

Wheels: A letter from Dennis says, “I own a 2000 Nissan Frontier pickup. At about 60,000 miles, I somehow destroyed the side wall on one of the tires. The tires still had considerable wear left on them so I purchased 2 identical tires. Some time later, the remaining two tires needed replacement and I again bought matches for the factory tires. The newest tires were put on the front of the vehicle, but I left the tire shop with a wobble in my steering wheel. When I returned with the problem, their answer was to rebalance the front tires; however, this did not cure the problem. After the third rebalancing, I insisted that the front tires be moved to the rear of the truck and this alleviated almost of the wobble in the steering wheel. My feeling is that I was sold a tire that is out of round or not true. During the second effort to rebalance the tires, I was told that I probably needed a front end alignment. Moving the tires, I believe, shot that theory out of the water. My question now is, do I persist in having them replace the newest set of tires, or leave well enough alone. I have since had the front end aligned and there is no noticeable wobble in the rear end. Is there any harm in keeping the seemingly bad tire on the truck?”

Halderman: I noticed in your letter that “somehow the sidewall was destroyed.” To me this means that you may have hit an object, such as curb. When this occurred, the wheel itself could have been bent. You did not mention where the first pair of new tires were mounted, but I think they were mounted in the rear. By the way, this is the recommended location for any new pair of tires. New tires should be purchased as a complete set, but if only two are purchased, the new tires should be mounted in the rear. While most people think that the front would be the place, experts say that if a front tire were to lose traction or fail, it is easier for the driver to control the vehicle if the fault occurs in the front rather than the rear.

When the second set of tires was replaced, the shop again made sure that the newest tires were placed in the rear. This meant that the bent wheel was moved to the front. To determine if this condition is happening, have the wheel checked for lateral runout. This would detect any wobble in the wheel that would cause the steering wheel to wobble. If the wheel checks out OK, then the tire itself could have a defect, such as belt layer that is out of location. Is it OK where it is? I would have the wheel checked. If the wheel is bent, a vibration may not be felt but the tire will not wear well and may not be detected for many thousands of miles.

