How To Extend "Re-Tirement" Of Your Forklifts

It's easy to overlook the humble tire when it comes to maintaining a forklift. Choose the wrong tire, however, and you could end up with a dramatic increase in fleet operating costs or, worse yet, increased safety risks. Choose the right one, and you can realize significant cost-savings, improved safety, and a more efficient operation. For example, a properly chosen tire can last 40 percent longer and decrease downtime for replacement.

Making those right decisions can be difficult, because contrary to conventional wisdom, tires are very complex components. There are many brands, types, compounds and treads, which means you must be fully armed with data before making a purchase. Here are some questions we typically ask our customers:

1. What type of fuel (IC or electric) does your forklift use?

2. How heavy is your typical load?

3. How long is your typical run?

4. What kind of problems are you having?

5. Does your forklift operate over dock plates?

6. On what kinds of surfaces do your operate it?

7. How many shifts is the forklift used?

8. What percent of time is your forklift loaded?

9. What is your average and top speed of your forklift?

If you are evaluating tires for multiple types of forklifts, be prepared to answer those questions for each of them.

In addition to knowing the specifics about your tire needs, it will be helpful for you to understand the unique set of terms that relate to tire attributes. Some commonly used ones include:

Durometer is used to describe the hardness of forklift tires. The higher the durometer number, the harder the tire. Most load tires range in durometer from 83 to 95. Our industry uses a couple of standard classifications that cover 80 percent of the tires purchased today.

Softer tires provide better traction for facilities where frequent maneuvering is required. They also are more forgiving of floor debris and offer the operator a more comfortable ride. Be aware, however, tires made of softer compounds create heat and wear faster, making them a less desirable choice for applications where maximum speed and long runs are the norm.

Harder tires are excellent for maximum loads, multiple shifts, long runs and high speed applications. They will wear better and last longer than tires made of softer compounds. But the ride will be harder and the tire more vulnerable to floor debris. Because they offer less resistance, they are well suited to operators especially concerned with energy efficiency.

Universal Compound tires are excellent all-around tires for the average user.

Electric Compound are softer-rolling and provide good traction while at the same time providing lower resistance, making them a good choice for both electric and LP trucks.

The actual tread of the tire is important to consider, too. Pay special attention to whether you want a smooth tire, such as for indoor applications, or a treaded one, for forklifts operated outdoors or over uneven terrain.

We recommend operators track by application how well their tires perform. Create a spreadsheet with rows for each of your forklifts. Track the date tires were purchased, the type of tire, the reason for the replacement and the hour meter reading. Over time, you will see trends emerge that will help you adjust purchasing decisions for the type of performance you need, such as correlations between harder tires and damage, or softer tires and premature wearing.

In the end, there is no one tire that can optimize tread life, traction, durability and fuel efficiency. The key is finding the best fit for each of your forklift material-handling applications. Working with a company that is knowledgeable about forklift tires and can work with you to select the right tire for each of your material handling applications is important in optimizing your fleet for performance. Give us a call today to discuss your tire performance and let us help you improve your bottom line!