Tires!

As you begin planning for travel this year, be sure to have your RV in shape and ready to hit the road. One important area needing attention is TIRES! No matter if you have a trailer or motorhome, nothing can frustrate you more than a flat tire. I have included an article from an RV Tech magazine that highlights some useful information.

Tire Care: The recent Firestone tire recall has raised our consciousness of tire safety but the fact is most tires are safe and most tire problems can be avoided. With that in mind lets review basic tire care and maintenance.

There are two factors that affect tire life: proper application and good maintenance. For most of us choosing the right tires is easy, we use the tires installed by the RV manufacturer. However, while the tires installed by the manufacturer may be adequate, they may not provide much margin of safety if the RV is loaded to the maximum GVWR. To know if your tires are the right ones for the job, it's important to compare the fully loaded weight of your RV to the weight rating of the tires. Ask your tire dealer or the manufacturer for a weight-rating chart for your tire brand and model. Most manufacturers also have these charts on their web sites.

When it comes to maintenance, keeping your RV tires inflated to the proper pressure is the most important thing you can do to insure their long life. Follow the guidelines in your RV owner's manual, if you have one. If you don't have an owner's manual then ask an expert, either a good tire man or your RV service tech.

The maximum pressure allowed for a tire is embossed on the sidewall. That's the maximum pressure when the tire is cold. It's okay for it to be over that by as much as 10 psi if the tire is checked while hot. The proper pressure for your RV tire may not be the maximum tire pressure. The right pressure is determined by the weight carried by each tire on the RV and the pressure recommended by the tire manufacturer for that weight.

Running a tire in an over pressure condition will cause uneven tread wear. Running a tire in an under pressure condition will also cause uneven tread wear and can cause damage to the sidewalls of the tire. (Under inflation can cause many tire related problems. Since a tires load capacity is largely determined by its inflation pressure, under inflation results in an overloaded tire. An under inflated tire operates at high deflection resulting in decreased fuel economy, sluggish handling and excessive shoulder wear. High deflection also causes heat buildup leading to catastrophic tire failure. Because radial ply tires have a characteristic bulge in the sidewall even when properly inflated, it is impossible to visually determine the degree of inflation. Use a reliable air gauge to check inflation pressure.) Keep in mind that a tire can lose as much a 1-psi per month and as little as 5 psi can make a difference in the load carrying capacity of a tire. So, it's especially important to check your tire pressure before taking your rig on that first trip of the season.

Improper inflation pressure isn't the only thing that can cause unusual tread wear. It may also be caused by a mechanical problem such as wheel alignment, a bent wheel or an unbalanced tire. (To avoid vibration or shaking of the vehicle when a tire rotates, the tire must be properly balanced. This balance is achieved by positioning weights on the wheel to counterbalance heavy spots on the wheel-andtire assembly. A wheel alignment adjusts the angles of the wheels so that they are

positioned correctly relative to the vehicle's frame. This adjustment maximizes the life of your tires and prevents your car from veering to the right or left when driving on a straight, level road.) These adjustments require special equipment and should be performed by a qualified technician.

I'm not going to go into the different tread wear patterns and what problems they indicate. It's enough to say that if you spot unusual tread wear it's time to see a mechanic. If you're not sure what you are looking at is unusual, then check with a

mechanic or tire shop.

The amount of tread on an RV tire is not the best indication of its condition. While some RVers put lots of miles on their rigs and may actually use all the tread on a tire, most of us don't get to travel that much. Our RVs may never wear all the tread off our tires before they need to be replaced.

Ozone is the biggest natural cause of tire failure. Ozone is a gas, which causes the rubber to become brittle which result in surface cracks, which over time, become wider and deeper.

Tire manufacturers do not recommend any type of dressings or cleaners other than soap and water and say that keeping your tires clean is the best thing you can do to minimize ozone damage. If you do use tire dressings, they should not contain petroleum products or alcohol. Since high temperatures and ultraviolet light accelerate this destructive process, covering your tires when not in use will also help prolong their life.

Tire manufacturers recommend replacing tires every five to seven years. You can determine the age of your tires by looking for the serial number embossed on the sidewall. Look at the last three digits. The first of the three is the week of the year.

The last digit is the year the tire was manufactured. So, the number 029 would indicate the tire was made in the second week of 1999. Of course if the tires are really old, it could mean the second week of 1989, so if you have purchased an older RV ask the tire manufacturer. With the complete serial number they can determine which year.

One last tire care tip:

If you use leveling blocks, they should be large enough, so the entire footprint of the tire will fit on them. If you have a dual wheel axle, both tires must be completely supported. If you have a multiple axle trailer, the tires on the side being raised must be supported equally.

I hope this will be helpful. If you have any ideas for future articles please let me know.