

SOME THOUGHTS ON TIRES FOR OUR CLASSICS

By Bob Winchell and Doug Bailey

On Bias Plies vs Radials: It saddens me a bit to discourage anyone from buying tires from Coker tires. I have known the family for years, and have purchased many sizes and types from Harold and Corky Coker. At one time they were the only reliable manufacturer of a product that I really needed and wanted. But in recent years other suppliers have moved into the arena, and they now exceed my expectations. In my opinion, the Coker product line has just not kept up with the competition. Even though they will honor a promise to send you replacement tires for flawed tires, most of us are not interested in that sort of hassle.

The last few Coker tires that I purchased were difficult to balance. They were flawed. They required large wheel weights to get them close to true. After returning two out of eight, and after watching the “white” turn prematurely yellow, I decided to try the Diamondback product. Unlike Cokers, which are old tire repops, Diamondbacks are *new* tires in the brand of your choice. Diamondback will vulcanize whatever white sidewall you desire on to a new radial high tech tire. The result is a tire that is easy to balance, has superior handling, and gives you modern ride qualities. And, Diamondbacks actually stay white over the long haul.

On the Age of your Tires: Whatever tires you choose, please do yourself a favor and check the date codes on your car’s tires. If they are over six years old, you should be planning for a failure in the not-too-distant future. When you consider the kind of damage that might occur if you have a blow-out – even if you don’t run off the road and hit something you can tear up a fender and undercarriage – the cost of a new set of tires is not as expensive as the alternative.

It is easy to identify when a tire was manufactured by reading its **Tire Identification Number (TIN)**. Unlike vehicle identification numbers (VINs) and the serial numbers on other consumer goods, Tire Identification Numbers are really *batch codes* that identify **the week and year the tire was produced**. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) requires that TINs be a combination of the letters DOT, followed by ten, eleven or twelve letters and/or numbers that identify the manufacturing location, tire size and manufacturer's code, *along with the week and year the tire was manufactured*. Since 2000, the week and year the tire was produced has been shown by the **last four digits** of the TIN. The first **two digits** identify the *week* and the last **two digits** identify the *year*. The example below shows a tire manufactured since 2000 with the current Tire Identification Number format: **DOT U2LL LMLR 5107**.

This means the tire was manufactured during the **51st** week of the year **07** – during **2007**.

TINs for tires produced *prior to 2000* provide the same information as today’s tires, but the



week and year of the tire uses **three (not 4) digits**. The first **two digits** identify the week a tire was manufactured; the third **digit** identifies the year. For example, a code reading 308 would most likely be manufactured in the 30th week of 1998. Although it is possible that tire was made in 1988! Before 2000, there was no universal identifier to confirm the decade of manufacture. Just realize that if your tires are older than about six years, and you drive high speeds on the highways, you're taking your chances.

Finally, hold on to your sales receipt! Most tire manufacturer's warranties cover (a) four years from the date of purchase or (b) five years from the week the tires were manufactured. If you purchase new tires that were manufactured exactly two years ago they will be covered for a total of six years (four years from the date of purchase) as long as you have your receipt. If you lose your receipt, your warranty coverage will end five years from the week the tire was produced. That would result in the tire manufacturer's warranty ending only three years from the date of purchase.

Trailer Tires: Now, if you need *trailer* tires, look to upgrade the ply rating from a "C" or a "D" to an "E." An "E" rated tire will cost you a bit more, but it will handle the heat and weight loads, while resisting road hazards better. Ask me how I know, and I'll be glad to share my experience.

Bob Winchell

Doug's Experience with Radial Whitewalls: In 2008 Ralph Messina from NJ won the Grand National's primary class in Philadelphia for '65-'66 Cadillacs with his nearly perfect triple black 1966 Eldorado convertible. He told me later that he had invested six years in restoring his car to this state of perfection! He, of course, was running the standard triple whitewalls – Coker bias plies. The bias plies were worth a couple extra points in the judging, and he was trailering his car anyway. However, he told me that (having won his trophy) he was ready to DRIVE his car, and that meant switching over to radials. And, he really liked the look of my Diamondback triple whitewall radials. (Above)



I told Ralph the story I share here, and that I have shared with those in my '58 and Vertical Headlight Cadillac owners' clubs too. When I got my '66 Sedan DeVille, she was running radials. But they were showing about 18 years on the "clock." They LOOKED like new: Zero wear on the tread, and no checking or dry rot. But there was no way I was going to run that car at highway speeds in Georgia's heat on those OLD tires. Peach State CLC happened to be touring the Coker facilities one Saturday, and we ran into Harold Coker, the founder. Mr. Coker took us to his home to admire his collection of brass era cars, and I got a chance to hit him with my scenario. Long story short, when he heard that I planned on driving my car a lot at highway speeds but I was insisting on proper triple whitewalls, he confirmed that my best bet was to go with

Diamondback radials. An honest man! I had the zero-mileage original Firestone spare in the trunk, so I took measurements and a photograph and sent those to Diamondback Tires in Conway SC. They used modern Firestone 380 radials and vulcanized the whitewall onto the tire. (It's not a gluing process, but a matter of making the white rubber part of the tire. The way they keep the whitewall white is a patented material that separates the black and white rubber, keeping the black from bleeding through and discoloring the whitewall.) At any rate, DB Tires made a terrific set for me and shipped them to Perfect Performance in Roswell, who put them on and balanced them for me. They give me the confidence to drive to Philly, Kansas City, and Columbus at 75 mph for hours on end (without a spare I might add, since I keep the original in the trunk). Needless to say, I get a LOT of questions and compliments at these national events, because people can see how close the radials look to bias plies. I have measured, and the sidewall, which is the most obvious clue you're running radials, is about one-eighth inch shorter than the bias ply in the boot. I will admit that the tread pattern on the Firestones' sidewall is a dead giveaway for those who are trying to duplicate the bias ply.

When I decided to replace the tires on my '58 after one tread on a Broadway radial separated, I went immediately back to Diamondback Tires. This time we used a Michelin tire, which cost a bit more than the Firestone 380s, but the sidewall looks even more like a bias ply to me. That's it hanging off the rear end of the "Turk" in the photo taken at Perfect Performance. See how that tread's edge looks a little more like an older tire? I highly recommend them!

<http://www.diamondbacktires.com/>



Wheel weights: Did you know that in the past specific "Cadillac weights" were used to avoid interfering with the full-flush wheel covers? If you have lost wheel covers this might be your problem! Clamping the weight on the outer surface keeps the cover from gaining the proper connection. Few shops these days even know what you're talking about if you ask them to use "Cadillac weights." A good modern tire shop will use tape weights (commonly used for modern aluminum wheels) on the outer bead seat surface of the wheel. A lesser shop will try to force a modern weight on there, and it will conflict with your wheel covers. A good alternative to the



Cadillac weights is to use a regular clip-on weight on the inner surface, along with tape weights on the other surfaces as needed. That's what Perfect Performance in Roswell uses to get a very nice static/dynamic balance on my two Cadillacs. For a modern version of a "Cadillac weight" take a look at this site for CAX Series Wheel Weights. They are designed for use with cars where regular wheel weights interfere:

http://www.chemco.ca/Products/Wheel_Balancing/CAX_wts.htm

Doug Bailey