

**A TIME FOR NEW MIATA TIRES** by Daryl Baker, May 2011

I hope to explain my process for selecting new tires for my 2004 NB Miata and the considerations that were necessary to reach that decision. The results of the decision won't be clear for a season, so maybe an update will eventually follow. Hopefully I can entertain you with my experience, while educating you if you are in a similar position.

After procrastinating thru the last Miata driving season, I was determined to quickly get the tire-changing decision made and out of the way this year. Too bad it's not that simple to do. I suppose I could have gone to the local tire shop and asked them what they had and been done with it. But that isn't how I make decisions. I started asking around at Northcoast Miata events about who has changed tires and what they didn't or did like and what too consider. That at least pointed me toward a few manufacturing brands. My 2004 original equipment [OE] was Bridgestone Turanza ER30's, and they have been great tires, and I know they are not a cheap replacement. I managed 25K miles on them, but I drove most of the last season with caution knowing they were getting low on rubber. I never had any tire-driving incidents with the Turanzas and they did fantastic last year even with thin tread, which surprised me. It may be because the compounds are so soft that they still grip well enough, and I didn't have to drive much in the rain so the water channeling need was minimal. Except for RiverRun at the beginning of the season, most of the driving last year was casual.

According to the TireRack.com website, thru May 2011, for their Consumer Surveys there are 476 different tire models represented, and almost 2.7 billion miles reported on by way of their results. They have been showing survey results ongoing since 1997. So understanding what the data they offer means and represents is significant. It is consumer-driven, and those who contribute to the reviews appear passionate about their opinions, expectations and experiences.

Not surprising, the most opinionated discussions come from the autocrossing network that consider every possible nuance of tire performance, and pay the price to experience the best that is available to them based on the factors they consider most important. Also, the prestigious car magazines feature and show side by side comparisons of the top performance tires head-to-head, in controlled situations. So the information is out there if you are the type to explore for it. I am. Like any competitive product, nothing stays the same. Tire models appear to change or roll out of production after just a few years, likely because of technology that makes a better or improved tire available almost continuously, which means that today a tire (or many) is probably available that is better than the original equipment or whatever was put on at the last tire change opportunity. It can be daunting to sort through the selections and categories available in modern manufacturing.

SO, the first step may be to know what tire is currently on your Miata. Like it or don't like it (the tire), you need a comparison and what you are used to gives you that. The size of the tire is the first thing you will be asked. I didn't know what mine were six months ago. Do you know yours? What you need from your tire and how you drive are next. If you drive your Miata in the winter, you have a different consideration than most, and good for you for enjoying the car in all the weather conditions. For me and most of the Miata-people I know, our Miatas are toys; pampered, well-maintained, modified, and prideful.

The tire manufacturer, tire brand, tire model, and tire performance category are all important choices you will hear and have to decide. If none of these matter to you, you probably haven't read this far. Every tire dealer will tell you his brands are the best and what brands he doesn't sell aren't worth driving on [and why]. I'm surprised how some of the businesses answered their phones or replied to my questions {sales opportunities}. That 'first impression' thing applies here. I had three dealers ask for my name and number to 'get back to you', who never did. Most tire dealers wanted to sell me an all-season tire. What I always started with was, 'I want a performance summer tire to replace the OE on my Miata'. That doesn't sound like an all-season tire discussion to me. Either they don't know what a Miata is, or they weren't listening to me.

SO, tire categories represent different driving needs and habits. For Miata owners, it should mean knowing how aggressively you will ever drive and how safe you want to be at that time. Seventy-five percent of my Miata driving is casual, relaxed driving, but the other 25% is why I have a Miata. I have to get to RiverRun and The Dragon before I can drive them. If my tires fail me during the 25%, really bad things are likely. That's what I'm shopping for, not the 75%. In the last couple years, I know a few members have gotten new rubbers for their Miatas and then slid off the road during normal processional driving during tours in the first month afterward. This has to be alarming, because you feel confident that you have good (new) tires and you don't need to worry about that. Why does that happen? Some discussions say during the manufacture of tires a 'mold releasant' is used and takes up to 500 miles to break down and wear off. Others say this is gibberish. In my opinion, getting acquainted with any new tires' habits shouldn't be overlooked. Even replacing with the exact same tire will be different, because you are accustomed to a worn out tread, with very pliable sidewalls, and some fatigue from tire age, so new tires should be different, and you have to get use to that. But sliding off the road with new tires should be forced, and not simple.

This list shows the tire possibilities only in categories. Each category will have from 15-50 choices. Eliminating each All-Season & Winter tire categories narrows it down to four performance categories plus Track & Competition. Separating HIGH, ULTRA, MAX, and EXTREME Summer Performance is where Miata tire decisions belong. If you race (autocross) then add in T&C.

Extreme Performance Summer Max Performance SummerUltra High Performance Summer Ultra High Performance All-Season High Performance Summer High Performance All-Season Performance All-Season Grand Touring Summer Grand Touring All-Season Standard Touring All-Season Passenger All-Season WinterTrack & Competition

Miata tires are an unusual size and few cars share this unique combination. Mine are 205- 45/16. Because of the oddity of this size some tires won't be available for your Miata. That's good, because it helps narrow down the decision. There are plenty to choose from. So before you spend too much time considering a specific model, make sure the size is available. (You can also 'upsized', but I can't comment on that.) Generally, the farther up the category list you go, the farther up the prices go, but that's misleading. Each group seems to have low and high possibilities. It seems, like everything else, you can get what you can pay for. If money is no object to you, just get the top rated tire in the category you like best.

I expect to get two seasons or up to 20K miles on a set of performance tires on my Miata. If there is anything good about that, it's that tires keep getting better, and like them or don't like them, in two years you get another shot at finding better ones. I've settled on the MAX and ULTRA performance categories to select from. In the surveys, I focus on the top several rated models, regardless of brand, and don't consider any that fall below 90% of the top-rated tire. The tire reviews will identify trends that may alarm you and steer you away from some brands, as it did for me in one case. Be aware that very slight differences in tire-model names and numbers will be completely different tires.

This shows the number of reviews on TireRack.com in May 2011. This is how many people have commented and shows which out what that means to you is a personal choice.

Reviews by Tire Brand

BFGoodrich (9,540) Bridgestone (17,495) Continental (7,165) Dunlop (8,102) Firestone (5,847) Fuzion (2,058)  
General (6,992) Goodyear (21,793) Hankook (1,150) Hoosier (87) Kumho (10,641)  
Michelin (15,018) Pirelli (6,664) Sumitomo (2,953) Uniroyal (130) Yokohama (10,755)

Once you figure all that out there are other things to decide. I hadn't heard of Road Force Balancing until last year. It's a higher level of tire balancing that many car dealers use. It eliminates any balancing issues and headaches for the dealers. Ever notice how few ride-issues the new cars have in recent years? One explanation is that tires are made better. True, in most cases. Another case, many new tires are designed to work with specific cars and types. Proven, yes. RFB apparently fills in all the other considerations. It costs about (regular balancing cost plus) ten dollars extra per tire. One tire seller told me that the upper tier of tires doesn't need RFB because the better tires [more expensive] are made to closer tolerances. I don't agree with that. We're buying a better tire, so it should be better, and we won't accept minivan ride quality on a sports car. Some sellers didn't know what I was talking about, and I don't think some of them did, either. Many people in the tire business don't know what this is, and many aren't really sure. One 'Tire Associate' didn't even know they had it at their business. I said, "It says on-line that you have RFB, tell me about that". 'I didn't know that, let me check!' You can check it out easily if you're interested, on Bing or Google: Road Force Balancing, Hunter GSP 9700.

And finally, I decided that a somewhat new tire was what I would buy. It hasn't been available for long, and even getting it seems like a triumph. We'll see how it compares. None of them are inexpensive. Any of them will cost you 500 and some will cost you 1200. Choose wisely. You'll have to catch me to find out what I chose.

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### **Tire review: 2011**

Well, we managed to catch Daryl and force a tire review out of him. Here's his report on the tires that he bought;

Okay, so I've driven six months and just over 4000 miles since changing my OE tires to *Firestone Firehawk™ Wide Oval™ Indy 500®* tires, an ultra-high performance tire. As the name suggests, this tire's heritage comes from racing. The specific tire choice was made based on performance data, price, dealer discussions and dealership location. My travel mileage this year was down a bit and no Miata vacations occurred, which usually add 2500-3500 miles in a season. This is a tire that didn't have much historical data because it is a relatively new tire model. It is a quiet tire, handles all road surfaces well, and corners extremely well. It doesn't 'hop' on rough roads and lane cracks like the OE tires did. One thing that surprises me is how it does not pick up loose gravel that has washed onto the roads in corners or on the dips of country roads. It seems to be quite good in this situation which is great to avoid paint chips. I have no regrets with my choice. These tires do chirp a little bit when starting out and crossing a painted crossing line on the road, and the previous tires never did that. I know it's not from all the power that my Miata has. The flat-spotting from sitting in the garage seems to last a very short time also, not more than a mile, which is also better than the original tires. I had no wet roads this year [hurray] so hydroplaning concerns will have to wait. The limited opportunities I had this season for aggressive driving were the least for me since buying the Miata. I can tell that these tires will continue to please me next season and I know it's gonna be a long winter waiting for those first warm days of Spring.

DB



It is time for something different, so we're headed back in time to examine Mazda's own special Miatas, concept and show cars, limited production cars, etc. But let's begin with a short review of Miata history. This will not be a complex review, there have been books written on the history of the Miata, we're just going to scratch the surface of the story.

1990 Miata Brochure; <http://www.miata.net/faq/brochures/1990/index.html>



Mazda introduced the Miata at the February, 1989 Chicago Auto Show, with a price tag of \$14,000, this NA Miata was available for sale in the US beginning in May of 1989 as a 1990 model. At introduction the Miata had three names; Miata in the US and Canada, Eunos Roadster in Japan and MX-5 everywhere else in the world. The 1990 Miata was initially available in only three colors; Mariner Blue, Crystal White and Classic Red, with Silver Stone Metallic added in March of 1990.

Mazda used steel for the body shell with lightweight aluminum for the hood while the available hardtop was made from sheet molding compound (SMC). Overall dimensions were 156 in long, 65.9 in wide, and 48.6 in tall with a wheelbase of 89.2 in. Without options, the 116 HP engine had only 2,150 lbs. to move, still the 0-60 mph times were only in the 9 second range but handling was exceptional.

Inspired by British sports cars (many point to the Lotus Elan as the inspiration) the Miata had a fully modern double wishbone suspension at all four corners, front and rear anti-roll bars and either steel (base model) or alloy wheels mounting 185/60 HR14 tires. Brakes were up to date ventilated discs front and solid discs at the rear. Headlights were retractable and very importantly, the top was watertight and easily folded away, unlike the tops on those inspirational British roadsters.

The B6ZE 1.6 L double overhead camshaft engine was designed specifically for the Miata and was capable of 116 HP at 6800 rpm and 100 lb-ft of torque at 5500 rpm. This was no powerhouse but it pulled the lightweight Miata up to 116 MPH and backed up by a slick shifting 5 speed transmission it provided spirited performance. Drive train options were a limited slip differential or automatic transmission.

Base cars had steel wheels, no power options or air conditioning but power steering and air conditioning (dealer installed) were available.

It was a winner, dealers could not keep the Miata in stock and often charged a surcharge to buyers lined up to buy the new affordable sports car. Clubs such as the Northcoast Miata Club spun off of the Miata Club of America (Mazda sponsored) and the fun times began.

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### **Reference Books**

- 1) Miata 20 Years by Larry Edsall
- 2) Mazda MX-5 Roadster: Design & Development: The Inside Story Told by Mazda's Designers & Engineers by Toshihiko Hirai
- 3) Road and Track Mazda Miata Portfolio 1989-2002 compiled by R.M. Clarke
- 4) Mazda Mx-5 and Miata 1989-1999 by James Taylor
- 5) "InTENSE", The MX-5 Miata 10th Anniversary Album by Barbara Beach
- 6) The MX-5 Miata 5th Anniversary Album by Barbara Beach
- 7) Miata Universe by Jay Lamm
- 8) Mazda MX-5 La Collection, Automobilia, English Edition by Stefano Pasini
- 9) Miata, Mazda MX-5, Mazda's Affordable Sports Car for the New Millennium by Jack Yamaguchi & Jack Dinkle
- 10) Miata MX-5 Guide by Jay Lamm
- 11) Mazda MX-5 Miata - The Rebirth of the Sports Car in the new Mazda MX-5 Miata(Two book set.) by Haru Tajima, Jack Yamaguchi & Jonathan Thompson
- 12) Mazda MX5 Miata: Renaissance Sportscar by Brian Long
- 13) Mazda Miata MX5 Performance Portfolio, 1989-1997 by R.M. Clarke



All of the Road Champs Miatas fit into the “toy” category. These 1/36 scale Road Champs cars above are light on detail but high on movable parts, most having opening doors, retractable tops (via a lever on the bottom) and folding seats. They are fun, collectible and colorful little guys that are getting to be very hard to find.

There seems to be about a dozen versions of this basic car, I have five but am missing the rest of this hard to find toy. I was able to find these for a dollar at Marcs at one time but no longer, I was able to find the red one on eBay for just \$8 last month and consider that to have been a lucky find.

These are the 1/36 scale toys that I am missing; Red/black, yellow/black, mariner blue/gray, mariner blue/black, mariner blue/white, mariner blue/ gray, merlot/white, green/black with bug graphics. I have not seen any of these for sale anywhere, if you know of one of these that is for sale please let me know ASAP!

Road Champs also made two 1/15 scale Crash & Smash Miatas, below is the red/tan but I am missing the black/tan version. This fun toy is all painted up as a crash test car and includes the crash test driver with his helmet and seat belt... safety first! When cocked and rolled into a barrier the hood flies up, both front fenders and the left front tire fly off. At the same time the steering wheel opens and the “air bag” (a balloon) inflates. It’s unfortunate that the airbag in my toy has melted away but the crash test dummy still folds forward on impact.



The little 1/64 scale Road Champs Miata in the same picture is one of three colors, the others being Montego Blue/black and silver/black. The 1/64 scale cars have painted windshields and very poor detail.



**Do you have a unique Miata toy/model that you'd like to share with the rest of the club? Send us a picture and some pertinent information about this toy/model and why it's special to you. We're looking for more club member involvement in this and all other all areas of this newsletter.**

**Some things to NEVER do to your Miata.....**

Miatas also make great pick-up trucks, tow vehicles and citrus fruit storage containers.



**Favorite Links**

- Northcoast Miata Club; <http://www.northcoast-miata.com>
- Northcoast Miata Club @ LinkedIn; <http://www.linkedin.com/e/-1qcvbg-grt72uu2-4p/vgh/4061197/>
- Mazda USA; <http://www.mazdausamedia.com>
- Cascade Auto Group; <http://www.cascadeautogroup.com>
- MX-5 Miata.net; <http://www.miata.net>
- Miatas at the Gap XVI; <http://www.gapmiatas.com>
- Mazda Chat; <http://www.mazdachat.net>
- Miatas at Deals Gap; <http://www.gapmiatas.com/forum/index.php>
- Kale Auto, hard to find auto parts; <http://kalecoauto.com>
- Northern Ohio Racing Association; <http://www.noraracing.net>
- NE Ohio region SCCA; <http://www.neohio-scca.org>
- NASA Racing; <http://www.nasaproring.com>
- Anatomy of Autocross (video); <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cDsmBexSd8>
- Backstreet Performance (club member Rich Johnson's shop) <http://www.backstreetper.com>
- Tire Size Calculator; <http://www.miata.net/garage/tirecalc.html>
- The Tire Rack; <http://www.tirerack.com/index.jsp>