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## New winter tire logo losing market value

### Transport Canada tests of alpine-rated winter and all-season rubber show wide results

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TORONTO STAR

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Just when the consumer appeared to have some clear guidelines for buying winter tires, those industry guidelines are being questioned by Transport Canada and a tire company.

Consumers have been told to look for the pictograph of a mountain with a snowflake on the sidewall, meaning the tire is winter-rated.

The tires are supposed to meet specific performance requirements in "severe winter conditions," according to the Rubber Manufacturers Association of Canada, a trade association to which tire manufacturers belong. The tire industry website at [www.betiresmart.ca](http://www.betiresmart.ca) lists those brands and models on the market that have earned the snowflake and mountain logo, also known as the alpine rating.

However, in recent testing carried out by Transport Canada, some tires bearing that logo had only as much grip as some all-season tires.

It was also discovered there was a huge variation in grip among tested tires, with differences as much as 30 per cent between models, according to Nigel Mortimer, head of recalls for Transport Canada.

Mortimer would not name the companies who are selling consumers the poorer alpine-branded tires. "First, look for the snowflake logo, then look at the price of the tire," he said. "Price is an excellent guide to quality in tire choice."

Bridgestone also ran tests and came to a similar conclusion. It's the light-truck and SUV tires that were deemed blatant examples of tires that do not grip at the alpine-approved level, according to Michael Sigillito, director of retail Canadian marketing for the company.

"The alpine snowflake logo is not restricted to winter tires," says Sigillito, "and that is part of the problem; it was a gentlemen's agreement to only use the alpine logo on winter seasonal tires."

Behind closed doors, there have been some heated discussions between the tire company members of the Rubber Manufacturers Association.

If there is no agreement among members at an upcoming May meeting, Transport Canada may have to act by implementing regulations for a new alpine standard that consumers can trust.

The winter tire logo program has not been made a federal regulation; it's a standard monitored by rubber industry members itself.

The wide differences in performance of snowflake-branded tires came to light at a Bridgestone/Transport Canada demonstration held earlier this month to show the differences in traction between all-season tires and snowflake-rated winter tires.

Mortimer said the agency's goal is for Canada to have the safest roads in the world by 2010. To that end, Transport Canada will mandate electronic stability control (ESC) in all new cars. But without dependable tire traction, ESC is far less useful, so the agency then began to examine winter-rated tires.

That led to testing with the aid of the Rubber Manufacturers Association of Canada and the Automobile Protection Association. Video of that testing is available on line at [betiresmart.ca](http://betiresmart.ca).

Transport Canada's testing turned up the wide variation in grip in the snowflake-rated tires. One of the tests involved stopping on ice from a snail's pace of 16 km/h.

On a Toyota SUV, three alpine-rated tires and three all-terrain tires were tested, with two of these all-terrain tires bearing the snowflake-and-mountain logo.

The winter tires went first. The first tire's stopping distance was given a rating of 100. The rest of the tires were scored on how they compared on a percentage scale, with lower numbers better.

The second winter tire scored 93 per cent – an even shorter stop. The third winter-rated tire scored 103 per cent, a slightly longer stopping distance than the first.

Then, the first all-terrain all-season tire (without a snowflake logo) rated 140 per cent, a 40 per cent longer braking distance than the first tire, which was to be expected.

But the second all-terrain tire that featured the winter logo took 153 per cent of the baseline tire's distance to stop. The last all-terrain Alpine tire rated a score of 141 per cent.

*Email tire questions to John Mahler at*

*thetireguy\_1@hotmail.com.*

*Please include vehicle's make, model and year, tire brand and size and your name, address and phone number.*

*Letter volume prevents personal replies.*

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