

Wheels: Heidi and Brian of Dayton have a question about tire maintenance. Heidi says that the tires should be balanced at the same time they are rotated and Brian says that the alloy wheels should not have weights applied. Can you help?

Halderman: I would recommend that the tires be balanced if they are rotated. Vehicle manufacturers usually recommend that the tires be rotated every 7500 miles to help extend tire life. Tire rotation is important especially on front-wheel drive vehicles because the front tires must steer as well as propel the vehicle. The rear tires often wear less because they are simply rotating without any additional forces applied.

Wheels: How should the tires be rotated?

Halderman: Most vehicle manufacturers recommend that tires be rotated in a modified “X” pattern. This means that the drive wheel tires are moved straight back (if front-wheel drive) and the rear tires crossed and moved to the front. In other words, on a front-wheel-drive vehicle, the left front and right front tires are moved to the left rear and right rear positions. The left rear tire should be placed on the right front and the right rear tire to the left front position. On a rear-wheel-drive vehicle, move the rear wheels to the front and cross the front tires and move them to the rear. Just remember, “Drive wheels straight – non-drive wheels cross.”

Some experts however recommend that the tires not be rotated. The reason given is that the cost of a tire rotation is not recovered by the increased tire life. Instead of rotating tires regularly, these experts recommend that as the tires wear you should replace them in pairs. This means that on a typical front-wheel-drive vehicle, the front tires may require replacement one or two times before the rear tires will need replacement.

Wheels: Do you recommend having the tires balanced when they are rotated?

Halderman: Yes. Even though this operation adds to the cost of vehicle maintenance, tires do wear slightly unevenly and therefore, do get out-of-balance during normal services. If the tires are balanced, be sure that the correct type of weights is used. Alloy (aluminum) wheels should only be balanced using stick-on weights or lead weights that are coated to prevent corrosion damage that can occur when two different metals (aluminum and lead) come in contact.

The bottom line is either don’t do anything and replace tires in pairs when they wear out or have your tires rotated and rebalanced regularly. Which method you use, I’ll leave up to you.

