proportion of respondents – although still a minority – knew the correct number of penalty points that can be meted out,

with 47% aware the penalty stands at three per dangerous or defective tyre.

Previous research for the RAC Report on Motoring\*\* found that a fifth (19%) of drivers have tried to save money by delaying necessary repairs, or either reduced or stopped servicing their vehicles altogether due to cost – which suggests money worries as a result of the cost-of-living crisis may be having an impact on the safety of many vehicles on the roads today.

RAC road safety spokesperson Rod Dennis said: “Driving on tyres that aren’t sufficiently inflated is incredibly dangerous because tyres are the only connection between a vehicle and the road. The safety risk spikes during the winter when wet and potentially snowy roads mean tyres have to work harder than ever to retain grip.

“The latest official data shows 185 people were killed or seriously injured as a direct result of a vehicle having illegal, defective or underinflated tyres in 2023 – an increase of more than a quarter (26%) on the previous year. Add on those serious collisions where drivers have lost control, or where a slippery road has been a factor, and the number runs into the thousands.

“Checking tyre tread takes just moments yet doing so has the potential to save lives on the roads. We’re encouraging every driver to start 2025 on the right note and get into the habit of doing so as often as possible, and at least once a month. Tyre tread depth gauges are cheap and easy to use, but an even lower cost alternative is to take a 20p piece and place it into the main grooves of each tyre in several different places. If the outer band of the coin is visible, then there’s a very good chance the tyres are unsafe, illegal or both, and it’s time to get them checked them out. Having your car serviced by an [RAC Mobile Mechanic](#) would also ensure any tyre issues were picked up.

“Ensuring tyres are inflated to the correct pressures is just as important as checking the tread. Those pumped up too much can cause tread in the centre of tyres to wear down faster, while those underinflated is likely to lead to uneven wear around the edges. Always check the vehicle handbook for the right pressures based on the load being carried in the vehicle.

“It’s worth remembering these are often also printed on a sticker either on the inside of the driver’s door, in the fuel filler cap, or next to an electric vehicle’s charging socket and can vary between front and back, and vary when carrying lighter or heavier loads.”

Chair of TyreSafe Stuart Lovatt said: “It's concerning to see some drivers don't consider the importance of regular tyre checks. Despite the high number of tyre-related breakdowns and the very real risk of incidents, some motorists leave it to their MOT to take action or don't check at all. It's for this reason that we urge all drivers to make tyre safety a habit by remembering our simple acronym ‘A.C.T’. By checking your tyres’ Air pressure, Condition, and Tread at least once a month – and before any long journey – you can significantly improve your safety on the road and avoid costly incidents.”

The RAC and TyreSafe websites carry extensive advice, including how-to videos, on how to check tyres and stay safe: [www.rac.co.uk/drive/advice/tyres](http://www.rac.co.uk/drive/advice/tyres) and [www.tyresafe.org/the-checks](http://www.tyresafe.org/the-checks).

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## Notes to editors

\*Research conducted on RAC's behalf by Online95 in September 2024.  
Sample size: 1,775 drivers who hold a full, current UK driving licence and drive at least once a month

\*\*RAC Report on Motoring 2024

The press office email address is [press.office@rac.co.uk](mailto:press.office@rac.co.uk) and media centre is at [media.rac.co.uk](http://media.rac.co.uk). **Please note:** the press office is unable to help with individual customer enquiries - please visit the [RAC contacts page](#) to find the right contact.

## About the RAC

The RAC, an iconic UK brand, provides complete peace of mind to 14 million UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. As well as its premium nationwide breakdown assistance service – with an expert branded patrol workforce attending more than two million breakdowns every year – it offers a wide range of market-leading products across insurance, legal services, vehicle inspections and service, maintenance and repair. Included in this is the first-of-its-kind nationwide Mobile Mechanics service which brings the garage to homes and workplaces.



At the forefront of new solutions for business fleets and consumers, the RAC's breakdown service is electric-ready with mobile EV charging technology and can be called on using [myRAC](#) – the all-in-one route planner, fuel finder and breakdown reporting app.

Visit the [RAC website](#).

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