

Interview with Stefano Carloni, President of the Italian Tyre Retreaders Association (Airp)

**How retreads contribute against rising fuel costs:
savings, safety and environmental protection**

44,591 tons of used tyres kept away from the waste stream, 45,264 tons of raw materials saved, lower consumption of crude oil and equivalent products (158 million liters), lower expenditures for final users (291 million euros saved). These results are disclosed in the latest Airp (Italian Tyre Retreaders Association) environmental and economic balance sheet for tyre retreading in Italy. The results are all positive, all environmentally and user friendly, yet average retread production in Italy is only 34,7%, as opposed to over 50% in the USA. The retreading business, despite growing quality levels boosted by mandatory regulations now effective all over Europe, is faced with the hardships experienced in the spare tyre market and the trucking industry, and profitability is under increasingly heavy strain. In this interview, Stefano Carloni, President of Airp (the Italian Tyre Retreaders Association), reveals his opinions about this issue.

The Airp environmental and economic balance sheet discloses important information. Retreads offer environmental and economic benefits. How do haulers and the tyre retreading business relate?

It seems like haulers know very little about tyre retreading. They are so taken in more urgent activities that they end up neglecting proper tyre management. As an association, we must definitely keep spreading information on retreads.

Do you think truckers are aware of the economic benefits offered by retreads?

No, there is a general lack of awareness, especially because using retreads should be part of a tyre management program putting selection of new quality products in the first place.

How important are tyre purchases in operating costs?

They are almost non-relevant, and for several reasons. Enhanced tyre performance and hi-tech, high mileage tyres are certainly positive factors causing tyre costs to drop places in the list of operating costs, shifting attention from tyre costs to more relevant costs. It must be said that the spreading of commercial offers for haulers is sometimes intended to offer last-minute bargains rather than programs including new and retreaded tyres. Anyway, tyre costs are worth considering and occupy an important place in good business management.

Smart haulers are nowadays faced with two alternatives: the former is purchasing quality tyres, the latter is purchasing low cost tyres. The first solution may seem more expensive, but it pays off, for it allows safe driving on performance, high mileage and gas-saving tyres. Most premium brands actually offer “green” tyres allowing lower fuel consumption, and fuel is the largest item in operating budgets. It must be also remembered that reduction of CO₂ emissions plays an important role in environmental protection and is actually a well-known priority in the EU, where cutting-edge technologies with low environmental impact are supported and boosted.

Quality tyres allow a second life through the retreading process. It is therefore not only a matter of driving on safer, high performance tyres, but also (all things considered) of saving money - by retreading good tyre casings - while driving on safer, high performance tyres.

Has Airp developed, or is going to develop, activities for more direct and fruitful dialogue with representatives of the road transport industry?

Our association has included in its promo-communication plan several projects for more fruitful dialogue with representatives of the road transport industry and is going to continue this policy. We started off with direct involvement of industry representatives, such as the haulers association, industry and municipal associations, trucking fleets and technical press. During our Annual Assembly we held a conference entitled “Tyres and transportation management”, that was attended by important business representatives. Various workgroups were also arranged, and there is a lot in store for the near future.

As from September 2006 type approval on retreads is mandatory all over Europe. It is an essential step for road safety and product quality. Do you think this important “legal assurance” is perceived or at least acknowledged by haulers?

I think it is not perceived as it should be. It is still common belief that “road alligators” are caused by retreads.

Still on the subject of road alligators, what is then to blame for tyre debris alongside the road and highway, especially during the hot season?

The main cause is improper tyre maintenance, underinflation being the main culprit: an underinflated tyre is under higher strain. To best explain and convey this phenomenon, the Tire Retread & Repair Information Bureau (TRIB) in the U.S. unveiled the results of an accurate survey on the origin of rubber on the road, which showed low rates of retreads. This is to confirm that the main cause of road alligators is improper tyre maintenance. Airp is also organizing a similar survey. This study is still in early stage, for it will take a while to get more extensive results. First tests, though, show very interesting results, with low rates of rubber debris from retreads and high rates of rubber debris from semitrailer tyres, which, as is known, are less likely to receive proper care and maintenance. There also seems to be no axle load control.

Lawmakers have repeatedly recognized the environmental benefits of retreaded tyres, for example in Italy's Financial Law of 2002 (La Finanziaria), providing that public fleet managers reserve 20% to retreads in their orders of spare tyres. It is certainly an important goal, but what else can be done to boost use of an environmentally friendly product, especially in view of the many legislative actions undertaken to boost "green" purchases?

Much can be and must be done to boost and reward "green" purchases. There are several possible ways: take for instance recent sales incentives boosting purchase of Euro 5 commercial vehicles, as provided for in DPR 273/2007 concerning allocation of funds for truck purchasing. Incentive amounts range from € 3,400 for small and medium enterprises to € 2,550 for other enterprises. Taking into account environmentally friendly tyres, such as retreads, would also be fair.

What are retreaders supposed to do to reaffirm their position in the marketplace?

Retreaders must keep going their way, and offering top quality is the only way to go. We must offer and develop what customers want. Together with tyre retailers we must come up with offers that best suit customers' requests and, I cannot repeat this often enough, always make quality our goal.

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