



Three lives of a tyre

Pitch for a public sector transport contract and somewhere in the tender document will be a question about how you are minimising your fleet's carbon footprint. Using retreaded tyres could form part of the response, suggests Arthur Gregg, given how much environmentally-friendly recycling they involve.

After 14 years with Continental, Gregg has joined Bandvulc as integration manager in the wake of the tyre and automotive components giant's acquisition of the Devon-based retreader last year. The two businesses are working well together, he reports, with the Bandvulc name set to continue alongside the ContiRe branding.

"Bandvulc was making retreads for Continental for many years prior to the acquisition," he says.

Bridgestone agrees that the environmental argument is proving to be a key one in reviving the fortunes of truck tyre retreads after some years in the doldrums, thanks to stiff competition from cheap imports. Opt for a retread

Whether hot- or pre-cure, retreads offer environmental and financial benefits, doubling or even tripling tyre life, reports Steve Banner

and you are reusing significant amounts of steel, natural rubber and oil, points out retread development manager Terry Salter.

"A new truck tyre weighs 65kg to 70kg, but a retread only needs 20kg of fresh raw material before it can go back on the highway," he points out.

It only takes 26 litres of oil to make a retread, compared with the 83 litres guzzled by a new truck tyre. CO₂ emissions created by retread production are 30% lower than those generated by the manufacture of new tyres, Bridgestone adds.

There is of course the question of what type of retread customers should opt for. Hot cure retreads still dominate the UK market, says Gregg, and account for 90% of Bandvulc's output.

"Nationally I think the hot cure/pre-

cure sales split is 60/40 in hot cure's favour," he observes.

That is not to say there is no appetite for pre-cure, however. Production at Bridgestone's Bourne, Lincolnshire retread plant (pictured above, and on p30) is split equally between the two types, a situation that is of course coloured by Bridgestone's acquisition of global pre-cure specialist Bandag a decade ago.

Hot cures have their tread moulded on in giant heated presses, look cosmetically more appealing than pre-cure, and are slightly cheaper, says Salter. Pre-cures have pre-formed treads applied to their casings before being pushed into a large oven and cooked at 115°C for just over four hours.

"Pre-cures tend to last a bit longer than hot cures because of the density of the tread rubber," Salter contends.

Bourne has had £500,000 invested in it over the past 18 months and has the capacity to make around 80,000 truck and bus retreads annually. "We're expecting to make 60,000 this year, but we may do more," he says.

While many high-profile fleets have embraced retreads, that does not mean they are necessarily willing to employ them in all applications.

"A lot of operators still don't like to use retreads on steer axles, although there are exceptions," he adds.

For example, refuse collection fleets can be happy to deploy them in that role. Much of their work involves around-the-town, low-speed stop-start runs. (For more information about public sector tyre maintenance, see also the IRTE best practice guide: <https://is.gd/ukisap>).



36 service centres across the UK.

Obtaining premium casings that are in good enough shape to be retreaded was

a challenge two or three years ago, but availability has improved recently, says Gregg. Continental only retreads its own casings so far as its ContiRe hot-retreading brand is concerned, but Bandvulc retreads can be based on any quality casing.

While 295/80 R22.5 tyres have long been a mainstay of the truck market, retreaders are recognising that customer requirements are gradually changing.

Last year saw Vacu-Lug introduce new sizes to its portfolio, adding a 315/80 R22.5 to its Logistik LD01 Drive pattern line-up, while a 315/70 R22.5 joined the Duramold Drive range. The latter is designed for regional, mixed-service and construction applications, so can expect an arduous working life.

THE ECONOMIC CASE

Their competitive front-end price is a strong argument in favour of opting for retreads, contends Chris Smith, marketing director, truck, north Europe, at Michelin. "One of our Remix retreads is 60% of the cost of a new tyre," he points out.

And escalating raw material costs mean that new tyre prices are now rising rapidly, says Bridgestone commercial product and marketing manager, Andy

Mathias, with costlier steel and natural rubber among the key drivers. "Tyres are going up by 10% to 20% across a range of brands," he reports.

Something else that is driving tyre prices upwards on this side of the Channel is the fall in the value of sterling in the wake of last year's vote in favour of Brexit. A high percentage of truck tyres are imported.

The fact that retread tyres use fewer raw materials than new ones and should give the same mileage if properly maintained is helping to insulate them from this price hike. Making them in Britain gives them some protection from the way the currency has moved.

It has certainly made them more competitive against budget imports from all points east, says Gregg.

Continental and Bridgestone are by no means the only companies to build retreads in the UK. Michelin produces them in Stoke-on-Trent, where it has recently invested millions, while Vacu-Lug makes retreads for Pirelli, among other activities, at its factory near Grantham in Lincolnshire.

"The weaker pound means that the advantages of retreads can be re-examined by the UK market as imports become less price-competitive," observes Vacu-Lug managing director, Tim Hercocock. "It has also allowed us to galvanise our export activities in European countries such as the Netherlands and Germany.

"The market is wide open for us."