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New tires every 7,000 miles? Electric cars save gas but tire wear shocks some Florida drivers

Jonathan Sanchez, the tech lead and shop supervisor at EV Garage Miami, examines a tire of an electric vehicle on Jan. 9, 2024. (Ashley Miznazi/Miami Herald/TNS)

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It was love at first sight when Neil Semel saw the electric Mercedes EQS 450+ at a Pompano Beach, Florida, dealership. The sedan was the perfect sleek black color his wife wanted, had only 2,200 miles and they both liked the idea of getting away from gasoline.

“I’ve always driven combustion engines and I thought it was time to try to save the planet,” Semel said.



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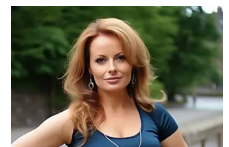
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But after less than 5,000 miles of driving around his Boca Raton, Florida, neighborhood, Semel was shocked to find some essential – and very expensive – parts were already wearing out. The tires.

“If somebody looked at me and said, Mr. Semel, you are going to love this car but in about 7,000 miles you will have to pay 1,400 or 1,500 dollars to replace the tires, I wouldn’t have bought the car,” Semel said.

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For many drivers of EVs in Florida – the nation’s second largest market for electrical vehicles – premature tire wear has become an unexpected black mark on vehicles promoted as a green climate-friendly option to gas-gulping cars.

At EV Garage Miami, a Sweetwater repair shop that services 90 percent electric vehicles, lead technician Jonathan Sanchez said tires are the most frequent thing customers come in about – no matter what model or make of EV they’re driving. Tire mileage can vary widely of course, but he said he frequently changes EV tires at just 8,000 to 10,000 miles – a fourth or even fifth of typical tire wear on a gas-burning car.

There are a number of explanations for the fast wear – from the way EVs work to the composition of the rubber to individual driving habits and maintenance practices – but vehicle and tire makers and industry experts acknowledge the issue. The tire manufacturer Michelin said conventional tires on electric vehicles consume tires 20 percent faster than on a gas-powered car – a figure commonly cited by EV makers as well – but Goodyear also has said they could wear up to 50 percent faster. Automakers and the tire industry are working on improvements.

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That would be good for consumers but also for the climate. To some extent, running through tires quickly may offset the reduction of damaging emissions

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“Tires are rapidly eclipsing the tailpipe as a major source of emissions from vehicles,” said Nick Molden, to the *Guardian* who conducted one study with Emissions Analytics.

Why the fast wear?

Tire manufacturers and car technicians like Sanchez point to a few reasons for the fast wear. Topping the list: Most EVs, thanks to the large battery system, weigh hundreds of pounds or more than equivalent gas vehicles. That can put more added stress on tires, said Sanchez, who worked six years at Tesla as a master technician before coming to EV Garage Miami.

The rubber also literally meets the road faster on an electric vehicle. Electrical motors can produce peak power, or torque, almost instantly, unlike mashing the gas pedal of a regular car, which requires gas to flow and burn in cylinders and a bunch of mechanical parts to start moving.

Some EV-specific tires are made differently as well – to both enhance mileage range from battery power and to offset one standout feature of electric vehicles. Without mechanical engines, they’re super quiet, which actually can make for an unpleasant driving experience. Tires can whine or hum rolling on pavement.

Don Wright, the vice president of engineering at Unico, an electric vehicle testing company, said sounds intruding from outside the car cabin are a big complaint for drivers. In gas cars, engine noise helps muffle the sound of tires.

“They didn’t hear it in their Ferrari,” Wright joked.

To address that lack of noise, some premium tires suggested for EVs use softer rubber and have foam injected inside that dampens the sound, akin to trading out hard dress shoes for tennis shoes. Those soft textured tires, while quieter, also can wear down faster.

Some car companies also have come up with other creative ways to address the lack of noise by pumping in artificial or ambient sound. Toyota announced a system that simulates a gas engine with pre-recorded “vroom vroom” sound pumped through speakers.

Electric car experts also say the habits and styles of individual drivers can contribute to the wear. Someone cruising around the neighborhood won’t have the same experience as someone who takes off at the green light like they’re in a *Fast and Furious* movie.

Wright agrees, “Me and my wife both have EVs with 20,000 or so miles on them and they (the tires) look brand new. I’m sure there are some weight contributions but I just wonder how people drive their cars.”

Sanchez at EV Garage said many car owners also sometimes forget to do the routine check-ups with tires, like filling them with air, alignments and rotations.

Many tire manufacturers also have developed “low rolling resistance tires” engineered with the goal of going farther on a single charge or gallon of gas. Tires with low rolling resistance have thinner sidewalls and shallower tread blocks. For EVs, it can add to the price. Some EV premium tires can run \$100 more expensive than typical car tires of similar size.

Tire companies respond

Of course, some EV owners get far more life out of tires than others and it’s important to note that complaints about tire wear aren’t confined to electrical vehicles. One J.D. Power survey found that fast wear was the top complaint for tire owners, no matter what was powering the vehicle – gasoline, diesel fuel or batteries. The survey found car owners expected about three times the amount of tire mileage they were actually getting.

Still, tire makers appear to be responding to the EV tire concerns, which have been aired in social media, EV publications and in mainstream media as well. At the American Trucking Association’s Technology & Maintenance Council’s 2023 Annual Meeting, for instance, Goodyear announced its “Electric Drive Ready” embossed tires that would be “equipped to handle the higher load capacities of EVs.”

Michelin suggests getting the Primacy tire for electric vehicles, which they say offers an up to 7% increase in range. Michelin also launched “Self seal” which would self-repair punctures and cut back on some weight by not needing to keep a spare wheel in the back.

Continental Tires said that all of its tires are EV compatible and as new tires are introduced to the market the tire will have a specific “EV marking.” But they suggest for EV noise reduction using a tire that has Conti-Silent, a foam band that is applied to the inner liner.

Despite the tire concerns, EV experts also say electric remains the clear climate-friendly choice. Auto markers point to the zero-emissions from electric motors and potential for recycling battery packs – a process that is complicated but

Electric vehicles have a smaller carbon footprint than gasoline cars, even when accounting for manufacturing. The EPA and Department of Energy's "Beyond Tailpipe Emissions Calculator" can help estimate the greenhouse gas emissions associated with charging and driving an EV.

And repair wise, there is also a lot less to go wrong in an EV, experts say. typical gasoline car's engine comprises more than 10,000 components, Sanchez said. An electric vehicle there's a few hundred. So there are fewer moving parts and maintenance costs overall. No oil changes, transmission fluid or belt replacements.


Even Semel, despite his frustrations over the tires, really likes his Mercedes EQS 450+, which boasts a manufactured suggested price of \$104,000-plus when new. His wife, who hated going to the gas station, is also sold on the EV concept. Now, if only somebody could come up with a greener tire option or rubber that lasts longer.

"It honestly is a great car. It gets a lot of miles. And honestly, my wife pulls up she plugs it in and we're done," Semel said. "But now we're looking at each other and the tires we will replace more often aren't biodegradable."

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