

Bridgestone: the new force in forestry tyres

Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres has recently been appointed the exclusive Australian distributor of Firestone forestry tyres.

Firestone is part of the Bridgestone Corporation group of companies.

As a result of this development, the Firestone forestry tyre range is now backed by the support, expertise and customer service capabilities of Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres throughout Australia.

Firestone, which pioneered the development of specific tyres for forestry applications over 40 years ago, offers a full range of tyres for all forestry applications.

These include high-flotation tyres for forwarders and feller-bunchers, as well as deep-tread, robust tyres for log skidders.

Log skidders are among the toughest applications for tyres in any industry – it compares with the severity of primary loading of material in mining activity.

For that reason, Firestone skidder tyres are manufactured using the hardest rubber compounds available, giving them ultra-cut-resistant properties.

They feature a very strong tyre structure, including a strong under-tread, and deep-stable lugs for good grip under rough, slippery forest floor conditions.

Firestone flotation tyres are low, ultra-wide tyres designed to give maximum flotation in soft floor conditions, while at the same time offering high strength and superior cut resistance.

According to Mick Ryan, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres' executive manager, diversified products, it is critical to ensure the correct tyre is chosen to fit the application.

"Bridgestone can bring unprecedented levels of expertise and tyre product knowledge to the forestry sector, ensuring that customers always have the best tyre for their needs.

"This, combined with Firestone's experience in developing tyres for specialist forestry applications, means we can offer the correct tyre for the application.

"For example, casing durability and puncture resistance are key attributes for any forestry application tyre," he said.

"Forestry covers a wide range of terrains, with wet, muddy and extremely mountainous conditions, particularly in the high ranges. Firestone offers a forestry tyre to cover any of the applications."



The Firestone forestry range includes deep-tread tyres for log skidders.

Mick said that with Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres taking over distribution of Firestone Forestry tyres in Australia, the highest levels of aftermarket service would also be available to Firestone customers.

"We are recognised in the mining, construction and quarrying sectors as offering industry-leading levels of customer support, including training in correct tyre selection, use and fitment, safe tyre handling and preventive maintenance programs.

According to Mick, the move towards having a single national distributor for Firestone tyres will also ensure better continuity of supply.

"In the past, supply of Firestone tyres has not always been readily available, but we have been able to put systems in place to ensure supply will no longer be an issue.

"In addition, we have been able to achieve some pricing adjustments, allowing us to offer Firestone forestry tyres at far more competitive prices – although they remain a premium product," said Mick.

BRIDGESTONE

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Supply challenges will continue into 2005

As you'll be aware the supply of giant off road tyres has proved to be a major issue in 2004 – one that will continue to affect the various markets serviced by Bridgestone well into 2005.

We know the supply issue is related to the high demand for raw materials from China, but it has been compounded with the volume of growth experienced in the local mining and resources sectors, which has been quite extraordinary and certainly not predicted.

Equipment manufacturers and other mining industry suppliers have all been caught out by the rapid growth in the mining, quarry and civil construction sectors – and we predict there will be no slowdown for the next two years.

Throughout 2004, we at Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres in Australia have focused on our existing customers, ensuring we fulfil our obligations, sourcing and providing products to keep them operational.

This has also resulted in a greater emphasis on Bridgestone's involvement in the complete life cycle of our products to ensure we are adding value to our customers' businesses by way of improved and careful tyre maintenance.

As we are the only off road tyre company that manufactures, sells, fits and services its own product, we have the unique ability to offer a total tyre management program.

An important element of this service is our tyre-monitoring program. Under this program, our account managers' primary purpose is to provide a consultative service designed to extend the life of the tyre.

For example, they will provide advice regarding operating surfaces and the rotation of tyres and supply data on the tyres' performance. In some cases, we have seen customers extend the life of a tyre by up to 30%.

Most importantly, when supply is an issue tyre safety can be overlooked and we've been working hard to educate customers about the perils of putting productivity before safety.

Risks shouldn't be taken by fitting product that isn't up to the job, or extending a tyre beyond its safe and useable life, and we send a clear message to the market that you are jeopardising lives by fitting suspect tyres just to get the job done.



Andrew Andreou, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres' Executive Manager, National Sales.

2005 will also see a further push by our diversified products division.

Bridgestone has managed this product range for some time, but in the past we haven't taken a pro-active approach to the market.

We've made considerable inroads in 2004 with Topy wheels and rims, Bridgestone rubber tracks and the Firestone range of forestry and industrial tractor tyres.

It's become increasingly clear that suppliers of construction equipment, civil contractors and owner operators are prepared to pay that bit extra for a quality product.

It's also clear that this new customer base likes to be confident that, should anything go wrong, they will have the support and service that goes with the Bridgestone brand.

Andrew Andreou
Executive Manager, National Sales

Safe handling of large earthmover tyres

Paul Comminos, Senior Engineer with Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres, looks at the issue of safe handling for large earthmover tyres.

Handling of large earthmover tyres is an inherently hazardous process. If not carried out with due attention to safe working practices, it can – and has – resulted in fatalities and serious injuries.

Typically, large truck and loader tyres have operating pressures of 100-110 psi. With a large capacity tyre – for example, a 40.00x57 tyre – there will be around 38,000 litres of air inside when it's fully inflated.

When you have 38,000 litres of air at 100 psi trying to get out, that's a lot of force acting on rim assemblies.

What makes these large tyres so potentially dangerous is their weight, the mass of the equipment they are supporting, and the very large volume of air under high pressure.

This is also an issue for contractors and quarries, many of who run demountable (wedge-type) rim assemblies on their equipment.

Even though substantially smaller than giant mining trucks and



Paul Comminos, Senior Engineer, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres.

loaders, quarry and construction trucks and loaders still have tyres that operate at significant tyre pressures.

As a result of a number of recent incidents and accidents, Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres has been working with the mines department to develop revised Australian Standards covering tyre, rim and wheel handling requirements on large off-road equipment.

These proposed revised standards aim to better reflect working practices in the field.

In our view, the current Standard provides very safe working guidelines, but it has proved impractical to work with.

For example, it specifies that tyre pressures must be down to 5 psi (35 kPa) before removing the bolts and nuts from demountable-type rims.

However, at those very low pressures, the tyre often breaks the bead, the air pressure relaxes and the tyre can become very difficult to handle.

In such a situation, it can even fall off the tyre handler, which in itself presents a potential hazard, particularly when you consider a tyre/rim combination for a large piece of mining equipment can weigh up to 5 tonnes.

As a result, tyre fitters start to choose their own parameters; they

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Proper training is a key element of correct and safe tyre handling, given that the tyres on a large piece of mining equipment may contain up to 38,000 litres of air at pressures of 100 psi.

Safe handling of large earthmover tyres continued



New standards recommend that mines, quarries and construction sites set their own maximum pressures for removing and working on tyres, depending on what is safe and appropriate working practice for each piece of equipment.

might remove the tyre when the pressure is at 15 psi, then up to 40 psi – and then some do not deflate the tyre at all. At these higher pressures, the consequences of a rim failure while working on a tyre are almost always fatal.

What we are proposing for a new Australian Standard for tyre handling is a move away from the prescriptive requirement of 5 psi for all tyres before they can be removed.

Instead, we are recommending that individual mines or quarry and construction sites set their own maximum pressures for removing tyres, depending what is safe and appropriate working practice for each piece of equipment.

There is also a need to better balance the risks.

For example, the probability of a rim burst while someone is removing a tyre is fairly low, but the consequences are usually fatal.

On the other hand, the consequences of dropping a tyre off a grab present a lower risk, but this is a more likely occurrence if tyre pressures are too low.

Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres is now working with Australian Standards on getting together an industry-based group, consisting of:

- Mining representatives
- Tyre suppliers
- Tyre management companies
- Wheel and rim suppliers.

This group would develop and recommend new safe tyre-handling practices for large equipment.

As part of the first steps towards this, Bridgestone has recently

developed a new tyre servicing *Maintenance Guide*, reflecting these changed practices and covering all steps, from initial fitment, through to care and maintenance, then disposal.

In Queensland, the Department of Mines is also developing a process setting out how mines should audit their tyre management, working in conjunction with what we are doing.

Tyre Servicing for Heavy Duty Equipment training classes, available through Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres, also cover these audit processes.

Bridgestone has run such heavy equipment tyre servicing courses for many years, as we have always been aware that this activity is a high-risk process.

Proper training is a key part of correct tyre handling, and is a major part of the training service we offer.

This service doesn't only stop at fitting and handling tyres. Correct application and haul road/loading area maintenance is also important to prevent excessive wear and premature tyre failure.

Our aim is to get in front of everyone associated with tyres on heavy equipment: supervisors, operators, foremen and fitters, and ensure they are properly informed as to the hazards associated with tyre handling.

This also takes the form of toolbox talks for mines and contractors, identifying potential problems, discussing operational issues, getting the best from tyres, ensuring safe operation and developing hazard-reduction plans.

For more information on tyre safety guidelines and training classes, please contact Paul Comminos on (02) 9722 6166, email paulcomminos@bsem.com.au, or your nearest Bridgestone Earthmover Tyres branch.