

Tyresome Foolishness



Why you should avoid vehicles without a proper spare tyre

FLAT TYRES ARE A PAIN and no one likes to deal with them, but they are generally not hard to change and not all that expensive to fix. At least, they weren't hard to change or fix, until recently.

Now carmakers – especially BMW – are selling cars with runflat tyres and no spare wheel. When you have a puncture you simply keep driving to the nearest tyre shop and replace the whole tyre. Once these runflat tyres have been driven flat you are not legally allowed to use them on the road again.



In theory, these tyres are great for the consumer: there's no spare to change and when you get a puncture you simply drive to the nearest tyre shop and get a replacement.

The reality is a little different. In theory, runflat tyres can be safely driven between 80 and 150 kilometres, which is way longer than the average journey.

However, even in places like England, there are plenty of times and places when a tyre shop simply isn't available. Even when a tyre shop is available, there's no guarantee that they'll have a spare tyre for your car. Often, they'll order one on your behalf from the local dealer. However, there's no guarantee that the local dealer will have one, either. In fact, it's not uncommon for motorists to be stranded for days or even weeks, due to the simple lack of a spare wheel. Madness.

It's bad enough in places like England, but worse in places like New Zealand and Australia. In these countries, there may not be a spare tyre for your car in the whole country. There's a spot on Australia's Highway One where you are 2000 kilometres from the nearest BMW dealer. And there are plenty of places in Australia where a flat tyre could cost you your life.



Car companies are quick to point out that punctures are relatively rare and that many motorists don't like changing wheels. Indeed they don't, but most motorists would at least like the option of having a wheel to change if they're stuck in the middle of nowhere.

There are also numerous reports of runflat tyres wearing out alarmingly quickly, requiring the replacement of all four tyres at low mileage. Other owners complain of vibration and poor handling attributed to the runflats. And, to add insult to injury, runflat tyres often cost more – a lot more – than conventional tyres to replace.

Runflat tyres aren't even particularly clever. They're simply a conventional tyre with a self-supporting system inside, to keep the wheel from going flat if it gets a puncture.

Car companies promote runflat tyres as a gift to the consumer, pointing out their safety and convenience. This is basically crap. Runflat tyres were developed so that carmakers could increase boot space, save weight and avoid paying out for a spare tyre, jack and tools. Our only sane advice is to simply avoid cars with runflat tyres.

Almost as bad are 'spacesaver' tyres, supplied with many modern cars. Basically spacesavers are a small,



thin tyre that is designed to get you to the nearest tyre shop at low speed.

Tests by *The Dog & Lemon Guide* on a racetrack show that cars fitted with spacesavers handle very poorly and are difficult to control at even moderate speeds. Spacesavers have already been linked to at least one fatality. There's no valid reason for spacesaver spares – they're simply another cost-saving exercise at your expense.

Worst of all are the cars that have neither runflat nor spacesaver tyres. Instead, they use conventional tyres, but give you no spare. Instead, you get a crappy little can of spray foam and their best wishes that the tyre is intact enough to be pumped up. If not, call a tow truck.

Our advice is to simply refuse to buy vehicles which don't have a proper spare tyre. Accept spacesaver tyres only reluctantly.

At least you can do something about spacesavers: insist that the dealer replaces the spacesaver with a conventional tyre. In some cases there's enough space in the boot to fit a full-size wheel. If there's not you may need to work out some way of restraining the larger tyre when it's in your boot. However, given that your life rests on your tyres, the extra hassle seems well worth it. •

