

Tires for Driver Cars *One man's experience*

By John Boyd

Driving my 53 DeSoto wagon to a Buellton, California, Imperial Club meet this spring confirmed a deepening conviction that when I replaced the ragged whitewalls on my in-progress DeSoto S2 Airflow, I wanted radials. My wife Barbara and I caravanned with friend Rich Grosch in another DeSoto wagon, his a 49 Deluxe woodie. My car has radials; his does not. Driving up I-405, Rich asked me to please choose lanes that do not have a concrete seam in them. I hadn't noticed the seams, although I had seen his car wandering somewhat as I checked my mirror.

I have the S2 running now, sort of. Brakes, springs, wiring harness, oil filter, dyno tune-up, and a bunch of other things are done, thanks in a large part to help and advice from the club tech volume CD, other Airflowers, and the Yahoo Airflow group. When all the air drained from my right rear tire in the garage one night, I decided I had to do something. Body work and paint are still ahead, and having read the warnings about protecting white walls from staining, I decided not to buy whitewalls just yet. But having ridden in the Airflow a couple of times, Barbara made clear her disinclination to make it a habit unless the groove-following and resulting sway were mitigated. So I looked for some 6.50 by 16 black radials. That took some attention.

I found offerings from some classic tire companies, generally costing more than \$200 per tire with some closer to \$300. I thought that was a lot. I talked to some local tire stores, and they did have 6.50-16s, but they were mostly graded LT, for light truck, and the dimensions were not close to those of the original 6.50-16s or bias ply or radial reproductions. The problems I found in dimension were that modern tires are wider tread, wider section, and lower height than what I needed. This is especially true for radials. For the S2 with its rear fender skirts there isn't much room for that wide tire section, and the extra tread width of newer tires, combined with their radial-ply construction, gives the front wheels a large, sticky footprint, with predictable effect on steering effort at low speeds. Besides, I thought the look of these wide treads, even with classy wide whitewalls, wasn't right for my Airflow.

Researching 16-inch radials in the volume market, I found one that is close to the dimensions of the 6.50-16 bias tires. It's original equipment on the electric Toyota RAV 4. And the price seemed right even at list. The manufacturer was offering \$70 off on a set of 4, and that lowered the price to \$127

	6.50 - 16 bias A	6.50 - 16 bias B	6.50R16 radial	195/85R16 radial
Tread width (in)	4.60	5.00	4.9"	4.8"
Section width (in)	6.7	6.8	6.9	7.7"
Diameter (in)	28.5	29.3	28.8	28.2"
Rim width (in)	4.0-4.5	4.50-5.00"	4.00-6.00"	5.5-6.5"
Revs/mile	733	714	725	739
Price (USD)	157	148	289	149
Speed error (mph)	-1.6	0	-0.9	-2.1

per tire. You can see a comparison of tires I considered in the table. I made bias tire B the standard for measurements as I found numbers close to these on several different tires. I decided the 195/85R16s would do the job for me. Close enough in all dimensions, and relatively affordable.

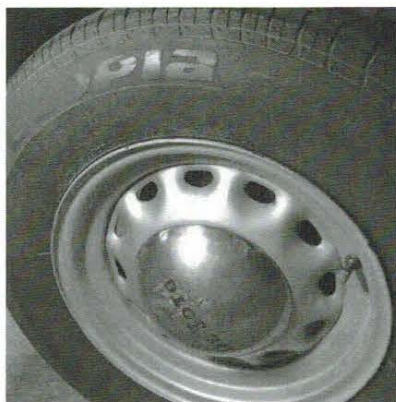
There were some issues. I only found one US company that has this size. My local big-box club store said they could get them in a day or two. But they refused to mount any tires with tubes ("We don't have the proper equipment"). Frank Daly's comprehensive treatise on tires for Airflows in the July/August 2013 issue of this newsletter addresses the danger of tubes in tubeless radials, and considering Frank's experience, I'm glad the store refused.

When the tires arrived, they were marked "for use on electrical vehicles only", and the store further refused to mount them on my (nonelectric) Airflow. But they were willing to mount them on my wheels if I brought them in. I did, and they installed them tubeless, inflating with nitrogen. I was somewhat concerned that the wheels might leak, but I'm glad to report that they have not gone soft.

The radials' diameter is about an inch less than my reference bias tire B, but only a fifth of an inch less than tire A. The effect on driving is I have a 3% speedometer error – if my meter were perfect, it might read 2 mph high at 60 mph. The section is almost an inch wider, but I don't notice it in appearance, and the tires fit well inside the fender skirts. No rubbing observed, even in hard turns. Best, though, they transform the driving of the S2. I can actually envision driving this car across country, although not this year. Barbara agrees the ride is acceptable, but does not consent at this time to a cross-country trip that involves cars of any sort. See the photo (page 8) for how they look on the Airflow wheel.

continued on page 9

8
Tires Continued



Reviews of this tire on the Internet ranged from “wonderful” to “what was I thinking?” For most reviewers, these came as original equipment on their RAV 4, and as I found, there are few choices for replacement. The most common complaint was short tread life. These are specially designed tires for low rolling resistance – that’s why they are narrow and tall. They are formulated for high efficiency, not for long tread wear. And they are not all-weather – not recommended in snow.

So far, I am very pleased with my choice. I really did not want to spend \$1200 for a set of wide whitewall tires and risk them getting sprayed or damaged in the body shop. I can drive the car on uneven pavement without undue stress, and it’s great to have Barbara along for the ride.

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