

# FULL OF HOT AIR

## Correct tires for 1953-82 Corvettes

**T**he subject of correct tires for your vintage Corvette can sometimes be an overwhelming subject. Finding an original NOS (New Old Stock) tire or, heaven forbid, a full set of four plus a spare for some early Corvettes can be next to impossible, even with the internet and the vast number of parts ads in many major magazines. There are still some original tires out there, with these tires usually being found in old tire warehouses or stumbled upon when a large car parts collection is liquidated. In either case, the sometimes-long search can be quite frustrating.

The fact of the matter is that the types and sizes of tires that were used on Corvettes from 1953 through 1982 are quite varied in construction and size. In addition, the usage was somewhat varied from year to year dependent on the options that could be ordered on the car. It should be stated here that most Corvettes driven today do not carry the original tires they were delivered with to the dealership. Tire technology has changed dramatically over the last 40+ years and most Corvette owners who drive their car on a consistent basis usually opt for a radial tire that will give the car better handling and better adhesion in the rain. The original tires we will discuss here are sought for the restored Corvettes that are judged on their originality at major Corvette club events around the country. While NOS tires may be as rare as hen's teeth, over the last 10-15 years several manufacturers have begun to manufacture reproduction tires that are almost identical to



*BF Goodrich Wide Whitewall*

the originals. It should be mentioned here that the DOT (Department of Transportation) markings that are required to be on all reproduction tires were not in use when the original tires were manufactured for most early Corvettes. This is one quick way to discern if the tire you are about to buy from an individual or dealer is an original or a new reproduction. While not all the tires used on Corvettes are available as reproductions, many now are and can be bought quite inexpensively. Keep in mind that some Corvette clubs DO NOT allow reproduction tires to be used in certain classes without point deductions in the judging structure. Let's discuss the types of tires that were available on 1953-82 Corvettes so you can begin the search for your particular tires.



## 1953-62 CORVETTE TIRES

The 1953-55 Corvettes used one of three different tires, either the U.S. Royal “Air Ride”, the B.F. Goodrich “Silvertown” or the Firestone “Deluxe Champion”. All three of these tires were supplied to Chevrolet in a 6.70x15” size. All the 1953 and 1954 Corvettes used either a 2 ½” or 3” whitewall, while the 1955 Corvette could have used either a whitewall or blackwall design. Very late 1954 and all 1955 Corvettes used a tubeless tire design.

The 1956 through 1962 Corvettes used the same size tires as the 1953-55 Corvettes, a 6.70x15” tire manufactured by the same manufacturers. A U.S. Royal “Air Ride”, the B.F. Goodrich “Silvertown” or the Firestone “Deluxe Champion” were used on all 1956-61 Corvettes. The whitewall width differed a little from earlier years and varied from 2” to 2 ¾”, with the wider widths being used in the earlier 1956 production cars. In 1958, the whitewall width again changed to a variance of 2” to about 2 ½” and this width was carried over through 1961. All standard equipment tires up to this time were manufactured in rayon cord, but nylon cord was introduced as a blackwall option for 1959 and 1960. Beginning in 1962, additional brands used on the Corvette were the Goodyear “Custom Super Cushion” and the General “Jet Air” tires. The 1962 whitewall width was reduced dramatically to between 7/8” and 1 1/16”. The standard tires in 1961-62 were of rayon cord construction, but nylon cord tires were available again as a blackwall option only.



*Firestone Redline Tire*



*Firestone Wide Oval Redline Tire*



## 1963-67 CORVETTE TIRES

The 1963 and 1964 Corvettes used the same standard size tires as the 1953-62 Corvettes, a 6.70x15" tire manufactured by the following manufacturers: the U.S. Royal "Safety 800", the B.F. Goodrich "Silvertown", the Firestone "Deluxe Champion", the Goodyear "Custom Super Cushion" and the General "Jet Air" tires. The whitewall width did not vary during these years and was 1". The standard tires in 1963-64 Corvettes were of rayon cord construction, but nylon cord tires were available again as a blackwall option (Option P91) only. The nylon cord tire was the same 6.70x15" tire size and the tires used were the Firestone "500" and the B.F. Goodrich "Lifesaver".

In 1965, a new 7.75x15" tire size was introduced and became the standard size on all Corvettes. This new tire was manufactured by the following manufacturers under the following brand names: the U.S. Royal "Laredo", the B.F. Goodrich "Silvertown 660 or 770", the Firestone "Deluxe Champion", the Goodyear "Power Cushion" and the General "Jet Air II" tires. The whitewall width was again carried over from 1964 as 1". The standard tires in 1965 were of rayon cord construction, but nylon cord tires were available again as a blackwall option (Option P91) only. The nylon cord tire was the same 6.70x15" tire size as used in the P91 option in 1964. A goldwall 7.75x15" nylon tire was also optional (Option T01) for 1965 and the tires used were the Firestone "Super Sports" and the Goodyear "Power Cushion". This goldwall used a 3/8" gold stripe on the tire.

For the 1966 model year, the same 7.75x15" tire size was used on all Corvettes. This tire was again manufactured by the following manufacturers under the following brand names: the U.S. Royal "Laredo", the B.F. Goodrich "Silvertown 660 or 770", the Firestone "Deluxe Champion", the Goodyear "Power Cushion" and the General "Jet Air II" tires, which is the same as the 1965 model year. The whitewall width was again changed for this model year and a 5/8" whitewall stripe was used. The standard tires in 1966 were of rayon cord construction but nylon cord tires were available again as a gold-



*Firestone Wide Oval White Letter Tire*

wall option only. The optional 6.70x15" tire used in the P91 option in 1965 was now gone. The goldwall 7.75x15" nylon tire was again optional (Option T01) for 1966 and the tires used were the Firestone "Super Sports" and the Goodyear "Power Cushion". This goldwall again used a 3/8" gold stripe on the tire.

For the 1967 model year, the same 7.75x15" tire size was again used on all Corvettes. This tire was again manufactured by the following manufacturers under the following brand names: the Uniroyal "Laredo", the B.F. Goodrich "Silvertown 660 or 770", the Firestone "Deluxe Champion", the Goodyear "Power Cushion" and the General "Jet Air II" tires, which is almost the same as from the 1965 model year. The only change was the new name from U.S. Royal to Uniroyal. The 5/8" whitewall width was again carried over from 1966. The standard tires in 1967 were of rayon cord construction, but nylon cord tires were available again as a new redline tire option (Option QB1) only. The new low profile 3/8" redline 7.75x15" nylon tire was manufactured by the following manufacturers under the following brand names: the Firestone "Super Sports", the Goodyear "Power Cushion" or the Uniroyal "High Performance".



## 1968-82 CORVETTE TIRES

With the new body style of the 1968 Corvette, a new series of tires were released on the car. The new F70-15 bias ply tires were introduced as original equipment. The standard tire was a black wall, with optional red or white stripe tires being available. Also, after September 1969, a new raised white letter tire was made available optionally. All 1968-69 Corvette tires are of nylon cord construction. The correct white stripe or red stripe tires used during these years were manufactured by the following manufacturers under the following brand names: the Uniroyal Tiger Paw, the Firestone "Super Sport Wide Oval" and the Goodyear "Speedway Wide Tread". The correct Goodyear tires should not state "Custom Widetread" or "Poly Glass" as these tires are incorrect. The correct Firestone tires should not state "Sup-R-Belt" as these tires are also incorrect. The later issued raised white letter tires were manufactured by the following manufacturers under the following brand names and were either the "Goodyear Wide Tread F70-15" or the "Firestone Wide O Oval". The Goodyear striped tires have a 5/16" stripe located 1" from the rim, while Firestone striped tires have a 3/8" stripe located 1 7/8" from the rim. Uniroyal striped tires have a 5/16" stripe located 1 3/8" from the rim. All tires built after January 1968 should have the DOT stamp on the tire.

For 1970-72 Corvettes, the same F70-15 bias ply tires from 1968-69 were used as original equipment. The standard tire was a black wall, with an optional white stripe or raised white letters. The redstripe tire was no longer used. All 1970-72 Corvette tires are of nylon cord construction. The correct white stripe tires used during these years were manufactured by the following manufacturers under the following brand names: the Firestone "Super Sport Wide Oval" and the Goodyear "Speedway Wide Tread". The correct Goodyear tires should not state "Custom Widetread" or "Poly Glass" as these



*Firestone Wide Oval White Stripe Tire*

tires are incorrect. The later issued raised white letter tires were manufactured by the following manufacturers under the following brand names and were either the "Goodyear Wide Tread F70-15" or the "Firestone Wide O Oval". In 1972 only, a U.S. Royal tire was also used with the "Uniroyal Tiger Paw" lettering. The legitimacy of this tire is still being researched since so few original cars with this tire have been found. The Goodyear striped tires have a 5/16" stripe located 1" from the rim, while Firestone striped tires have a 3/8" stripe located 1 7/8" from the rim. In 1971, new Federal Regulations were instituted that required every tire manufacturer to mold into every tire a new TIN (Tire Identification Number) for traceability in case of a safety recall.

Introduced in 1973 and continuing through 1977, a new GR70-15 radial tire was used on the Corvette. The standard tire was a black wall, with an optional white stripe or raised white letters. The white stripe option was dropped in 1977. All 1973-77 Corvette tires are of radial cord construction. The correct tires used during 1973-74 were manufactured by only the two following manufac-



turers under the following brand names, the Firestone “Steel Radial 500” and the Goodyear “Steelguard”. The white lettered tires use a full 1” tall letter and do not use the white outline of a letter. White letter tires were not always available in early 1973 production and the Goodyear white letter tires were not available for two months in the spring of 1973. There was also a recall of the Firestone 500 tire in 1973 and 1974. During the recall, the Firestone 721 or any other Firestone tire of the same size replaced it. The tire manufacturers of the 1975-77 model years are still being investigated although it seems that most Corvettes of this era used the same tire manufacturers as in 1973-74.

Beginning with the 1978 model year, the Corvette began use of the new “P-metric” tires on the Corvette. The standard size on all Corvettes built from 1978 through 1982 was the P225/70R15 blackwall tire. The tire manufacturer, Goodyear, designated the tire as a Polysteel Radial. The optional tire (Option QGR) for these years was the same size tire but with “Goodyear” and “Polysteel Radial” in solid block white letters on the sidewall. Also available as an option was the larger P255/60R15 tire, which was used on the Limited Edition Pace Car replicas. The use of these tires on 1978-79 Corvettes necessitated the trimming of the inner fenderwells and front fender. These tires used raised white outlined letters denoting “Goodyear” and “GT Radial”. This same size tire was also used optionally on many 1980-82 Corvettes. This tire was also part of the 1982 Collector Edition Option package. Some of the early 1980 Corvettes may use the same “GT Radial” lettering as mentioned above, but most will denote raised white outlined letters which read “Goodyear” and Eagle GT”. Coker Tire, who furnished the photos for this article, has a wide assortment of almost any tire you need for your Corvette.



*BF Goodrich Silvertown Radial Redline*

Hopefully this article has given you a little insight as to what tires were correct for your Corvette. Now, you just have to go and find them. Coker Tire, who furnished the photos for this article, has a wide assortment of almost any tire you need for your Corvette. They also have BF Goodrich Silvertown radial tires (optional redline, gold line or a pinstripe whitewall) that replicate the original look but have a truly safer radial and a much smoother ride thanks to the popular BF Goodrich V-block tread design and are available in P215/70R14, P215/70R15, and P225/70R15 sizes. Good Luck!

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