

From My Shop
by Phil Lawrence

Clincher Tire Pressure

This month I would like to talk about clincher tires. If you ask ten Model T owners how much air to put in a clincher Model T tire you'll more than likely get ten different answers.

When I bought my first Model T fifty years ago the man I bought it from told me to keep 45 pounds in them (they were 30 x 3 ½ tires). I guess he didn't drive the car much because it wasn't very long before I started having more flats than I could count! Seemed like almost every time I would take it out on a tour, you guessed it! I'd get a flat. In addition to regular flats, from time-to-time when I would go into a turn at a good clip, I would wind up shearing the rubber valve stem. Finally, one of the club members told me to put 55 pounds in those tires and, while that didn't stop the problem, it seemed to improve things.

I used to drive around the neighborhood blowing the exhaust whistle and one day, an older neighbor who lived a little ways from our house heard me and came out in the street to stop me. I thought he was probably mad about the whistle blowing but he told me to wait, he had something to give me. He went into the house and came back out with a book in his hand. He said he had been trying to stop me long enough to give this book to me. What he gave me was an original 1921 edition of *The Model T Ford Car* by Victor W. Page. The book was filled with just about anything you needed to know about the Model T. I thanked him and that night started reading and learning about Model T's. I was just 16 years old at the time and didn't yet know too much about T's.

The book covered all aspects of T repair and included the Fordson tractor. Well, one night I got to the section on tires. On page 173 I found the solution to all my tire problems! ...“Ford front tires should be inflated to 60 pounds, the rear ones to 70 pounds pressure. The rule is 20 pounds for every inch of tire width.” Words to live by!

Of course, Victor Page is referring to the fronts as 30 x 3 inch tires and the rear as being 30 x 3 ½ inch tires. Now, to be totally correct, our modern 30 x 3 ½ inch tires are, in reality, oversize 30 x 3 ½ tires. These are really 31 x 4 inch tires, which should take 80 pounds pressure! For the timid among us, 70 pounds should be fine.

Why so much pressure? The clincher tire is a high pressure tire—it needs that high pressure for the bead of the tire to stay in place on the rim. The 21” straight side tires used in 1926 and 1927 are low pressure tires and are held to the rim by the wire in the bead of the tire.

I've heard many owners say that the high pressure makes the car ride hard, or rough, so they keep a lower pressure. All I can say to that is your mileage may vary. Let your conscience be your guide!

I don't know if it's general knowledge or not but the way to determine rim diameter without measuring is to take the diameter of the tire such as 30 inches and double the width, then subtract that total from the tire diameter size to get the trim size. So, 3 1/2 inches times two equals 7 inches. 7 inches from a 30 inch diameter tire is 23 inches which is the rim size. See the drawing on the next page.

30 X 3 Clincher

30 X 3 ½ Clincher

All numbers are in inches – rims varied some

