

# Old Cars Old Tires And the DOT

There have been a number of things recently that have prompted me to look into the use of Department of Transportation (aka DOT) numbers on tires. The recent purchase of a used car with seemingly sound tires and a four wheel drive SUV that racked up eighty thousand miles on a set of factory tires. In either case, knowing about DOT numbers, goes a long way in resolving the mystery. In the first case the tires looked new but in fact they were nearly 30 years old, the fact that the tires on the SUV wore so well was due to the fact that the tires were five years older than the new vehicle they came on (they were hard due to their age).

In the 60's congress established the DOT. The DOT was tasked with establishing standards for vehicles used on Americas Highways and that included standards for tires. DOT Numbers on tires provide two critical bits of information, where the tire was manufactured and when.

The DOT has established a useful life of a tire to be between six and ten years. For many in the hobby the rule of thumb has been if it holds air and has tread you are good to go. And for cars that may not see freeway speeds there may be some latitude (at your own risk).

If you go on long distance tours, that may come back to haunt you. Please allow me to explain. Dry Rot and Tread Separation can be a serious problem, often showing no visible signs. Most tire shops are well aware of the DOT tire life standards and will not service a tire beyond a certain point. It's good for business and keeps them from getting sued. They could be liable for sending you down the road with a tire the DOT has deemed unsafe. It would not come as a surprise to learn that the tire manufacturers have also baked that specification into their process.

## The Nuts and Bolts of it!

**DOT LLIN 6FEWWYY**

**Example**

- No DOT Number - Prior to 1960.
- Three digit DOT Number Prior to the year 2000.
- Four digit DOT Number after the year 2000.
- Last digits contain the week (WW in example) and year (YY in example) the tire was made.
- First two digits indicate where the tire was manufactured (LL in example).

Courtesy of the folks at [cruisinkitsap.com](http://cruisinkitsap.com)