

## Let's Talk Fleet Risk

### Stuart Lovatt – Chair, TyreSafe

**Simon:** This is the second instalment of our 2-part podcast for Tyre Safety Month, where I chat to Stuart Lovatt, Chair of the road safety charity, TyreSafe. In the previous episode we looked at:

- The number of tyre-related incidents and their consequences.
- The results of this year's survey looking at the legality of tyres at the point of replacement
- The specific tyre safety issues businesses need to look at for each vehicle type including trucks and vans.

In this episode we continue that, looking at company cars and grey fleet, including the emerging concern regarding tyre safety on electric vehicles, and the safety implications of grey fleet drivers opting for part-worn second-hand replacement tyres to save money. We also discuss the key messages and resources that are part of this October's Tyre Safety Month campaign.

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**Simon:** Vehicle checks are something I want to cover now, as we move on to company cars. Because they're typically not checked as often as a commercial vehicle should be – a van or a truck should be checked every day, or at the start of every shift. But company cars typically aren't – you're lucky if many people do a weekly check, and monthly, you might get a few more.

But I'm wondering if the move to electric vehicles is causing some additional unseen challenges. Because, anecdotally, I speak to a number of people who drive EVs and they report often having to change tyres, particularly on the driven wheels, well before 10,000 miles – which is a lot earlier than you'd presumably expect. Presumably because of the extra weight on the vehicle, and the extra torque available. I also mentioned earlier, and we've alluded to it a couple of times, about the 2.2 million MOT failures. And the latest DVSA data seems to show a higher proportion of tyre-related MOT failures than conventionally powered cars. This seems to be quite an important emerging issue, as we move to more electrified fleets over the next few years, and one that – if true – I suspect will be similar with electric vans as their numbers grow over the next few years. Is that the case?

**Stuart:** I don't have the figures to hand on specific electric vehicles, but we do know because of the batteries these vehicles – particularly vans – are significantly heavier. Therefore it will have a huge impact on the tyres. Now, we know that you can get specific tyres now designed for electric vehicles, and that is increasing. So it goes back to this checking your tyre pressures. So whether you're in an electric vehicle, or whether you're just going off on holiday and you're loading in the family and the dog

and all of your suitcases to get down to the ferry, even the manufacturer – when you look inside your door – they talk about the difference between unladen and laden weights. And this is from the vehicle manufacturers. They put what they believe to be the right tyre for the right type of vehicle. They tell you what the tyre pressures are. So again, it's not us telling you what the tyre pressure is, this is the people who made the vehicle.

But again, it's important that if you're going to be using a company vehicle and it's going to be laden, you can't just rely on your tyres being able to respond to what's going out there on that journey, and the stopping distances. If you're a Fleet Manager, that will significantly affect fuel efficiency of your vehicle, it will affect the lifetime of those tyres because they will wear differently. So, I think it's the same kind of issue whether you're driving an electric vehicle over a conventional vehicle. If you haven't got the right tyre pressures for the vehicle and the load that you're carrying – and obviously on a work journey that load could vary from day to day – it is an issue that needs to be addressed, because it will affect not just fuel efficiency, it will affect performance as well.

As we've just talked about, driving a van with under inflated tyres will seriously compromise the handling characteristics, which could then lead to an incident – stopping distances, leading to a collision. Particularly if some of your drivers are driving at higher speeds, or even just driving around in the local road networks.

**Simon:** Yeah. The other side of car use for businesses is grey fleet, where employees are using their own vehicles for work. It's a topic that's always brought up when we go and do talks and events. We always get Fleet Managers coming up, or Driver Safety Managers for businesses asking how to deal with grey fleet. And we all know about current inflation and the cost of living crisis at the moment. You've done a lot of work over the last few years, raising awareness amongst the general public about the dangers of buying used or part-worn tyres – which I didn't even realise was a thing until I first came across TyreSafe. Surely this is an issue that employers need to be more aware of, especially when asking employees to use their own cars for work?

**Stuart:** Yeah. Well, there's a number of things there, Simon. First, can I say that TyreSafe, as a policy, we are not opposed to the sale of part-worn tyres. What we have grave concerns about, in our core mission of trying to reduce the number of tyre-related collisions on the network... what we are opposed to is the illegal sale of part-worn tyres. So, if you use company vehicles, you probably have a contract with the local dealer, you'll go in there and get your tyres checked on a regular basis. If it's grey fleet, as you talked about, that is a different issue. You've still got the same legal responsibilities for driving on business, but of course that emphasis falls also on the driver and the owner of that vehicle, even though they may be putting claims in there for using their private vehicle.

And of course, as you talk about, the cost of living crisis – there is the danger there that people may want to think, well, "I'll go and get a part-worn tyre, and that will keep me going until next payday" or whatever. What we're trying to do in TyreSafe is raise awareness that – particularly with this month's TyreSafe campaign – it's actually probably not a value purchase. Because you can sell a part-worn tyre with

only 2mm of tread left on, whereas a new tyre will be 6-7mm as standard. And so therefore per mile it will be more cost effective to get a new tyre than a part-worn tyre.

But you're aware of this Simon, so thanks for the lead-in to this... we went out and checked all the 200 retail suppliers who were selling part-worn tyres, and you could see them basically on any street in any town in the country. But what we found is that, working with Trading Standards and the police, and also doing some secret shopping, if you like, with some tyre industry experts... we found that 94% of tyres were being sold and traded illegally.

So they have to have the part-worn stamp on them to be traded legally. So without that stamp, then automatically they're being sold illegally. So you can imagine, if you decide to go and buy a second-hand microwave, or a washing machine, it doesn't have to be inspected, get an electrical certificate... but 94% that we checked were being sold illegally. But more worryingly, 64% were unsafe to return to the road, due to a number of things, including having bolts through them, and illegal repairs. Just generally unsafe. Now I don't know about you Simon, but I can't think of any other safety critical component where you and I could walk into a shop on a high street, never mind backstreet garages, and buy something openly that is illegal.

Of course, we're trying to raise awareness of this. So yes, there is the legal, moral, financial thing... there is the financial aspect which is that pound-for-pound, you're not going to get a good deal. Secondly, the chances are that the person who is selling you one of these part-worn tyres isn't actually fully okay with the safety regulations. So we have an issue around that, so with our campaigns we're saying don't make this as a distressed purchase – actually, there are other alternatives, and many organisations, many companies now are aware of this issue, are aware of the cost. And they'll give you interest-free payments so that you can actually pay for this.

So one of the things that we're trying to say, and we're talking about this in the TyreSafe campaign this year, is think about it as something that's not just a last-minute distress purchase. If you check your tyres and you plan for them, and this is particularly important for the grey fleet drivers... rather than having to take time off unexpectedly, potentially missing an important meeting or a sale because you suddenly are having to react to something – if you check your tyres and plan for them, you can book your car in, get your tyres checked, and if necessary you can pay for it in instalments. So it helps you also with your budgeting as well. So you can continue to operate for the company.

**Simon:** And I think what many employers don't often realise is the level of responsibility they have for grey fleet journeys and grey fleet vehicles. To a certain extent the ownership of the vehicle is irrelevant; the company still has a legal responsibility to ensure that that vehicle is safe and appropriate for the journeys it's being used for. So I think the fact that we're in Tyre Safety Month now – it's a really good opportunity for employers to communicate exactly the sort of information to their employees who use their own cars for work. And to encourage them to check them more thoroughly, and make them aware of the issues around part-worn tyres, and hopefully make them focus more on tyre safety – not just this month, but all year round really.

**Stuart:** Yeah, there is a real need and benefit in doing this, in preventing damage. I don't want to keep talking about killed, and seriously injured... if you don't check your tyres you may be involved in a serious incident. You may well be. But the chances are you're just going to be involved in a damage-only incident. But that then can affect your ability to perform for that company, of course. And it may be that you don't finish your delivery for that day. Your vehicle may be off the road for several days, or weeks.

So ultimately, the impact for the business in not doing these basic checks can be quite severe. I'll give you another piece of research that we did – and you're aware of this, Simon. Because I do believe that this is a hidden killer, but also a hidden problem, certainly a problem that I don't think businesses are quite fully comprehending, as well. So what we did is we did an agreement with the National Police Chiefs Council. We went into the police crash compounds of five police forces, on an agreed day. And on those days, we inspected 81 vehicles who were already in the compound because they had been removed there for a number of reasons. They had been involved in collisions.

And what really frightened us, if you like, was that 74% of those 81 vehicles actually had tyre defects. So, of the 324 tyres that were inspected, only 190 didn't have tyre defects. And that included part-worns, illegal repairs... everything that we've talked about today, we found in those police crash compounds. And you might have heard us talking about this before – one of the things we found on one car was that one tyre was 42 years old, and its partner on the front was 41 years old – and in a pretty poor condition. Probably one of the reasons why they were involved in the collision, and why – potentially – 1/3 of tyre-related incidents are rear-end collisions, because people physically could not stop.

So again, we are basing our concerns and our campaigns around this kind of research, and it's something we're looking to do again, just like we did with the tread depths survey. We're looking to do this again – working with the police forces, going to the compounds, and checking these things. These vehicles were in there for a number of reasons, and this was literally a random check. And I think that just highlights the scale of the problem. People are being involved in collisions because their tyres are illegal and defective.

**Simon:** So, we've covered all of the major groups of vehicles used for work. Is there any overall message you'd like to give to business owners, or Driver Safety Managers about the importance of tyre safety, and how they can communicate that to drivers?

**Stuart:** I think the message hopefully has come out loud and clear in this interview. What we're asking people to do is to act on their tyres. Ask your drivers, ask your managers, to undertake their daily checks, as you propose within the Driving for Better Business programme. Improved tyre safety management is absolutely essential for many, many reasons – better safety... there are significant business benefits. We talked about the police crash compounds just now. Irrespective of the cost of replacing the tyres, we're talking about potentially being involved in an incident... firstly, your vehicle downtime – we always talked in Driving for Better

Business about insurance costs, premiums etc., everything going up. So there we just talk about being involved in a collision. Here we're talking about tyres being a causation – not just a contributor, but a causation of the collision. So, again, we talk about fuel, and tyre efficiency, but also think about this – if you were involved in a serious incident on the network, what about the statutory removal costs of being taken to the police compound. That could run – particularly with HGVs – into the thousands of pounds.

There are all the other costs that you could probably think of, in terms of replacement vehicles, bent metal, repair costs, etc., so, I think the overall message to business drivers and their managers is that this is an important check of a safety critical component that can have huge consequences above and beyond some of the things that you'd already thought of. So please join us. Support us.

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**Simon:** There are a number of tyre safety resources on the Driving for Better Business website. Go to [drivingforbetterbusiness.com](https://drivingforbetterbusiness.com), click 'Resources' at the top of the page, and search for 'tyre' – or click the link in the show notes.

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**Simon:** So, I said at the top of the show that this podcast coincides with Tyre Safety Month, which you run each year in October. The theme for this year, for 2023, is Be Safe and Save. Can you tell us what you want our listeners to take away from this campaign? What's the main theme of the campaign? What are some of the key messages, and what do you want people to take away from it?

**Stuart:** Thanks for mentioning that. Tyre Safety Month – this is traditionally the month where we ask people to rally round and support TyreSafe and the campaigning that we're doing. So, as you mentioned, this month's, this year's campaign... the cost of living crisis is continuing. People are trying to find ways to save money. What we're trying to get across – and some of them are quite light-hearted messages, like people not reusing their teabags – but actually there is a core safety message. What we're saying, and we talked about it today, is actually as a business with your drivers, your grey fleet drivers – actually by acting on your tyres, doing your daily checks, you are better able to plan for when this component, which is designed to wear down, needs to be replaced.

So, you can budget better, you can financially manage your vehicle fleet better, by undertaking and understanding when and where something needs to be done. But again, we've talked about the sheer numbers, huge numbers that as we turn a spotlight to the scale of the problem out there, even if your drivers aren't involved or are not the primary vehicle that has been involved, it could still be hit by somebody else, or be involved in a collision somehow else which could lead to significant delays for your deliveries etc., so, what we're asking people to do is to understand that it's a win-win, this message. So you can be safe, as we talk about in road safety, but you can also save money.

And there are many other benefits as a company – this could help you with your green credentials, because we talk about how a billion pounds a year of fuel is wasted because of driving with underinflated tyres. We talk about how your tyres will

wear down quicker. Your carbon emissions affecting the air quality will be significantly higher by driving around with dangerous, defected and under inflated tyres.

So this a campaign where we're not asking people to suddenly change their behaviour or change their opinion. What we're saying is that this is a win-win message. Be safe and save – and that could be saving the planet, saving your company money, saving time even. So it's a real win-win campaign, on the back of the cost of living crisis, where everybody's going through spiralling costs. That could mean collision repair costs, insurance costs... everything is going up.

So what we're saying is this – now is not the time to compromise either on safety or the performance of your vehicles or fleet. So please, have a look on our website – [tyresafe.org](https://tyresafe.org) – have a look at it, and use those resources. Continue to help us to raise awareness about this ongoing huge problem, that hopefully we've managed to explain to people today.

**Simon:** Fantastic. I'll put a link to the TyreSafe website in the show notes at the end, along with some links to some other appropriate resources that we've got that you can share with drivers as well.

Thank you everyone for listening, and Stuart I wish you the very best with this year's campaign, and I hope it goes very well. Thank you very much for talking to us.

**Stuart:** Thanks very much for your time, Simon, and for this opportunity.

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**Simon:** You can find more information on Tyre Safety Month at [tyresafe.org](https://tyresafe.org), along with a recording of this year's TyreSafe briefing, and many other resources for you to share with your drivers.

You can also consider becoming a supporter of TyreSafe, to help them continue their excellent research and campaigning activities. You'll find all of these links in the show notes.

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