

# ADVENTURE TYRES

By John Nick

## One of life's great compromises

Ask a bunch of Adventure riders to name their favourite tyre. Chances are you will get as many opinions as riders in the bar. Adventure riding is an on and off road activity, how much of either you indulge in may depend on the sort of riding you like and where and how far you ride.

Decades ago advertising copywriters perfected tyres that worked equally well on and off road. Perhaps my favourite piece of nonsense was the 'Claw Action tyre' This wonder was advertised with diagrams which clearly showed how the tyre actually gripped the ground, pincer-style, as the carcass flexed over the terrain.

Miracle dual-purpose tyres continue to be advertised. I remain unconvinced. While progress has been made, the problem remains much as it has always been. The better a tyre is off road the faster it wears and the less it grips on road. The opposite is also true. The stark reality is that tyres made for road riding and those so called big bike 'enduro' tyres do not work in most off road conditions experienced in NZ. Experts, let alone beginners, struggle with the wrong tyres in typically steep, wet and diverse NZ conditions.

## ADVENTURE TYRE PATTERNS

Broadly speaking there are three types of road certified tyres suitable for Adventure riding in NZ; road-adventure, semi-knobblies and full-knobblies. Bear in mind that even within these three categories there are shades of difference.

### Road-adventure

These are really road tyres with wider than normal rain grooves. This is because their carcass section is rounded, like a road tyre, to present maximum rubber contact when aggressively leaned. Just like a road tyre they grip very well on dry and wet seal. These tyres also work to some extent on dry, hard-packed dirt and hard rock, offer a hint of control in loose gravel but almost certain humiliation in sand, wet dirt, or grass of any kind.

Suitable for: Road riding, public gravel roads on bikes of all sizes.

Weakness: Not suitable for organised Adventure rides and most off road terrain.

Size availability: 17 and 18 inch rear, 19 and 21 inch front.

Rear tyre life: Virtually as for a road tyre.

### Semi-knobblies

These tyres have a squarer carcass profile, with a moderately rounded to D shaped tread section. The knobs have a large area, and although only modest in height, are distinct blocks, with moderate gaps. Performance on road in dry conditions is good, and adequate in the wet. Grip and feel are acceptable in gravel, stony ground, sand

and dry dirt. They offer a touch of control in firm slippery dirt conditions, and at least some hope in mud or soft grass.

Suitable for: Organised Adventure rides in dry summer conditions gentle off-road exploring and moderate road trips on bikes of all sizes.

Weakness: Far less than comforting in wet dirt and grass.

Size availability: 17 and 18 inch rear, 19 and 21 inch front.

Rear tyre life: Up to 3000 km on the seal, if looked after.

### **Full-knobblies**

Several brands and designs of full-knobby tyres are made and certified for Adventure bikes. These tyres have a rectangular cross-section carcass and long and widely spaced, knobs. They work best fairly upright, by penetrating their square edges and knobs through soft or loose surfaces to firmer ground below. They grip very well in gravel and in slippery and soft off road situations. Grip may be adequate on dry seal, but can be scary on wet, smooth seal, especially when leaned.

Good for: Serious organised Adventure rides, all off road riding.

Weakness: Extremely high wear on road; tyre knobs can fold if pushed hard, especially on larger bikes, very poor grip on wet seal. Noisy.

Size availability: 18 inch rear, 21 inch front, limited availability in 17 inch rear.

Rear tyre life: Most struggle to go 1000 km on seal, unless pampered beyond decency.

### **WHERE DO YOU FIT IN?**

Deciding what tyres to fit will depend largely on what riding you plan to do. It will likely involve compromise. If I was commuting daily on the road, riding the length of NZ or crossing Australia, the distances and tyre wear involved would dictate a road-adventure tyre compromise. If I'm doing a particular long distance ride involving gravel and a bit of off-road I may use a road-adventure tyre on the rear with a semi-knobby on the front. For a special Adventure ride like the Yamaha Safari with significant off roading. I go the whole hog and get a set of semi-knobblies or full-knobblies delivered to a local bike shop for fitting and removal around the ride. A nationwide supply company like Dirt Guide, [www.dirtguide.co.nz](http://www.dirtguide.co.nz) can arrange for tyres to be delivered to their stockists at very competitive rates.

### **MIX AND MATCH**

Though not condoned by tyre manufacturers, some riders (myself included) do mix and match, generally using a more off-road tyre on the front with a more road oriented rear tyre. While this will create a certain degree of imbalance on the tar seal, the idea is that a full-knobby or semi-knobby will give critical steering control in muddy or grassy going, while a more road oriented semi-knobby, or road-adventure tyre on the rear will wear far slower, thus lasting the distance required. So, for instance, I might partner a front full knobby with a rear semi-knobby, (or less aggressive, or cheaper priced full-knobby) and might combine a semi-knobby front with a road-adventure rear. If you choose this path remember that tar sealed performance will be compromised.