

MD Alignment

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Are Alignments on Trucks and Buses a GREEN procedure or a Money Drain (Part 1)

A fleet maintenance manager called today and expressed his disgust at paying for alignments on his vehicles and not getting any better tire life or handling.

Over the years I have met many fleet managers who have stopped doing alignments and found that their tire life did not get any worse than when they were paying for alignments. In other words, the cost of the alignment just added to the cost of the tire without any benefit.

What is a reasonable expectation today with regard to steer tire life on trucks? Let's put some metrics out and then explore the complications.

Base Expectations for today's steer tires:

Line Haul: defined as a minimum 200 miles (320 KM) traveled before a delivery.

15,000 Miles per 32nd wear rate

A tire with a usable 14/32 tread depth should expect 210,000 miles.

24,000 Kilometers per mm wear rate

A tire with a usable 11 mm tread depth should expect 264,000 KM.

Real world typical results are 80,000 to 100,000 miles (128,000 to 160,000 KM) before removal for irregular wear. Very few steer tires are removed because they have reached the legal minimum tread depth uniformly around their circumference. This means that we are wasting tires (the oil, rubber and steel it takes to construct them) and increasing labor cost and down time for the rig.

The question is why are we unable to consistently produce the expected tire life and wind up accepting a 50% increase in cost for steer tires

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Is it alignment? The industry spends millions of dollars each year on computerized systems that claim to perfectly align vehicles and yet we still have the problem.

Is it the tires? That would presume that they are made so inconsistent that some will wear correctly (it happens) but most will show irregular patterns. Some tires wearing on one edge and others cupping on both edges or in the middle treads.

How about other factors like inflation, improper mounting, wheel end maintenance, brakes, speed, alignment specs or who knows what?

I have found that all of these factors come into play when dealing with irregular tire wear and handling on trucks and buses. And in the following posts I will outline the primary items that will improve tire life and handling.

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