

The law about car tyres

What you need to know



If you drive with damaged or worn tyres you risk being fined. You risk invalidating your car insurance policy and endangering lives too.

Tyre fitted to a motor vehicle or trailer must be fit for purpose and be free from any defects which might damage the road or endanger any person.

Tyres must be correctly inflated to the vehicle manufacturer's and the tyre manufacturer's recommended pressure.

Fit for purpose means that a tyre must:

- be compatible with the types of tyres fitted to the other wheels
- not have any lump, bulge or tear caused by separation or partial failure of the structure.
- not have a cut or tear in excess of 25mm or 10% of the sectional width of the tyre, whichever is the greater, and which is deep enough to reach the ply or cord.
- not have any part of the ply or cord exposed

A vehicle with any of these faults or with tyres of different nominal size or aspect ratio on the same axle is liable to fail an MOT test.

Duty to maintain

Tyres must be correctly inflated to the vehicle manufacturer's and the tyre manufacturer's recommended pressure. ('Run-flat' tyres partially inflated or in flat condition are permitted in certain circumstances.)

Tread depth

Tread depth must not fall below the legal minimum. The tread is that part of the tyre in contact with the road in normal conditions.

The minimum depth of tread depends on the class of vehicle.

Type of vehicle	Minimum tread depth
Passenger vehicles (other than motorcycles) for not more than 8 seated passengers	At least 1.6mm throughout a continuous band in the centre 3/4 of the tread and around the entire circumference
Goods vehicles not exceeding 3,500kg max gross weight	
Light trailers not exceeding 3,500kg max gross weight	
Most vehicles larger than those listed above	At least 1.0mm throughout a continuous band across at least 3/4 of the breadth of the tread and around the entire circumference
Motorcycles 50cc and over with or without sidecar	NB: In the quarter where the tread may be less than 1.0mm, the original tread pattern must be visible
Mopeds and motorcycles under 50cc	Original tread pattern must be visible

Spare tyre

You don't have to carry a spare and it does not have to comply with the legal requirements while it is stowed away. However, when fitted to the vehicle (for example, following a puncture) it must then comply with the law. The spare is not tested in the MOT but the examiner may draw your attention to an unserviceable item as a matter of courtesy.

Buying a new car

If you are buying a new car don't assume that there will be a full-size spare wheel and tyre in the boot. It is increasingly common for car manufacturers to provide a non-standard or 'skinny' spare or even simply an emergency tyre sealant and compressor/inflator pack.

If carrying a full-size spare is important to you then raise it with the dealer; some offer a standard spare wheel as a cost option if the design of the boot floor can accommodate one.

Our [car reviews](#) include information on the type of spare supplied as standard.

Penalties

If you drive a vehicle fitted with an illegal or defective tyre on a road, a police officer may give you a [Fixed Penalty Notice](#) or, in Scotland, a Conditional Offer Notice.

A police officer has discretion not to issue a fixed penalty but to report the case for prosecution. In law, the driver and the owner (if different) are liable and one or both may be summonsed.

The maximum fine which a court can impose for using a vehicle with a defective tyre is £2,500 and three penalty points (£5,000 in the case of a goods vehicle or a vehicle constructed or adapted to carry more than eight passengers).

If a vehicle is fitted with more than one defective tyre, you can be summonsed for each tyre which is illegal. Disqualification is also possible in certain circumstances.

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