

Tyres, weather, road surfaces and driving safety

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Of the many impressive things humans do each day, the 'simple' act of driving is among the most complex. Few activities involve so many variables that are outside of an individual's control, but which drivers must successfully navigate in order to get safely from A to B.



So says Tiger Wheel & Tyre, South Africa's most awarded company in the retail wheel and tyre industry, and one that surely knows a thing or two about road safety.

"Road surface conditions as well as weather conditions change from one road, and one minute, to another, and drivers have no control over these factors. What they can control is how well their tyres are equipped to handle challenges and how they react in these circumstances," said Group Marketing Executive, Joe du Plooy.

Indeed, tyres are the point of contact between vehicle and road, and should always be in peak condition. Consider that while the minimum legal tread depth is 1mm, the reality is that at just 50% worn, their road contact area is reduced by 75%. Worn tyres are especially dangerous in the wet, because they lose the ability to channel away surface water, increasing the risk of aquaplaning – where the vehicle loses traction and becomes uncontrollable.

Tiger Wheel & Tyre's top tips for emergency road safety and driving on different surfaces, include:

- **Rain or snow.** Increase following and braking distances, make gentle turns and don't brake if the vehicle aquaplanes, but ease slightly off the accelerator until steering control is regained. In case of flash flooding, drive to high ground and park, and don't navigate low-lying bridges or roads as floodwater may carry the vehicle away and drown you or hydrolock the engine.
- **Hail.** Pull to the side of the road as soon as you safely can, preferably under a bridge. If possible, turn your vehicle so the hail hits the windshield head-on – it's stronger than the other windows. Turn your face into the seat to protect against shattering glass, but do not leave the vehicle.
- **Hot roads.** Inflate tyres to manufacturer recommendations, preferably with nitrogen, which makes them run cooler. Under-inflated tyres run hotter and when you add hot roads to that you increase the risk of a tyre blowout.
- **Dirt roads.** Loose dirt makes for similar conditions to those encountered in the rain and skidding, much like aquaplaning, so drive as you would in wet conditions. If you drive on dirt more than tar, consider switching to off-road tyres for better grip.
- **Potholes.** If a pothole can't be avoided, brake hard, then release the brakes before impact so the vehicle has its full

suspension travel to absorb the impact. Also drive straight through the pothole – hitting it at an angle causes impact energy to transfer in ways that may damage the vehicle. Be cautious when driving through puddles as they may conceal potholes.

“Tyre maintenance is as important as reacting appropriately to changing driving conditions. Among other things, we recommend drivers inflate their tyres with nitrogen so they run cooler and last longer; check their tyre pressure and tread wear monthly; and rotate tyres and balance and align wheels every 10,000 km, or as indicated in their vehicle owner’s manual,” concluded du Plooy.

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