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Lawsuit claims Michelin, Honda misrepresented run-flat tires

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Michelin North America Inc. and American Honda Motor Corp. are the targets of a lawsuit concerning the Pax run-flat tire/wheel system.

The legal action follows the settlement of a class-action suit involving consumer complaints about Dunlop and Bridgestone run-flat tires.

The new lawsuit, filed March 6 in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California as a class action, claims Honda and Michelin misrepresented the costs and convenience of repairing or replacing the run-flats that come standard on the 2005-07 Honda Odyssey Touring edition and as an option on the 2006-07 Acura RL vehicles.

Michelin said the suit had "many misstatements and errors...This case is without merit and we will defend it vigorously." Honda wouldn't comment on the pending litigation.

The plaintiffs filing on behalf of the class—a Honda Odyssey owner and an Acura owner—claim they and others who bought those vehicles suffered damages as well as the "inability to timely, conveniently or cost-effectively repair or replace these expensive tire and wheel systems when they require repair or replacement."

The plaintiffs allege Honda and Michelin "never disclosed that neither they nor any third parties maintained sufficient repair or replacement facilities (or the necessary equipment to perform such repair or replacement)" to meet the vehicle owners' needs. The lawsuit also claims the Pax tires are susceptible to premature wear and are more likely to suffer from side punctures.

Various tire makers' versions of run-flat tires allow a motorist to continue driving for a limited number of miles after a loss of tire pressure before reaching a service location for repair. With the Pax system a tire can go more than 120 miles at 50 mph without air. It includes a tire with "inverted" beads, a specially designed wheel, a flexible support ring inside the tire and a tire pressure monitoring system. Michelin claims the tire never rolls off the rim even after sudden deflation because the beads are locked in place.

Another benefit of run-flats is a 12-percent gain in trunk space from not needing a spare and jack. That's an attractive option for auto makers and a reason tire makers believe fitments will continue to proliferate.

However, tire repair locations need a special attachment for their low-profile tire changing equipment in order to properly mount/demount Pax tires because of the specially designed wheel and tire with its inner support ring.

Mark Anderson, one of the plaintiffs' attorneys in the latest class action, said the lawsuit addresses "the lack of disclosure that the replacement tires are so costly. They are so expensive to replace whenever they wear out." He also contends there is a lack of repair facilities that have the proper equipment to service the run-flats.

Monetary damages in the lawsuit have yet to be determined, he said.

A Michelin spokeswoman said as of early March there were 1,139 authorized Michelin Pax System service centers in the U.S., a majority of which are Honda and Acura car dealerships. A Honda spokesman said that by

the end of March, about 90 percent of the 1,018 Honda and 268 Acura dealerships in the U.S. will have the necessary equipment to service the Pax systems. He said about 54,000 Honda and Acura vehicles equipped with the Pax system have been sold since 2005.

According to the Michelin spokeswoman, nearly 75,000 vehicles with Pax systems have been sold in the U.S. since 2003. The run-flat also is an option on the Nissan Quest.

In addressing consumer complaints about the dearth of service locations, she said when the system was launched, the company realized there would be a "ramp-up period." She said Michelin tire dealers are taking training and preparing to repair Pax tires, and those with low-profile tire changing equipment can upgrade the machines with the special attachments.

The company also offers a Pax Assurance road hazard warranty for two years or to half the tread depth, which provides replacement of a run-flat if it's not repairable.

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