TIRE BLOWOUTS

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We call it a tire "Blowout"; professionals in the tire business call it a "rapid loss of air." Regardless of what you call it, the possibility of experiencing a blowout evokes frightening images.

Personally, we've had two tire blowouts while traveling in our coach; one occurred on the front axle, the other on the tag axle. Neither resulted in a catastrophic loss; in fact, we wondered why they both ended safely. Was it a result of the coach's engineering, the steering stabilizer device, or driving skills? We posed this question to numerous people and did not get a convincing answer until we talked with Doug Jones and Keith Radford of Michelin Tire Corporation.

Mr. Radford sent us a video taped program called 'The Critical Factor." This tape was made for the American Trucking Association and was moderated by NASCAR driver Benny Parsons. The laws of physics state that a moving vehicle will continue in the same direction until it is acted on by another force. All drivers have no doubt felt the effects of crosswinds or high-crowned roads. The videotape clearly demonstrates these forces. When your RV's tire blows, it causes a dramatic change in side forces. During the 10-minute program, several deliberate tire blowouts are created separately on both the front and rear axles of a truck. It is explained that a moving vehicle exerts a positive force straight ahead. When a tire experiences rapid air loss, that corner of the vehicle drops, and an increase in the force of the side vector pulls the vehicle toward the side of the blown lire.

What do you do when your coach experiences a tire blowout? According to a videotape produced by Michelin Tire Corporation, the driver is "The Critical Factor."

The worst thing a driver can do in this instance is to apply the brakes forcefully. Braking decreases the force of the forward vector and accentuates the force of the side vector. In other words, the vehicle will continue to he pulled toward the blowout side. The second worse thing to do is to remove your foot from the accelerator pedal. The safest and most appropriate action to take is to accelerate.

At first this may seem like strange advice, because your goal is to slow down and get off the road. That is true, but first you must gain control. Accelerating does not significantly increase speed; rather, it applies power to the drive wheels, so you can increase the forward force and overcome the side movement. This gives you time to make steering wheel corrections and gain stability and control. Once you've gained control, you'll have time to determine when and where you will slow down and pull safely off the road.

The program also demonstrates that a driver's response to the problem is the same whether the rapid air loss occurs on the front or rear axle. A blowout on the front axle will be felt through the steering wheel, and a rear blowout, which affects the ride, will be felt through the seat.

The information included on this tape is very important in terms of safety and education and contains no product promotions. It emphasizes that the most important factor in avoiding a calamity as result of sudden tire failure is the driver's response.

Michelin Tire Corporation has been very gracious in making "The Critical Factor" videotape available to each of FMCA's area vice presidents for use at area rallies and chapter rallies. This review has been presented for the benefit of readers who might not have an opportunity to view the video.