





DanFreight Systems Inc. (DFS) in Joliette (Quebec), Canada, a technology-driven fleet that is serving as a pioneer for wide base tires in North America, has amassed some valuable data about wide base performance.

ATTRACTIVE OPTION FOR WIDE BASE FLEETS: RETREADS

Daniel Berard, President of DanFreight, acknowledged that DFS started using the wide base singles in April of 2001. Today, 100 percent of the fleet's 82 tractors and 90 percent of the company's 125 trailers run on wide base tires.

The refrigerated fleet generally moves dry freight from Quebec to California and returns to Canada with fresh produce.

WIDE BASE VS DUALS

Berard said, "We are a proactive fleet, and that's why we took the lead on wide base tires."

He continued, "We have found an 8 to 9 percent fuel savings by replacing our dual tire configuration with a single wide base tire. We're in a competitive business where you have to be ahead of the curve to survive."

Acknowledging the fuel savings are not net savings, Berard said, "Presently, you have to give up a share of those savings because the wide base tires wear out much faster than dual tires do. When we first started using them, they only got about half the wear performance of a set of duals."

The tire manufacturers have been improving on that wear performance every year with better compounds, but there is still a wear performance gap."

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There are also a number of other factors that might keep the wide base tire from becoming the tire of choice for every fleet. There are going to be additional man-hour costs in your tire program with wide base tires.

Berard said, "If you're going to run them, you better have a good preventative maintenance program in place. If one of them develops an uneven wear problem and you don't catch it in time, the cost of replacing that tire will be equivalent to replacing two traditional tires."

Despite a few negatives, Berard doesn't see the DFS fleet switching back to traditional duals. He is confident the new tire manufacturers will continue to work on the wear performance. He said, "When they increase wear, combined with fuel savings, there will be a real competitive advantage with wide base tires. In addition to that, they have a better ride and our drivers really like them."

BANDAG BTR-UWB

DFS uses both the Bridgestone and Michelin brands of wide base tires, but the big, pleasant surprise resulted when they started retreading the worn casings with the Bandag BTR-UWB tread design. According to Berard, the fleet soon realized a 20 to 50 percent improvement in tread wear performance with Bandag in the trailer-axle position, depending on which brand of new tire you compare it with. That superior retread performance comes at half the cost of a new wide base tire.

The success of the retreaded wide base tire is tied to a stringent casing specification, allowing only virgin casings without any injuries to be retreaded.

Claude Laporte, DanFreight Director of Fleet and R&D said, "We started evaluating the Bandag BTR-UWB design in January 2003 and gathered the data necessary to make a decision to go with the Bandag design in July 2004."



“Today we know they (wide base retreads) are every bit as dependable as new tires. That’s not based on a gut feeling, that’s based on sound data.” - Claude Laporte

Laporte acknowledged it was a bit of an uphill battle when he evaluated that first set of retreads, because DFS President Daniel Berard was an owner/operator earlier in his career and had some negative perceptions about retreads based on that earlier experience.

However, when the data started coming in, not only Berard but also the DFS drivers changed their views of retreads. Laporte said, “Today, we know they are every bit as dependable as new tires. That’s not based on a gut feeling, that’s based on sound data.”

FAST DATA

Berard said, “DanFreight has become an evaluation fleet for many OEM suppliers to the trucking industry. Because our trucks and driver teams log 500,000 km (300,000 miles) annually, we are a source of fast data. More importantly, we want to partner with these suppliers to stay on the cutting edge of technology so our employees make the commitment to measure and gather meaningful data.”

According to Laporte, that was precisely the case when his local Bandag supplier, Benoit Villemaire of Rechapage Villemaire, and Bandag Incorporated stepped to the plate to help develop a product that made it possible for DFS to utilize their wide base casing assets. He said, “We don’t view Rechapage Villemaire as our tire dealer, we see them and Bandag as best-in-class supplier/partners committed to helping us operate more efficiently.”

