



During the 1940s and early 1950s, each car was bespoke at Maserati, making it rather difficult to pin down what the original equipment tyres were. So we use a selection of books from tyre manufacturers and insurance companies of the period to piece the details together. Through our good friendships with Borrani, Pirelli and Michelin, we know what tyres were produced in what period and in what tread patterns.

Classic tyres for Maserati

STORY: DOUGAL CAWLEY - LONGSTONE TYRES

WITH PIRELLI ON THE PODIUM

We know that in the early post-war days of Maserati, they fitted 16" Borrani wheels, which are still produced by Borrani in Milan from their original drawings to an incredibly high standard. We also know that Maserati, and Borrani for that matter, were well connected with Pirelli, who made the Stella Bianca tyres at the time. A tyre they have recently started to produce again. The first production was of the 6.00-16 and is the highest performance cross-ply tyre in that size (V rated - 149 mph)

In 2022 Pirelli also produced its first production of the 550-16 Stella Bianca, which is excellent news for fans of historic Maseratis because, among other things, the 550-16 was fitted to the front of the Maserati 250F (one of my favourite cars ever). These tyres were matched up with varying sizes on the back depending on the track, but one of the rear options was the 600-16 Stella Bianca which is already in production; again good news. The 550-16 or 600-16 Stella Bianca are the ideal match for the rest of the early post-war Maserati models of the 1940s and 1950s.

In 1952 Pirelli was the second tyre manufacturer to the market with a radial tyre, the famous Pirelli Cinturato. However, this wildly different new tyre technology was treated with trepidation by the world of car manufacturers. The Michelin X had come out in the 1950s and dramatically improved the amount of longevity and grip you got out of a tyre. At that time, when people were accustomed to driving on cross-ply tyres, having the ultimate grip was not the decisive factor when choosing tyres. Instead, they opted for better handling, and these first radial tyres startled the sports car drivers of the day because that extra grip, when lost, would be lost all of a sudden and sometimes lost completely. A very different experience to the cross-ply with its progressive handling. Pirelli changed



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peoples' expectations again by producing the Cinturato, which offered the extra grip and longevity of a radial while at the same time maintaining the progressive handling that was critical to the way the rear-wheel drive sports cars were driven in the day.

TOUGH TYRE CHOICE

The cross-ply versus radial tyre choice is not as simple as it might seem. In 1957 when Maserati went to market with the 3500GT, the Cinturato radial tyres had been available for five years, yet Maserati still offered 6.50-16 Pirelli Stella Bianca cross-ply tyres as standard. The good news for 3500GT owners is that we will hopefully get this tyre produced again by Pirelli, allowing them to experience these cars the way Maserati initially intended. It is double bubble good news about the 650-16 Stella Bianca because that was also the other option rear tyre for the 250F!

The range of Stella Bianca is small and intended to stay small. However, from a Maserati point of view, eventually, it will be complete; in that the 550-18 Stella Bianca is on the way with a future plan to produce a 600-19 Stella Bianca for pre-war Maserati.

Radial tyres started to take hold with European Sports car manufacturers. For example, Maserati fitted 185VR16 Pirelli Cinturato as standard original equipment on the 3500GT by 1960. This was an exciting period where the tyre manufacturers Michelin and, to a certain extent, Pirelli were beginning to make tyres to fit on millimetric 400mm wheels, so Borrani offered a 400mm wheel option (RW3661) which could be equipped with a 185R400 tyre. Still, the metric wheels quite soon fell by the wayside and moved back to the generic imperial inch measurement wheels.



With this move away from metric tyres and more availability of radial tyres, people became more accepting of radial technology.

The 185VR16 Pirelli Cinturato was the largest tyre able to withstand the power and speed produced by the sports cars of the day. As a result, all the top sports car manufacturers fitted 185VR16 Cinturato tyres (also sometimes called Cintura). They were original equipment on Ferrari 250 models, BMW 507, Fiat 8V, Maserati 3500GT and early Sebring, Mexico and Mistral models. The States and the UK were a bit slower in accepting radial technology, but if you asked Aston Martin to fit radial tyres to your David Brown car, they also fitted the Cinturato.

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TYRES FOR TOP PERFORMANCE

The next significant step forward in tyre development was when Pirelli in 1964 developed the ability to produce a tyre of the size 205, capable of withstanding the power of the top sports cars of the period. From 1964 a large proportion of the leading sports cars of the period moved from 5.5" or 6" x 16" wheels fitted with 185VR16 Pirelli Cinturato CA67 to the new supercool 205VR15 Pirelli Cinturato CN72 on wider 15" wheels. Maserati jumped on this new tyre technology, with an extra inch of tread width in contact with the road, giving better braking and less wheel spin. The smoother ride afforded by the taller side walls was just what was needed. Maserati moved over its then-current 1964 models, the Quattroporte, Sebring, Mistral and the fabulous 5000GT onto 6.5"x15" Borrani wheels fitted with 205VR15 CN72. When new models Mexico and Ghibli joined the Maserati range, they followed suit and fitted 205VR15 Pirelli

Cinturato. Maserati was not alone in championing these tyres. They were fitted to the Ferrari 330, Iso Grifo and Rivolta, DB6 Aston Martin, and all the Lamborghini models, including the first Miura.

KEEPING A LOW PROFILE

1968 saw the next groundbreaking leap in tyre technology with the introduction of the low-profile tyre with Jaguar fitting Dunlop ER/70VR15 SP Sport tyres to its XJ6. Yet the low-profile Dunlop tyres didn't really make it onto sports cars until later. However, also in 1968, Pirelli worked with Porsche to develop the Cinturato CN36, which was fitted to Porsche's flagship 911. Yet, it seemed Maserati was not immediately happy with the development of wider tyres and stuck with the full profile CN72 until 1971 when Pirelli introduced its CN12. After that, the Ghibli, Mexico and new Bora moved to fit 215/70R15 tyres. However, the Indy model maintained the full profile 205R14 tyre, which today is still manufactured by Michelin as a 205VR14 Michelin XWX.

Worth noting that when the 70% low-profile Michelin XWX tyres were first produced, they were called just the Michelin X or the Michelin XVR. In 1968 the 70-profile Michelin was developed, Pirelli produced the 70-profile CN36, and Dunlop introduced the 70-profile SP Sport Aquajet. However, the XWX was already used before 1968, even as early as 1966, but not in low profile. No cars were fitted with low-profile radial tyres before 1968.

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR MASERATI

The Maserati Merak seems to be a car of indecision; starting off with 205/70VR15 tyres front and rear, it then appears that, in an attempt to improve the balance of the vehicle, they moved to have a smaller tyre on the front and a larger tyre on the rear. That would be done to make the car "turn in" quicker or



to decrease over-steer. For these cars, we suggest either Michelin XWX or Pirelli Cinturato. The 1975 Merak SS fitted 195/70R15 on the front and 215/70VR15 on the rear.

Unfortunately, a 195/70R15 tyre is not currently produced in anything that would be suitable for these cars. Still, in discussions with owners and restorers, we feel the best set-up is to fit a 205/70VR15 on the front. We know these tyres fit, and 205/70VR15 and 215/70VR15 are available as either Michelin XWX or Pirelli Cinturato.

The Maserati Khamsin has a slightly disconcerting manual which suggests fitting Michelin 215 X 15" VR on 5.5" wheels. However, being well into the 1970s, the Khamsin came fitted with 215/70VR15 tyres. Although the manual states Michelin, some press photographs from the time show the car equipped with Pirelli CN12 tyres. Nevertheless, the situation is good because Michelin makes the 215/70VR15 XWX, and Pirelli offers the 215/70VR15 Cinturato CN12. The Kyalami from the same period fitted 205/70VR15 XDX but can today be fitted with XWX or the Pirelli CN12 or P5. Worth noting with these two mid-1970s cars is that although the technology to produce 60% profile tyres fitted to the Porsche 911 RS and Carrera from 1973, Maserati chose not to use this technology until the introduction of the Biturbo.

We are now finding that for some sizes of 1980s cars, it is becoming difficult to source quality tyres. So we were delighted when Michelin added the 195/60VR14 MXV3-A to their classic range, which allows fitment to many of the early Biturbo cars. Towards the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s, the Maserati moved onto 15" wheels. We can now supply 205/50VR15 P7 and 225/50VR15 Pirelli Cinturato P7 for the BiTurbo 222E, Karif and Spyder moving into the early 1990s.

GRAZIE, PIRELLI - MERCI, MICHELIN

The situation with proper classic tyres to complement classic Maserati chassis designs is currently very strong. Mostly thanks to the support from Michelin and Pirelli. The future looks bright with these companies and at Longstone, chasing the future of classic car tyres and investing in new productions of old tyre designs to keep the post-classic or Youngtimer car market supplied with tyre designs that complement their chassis set-up. Having the right tyre for a car can significantly affect how enjoyable your classic car is to drive.

