

# AutoSunday

*Why uneven tread wear shouldn't be ignored*

Each week it seems a repair theme develops at the shop and this week turned out to be tires, steering and suspension. We've seen multiple vehicles with two or all four tires that have just worn out or worn unevenly for a number of reasons.

I can't stress how important tires, steering and suspension are and how much they are dependent on each other to safely get you down the road.

**Doug McAllister**  
*Under the hood*

Let's approach this from a couple of view points — the first is safety. The primary feature stopping your vehicle is not the brakes but the tires. Low tread, incorrect air pressure and unevenly worn tires are factors that increase the stopping distance needed between you and the vehicle in front of you, sometimes by many car lengths.

Weak or damaged steering and suspension parts also add to stopping distance by allowing the tire contact patch to literally jump off the pavement when you are maneuvering to avoid a collision, hitting the brakes hard during a panic stop or dodging pot holes.

Second, let's look at cost. If a vehicle's steering and suspension are in good condition, tires should last on average 40,000 to 50,000 miles or more. There are always exceptions to the average but replacing tires prematurely due to accelerated wear is no small investment; it is not uncommon to spend \$500 to \$800 or more, depending on the tire type and vehicle.

Shocks, struts, tie rods and ball joints absorb most of the abuse from daily driving and when these components wear out, tire wear increases dramatically. A quality repair shop will check your vehicle in these areas to make certain you know the status of these components and make recommendations when parts are worn out or unsafe.

If your vehicle has 50,000 or more miles and still has the original struts/shocks, you'd be amazed how much the handling has deteriorated over time. Because this has occurred gradually, you tend not to notice how your vehicle bounces over the road, or when braking how your vehicle "nose dives" when coming to a stop. Both of these conditions are a result of suspension fatigue.

The next time you're driving down the road, pay attention to how many vehicles are literally bouncing in front of you. We've had customers replace shocks/struts on their vehicle and have called us on the way home telling us the improvement in road feel was dramatic.

Finally, let's keep in mind today's economic reality. Most of us can't afford to transition into a new vehicle every three to four years. The great thing about your vehicle is you likely own it, you've taken care of it and plan on keeping it going, at least for now. You can feel like you're riding in a new car or truck simply by investing in the areas that will not only keep you and your family safe but also protect your investment.

• Douglas Automotive is at 312 S. Hager Ave., Barrington, (847) 381-0454, and 7218B Virginia Road, Crystal Lake, (815) 356-0440. For details, visit [douglasautomotive.com](http://douglasautomotive.com). Send questions to [underthehood@dailyherald.com](mailto:underthehood@dailyherald.com).

## Who better to tell the story of this thrill rider than his grandson, president of the track where it all began

By JASON STEIN

Wheelbase Communications

It's fitting, perhaps, that George Rice "Joie" Chitwood would be remembered as the first driver to have ever snapped a seat belt together during a trip around the famed Indianapolis 500 Speedway.

A seat belt and Joie Chitwood?

For anyone who knows about Chitwood — the wild adventures, the hurtling machinery and the thrill show chills — it almost doesn't add up.

### Pro-Files

Automotive legends and heroes

"But, if you knew my grandfather, you knew he was always ahead of his time," says Joie Chitwood III, his hands firmly on the wheel of a Chevrolet Corvette pace car as it speeds its way around the Indianapolis track during a media event.

"Back then, they thought it was safer to get thrown from the car in an accident."

Chitwood, who is now president of this very speedway, smiles a devilish smile as he takes another hard left and hammers the gas. The Corvette breathes deeply and lets out a wonderful growl.

Chitwood is really hauling.

But, then, when hasn't a Chitwood been hard on the pedal?

As long as there has been racing, the Chitwoods, led by grandfather Joie, have always been in search of more speed and adventure. They haven't just been pushing the envelope, they've been sealing it.

"My grandfather taught us what racin' was all about," Joie III says. "Maybe it's in our blood."

A frustrated mechanic in the early 1930s, Chitwood quickly set the tone for an entire family of racers and daredevils.

Born in St. Joseph, Mo., in 1912, Chitwood wanted to race anything he could get his hands on and he passed that adventurous spirit down to his son and his son's son.

But he got his start behind the wheel only after sheer determination and a little luck.

Through his teenage years, Chitwood had been working as a mechanic in the Midwest on a race car owned by Shorty Meinholtz. He would get his chance at Winfield Speedway in Kansas on July 28, 1934, after Meinholtz's driver, Fred Zimer, came into the pits during a practice session complaining that the car was not handling well.

Meinholtz promptly replaced Zimer with Chitwood and thus began an illustrious driving career that would include numerous Sprint Car titles, a few trips to the Indy 500 and a dramatic career change.

By proving he could handle the wheel, Chitwood quickly became Meinholtz's main driver as well as the

main driver of the O'Day Offy race car at Indianapolis.

By 1940, at just 28, Chitwood was racing in the Indy 500. That first year he began from the 26th spot and finished 15th. Six more times in the next nine years he would find his way behind the wheel, starting from as high as ninth in 1950 and finishing fifth three different times (1946, 1949 and 1950).

His career was interrupted during World War II when, as Joie III says, "racing was outlawed."

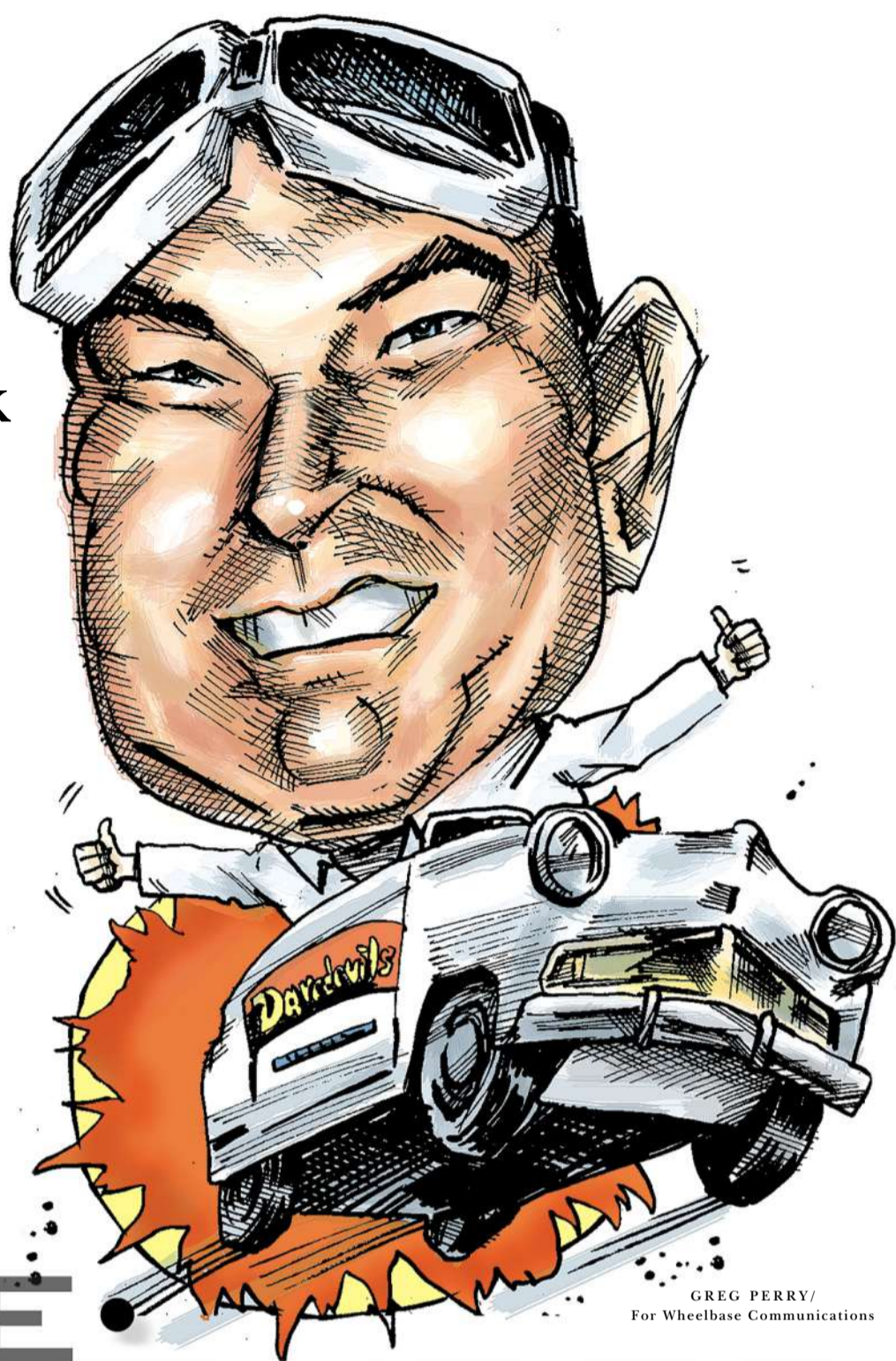
"They needed all the fuel and rubber for the war effort," he says. "So my grandfather's career took a big turn."

It was a fortuitous one at that.

Out of work, Chitwood happened to run into the widow of a man named O'Lucky Teeter, a stunt man in the Midwest. Teeter had died performing a stunt during his thrill show and his widow asked Chitwood if he would help her sell the show.

Chitwood agreed and never looked back.

By 1944, he bought the daredevil



GREG PERRY/  
For Wheelbase Communications

## JOIE CHITWOOD

act and started the "Joie Chitwood Thrill Show," traveling the country in the late 1940s as a stunt man.

"The stunt show became so popular," Joie III says, "he left racing."

In the 1950s, Chitwood had five units touring the United States at the same time. His troupe barnstormed their way into small towns, country fairs and race tracks.

Chitwood himself was a thrill. He crashed cars, performed rollover stunts and drove on two wheels.

One accident required 50 stitches to close a wound to his face.

Which was tougher on Chitwood, stunt driving or racing cars?

"Stunt driving — every time," he said during an interview in the early 1960s. "When you slide behind the wheel of a racing car, you plan to do everything possible to avoid a crash. But when you're stunting — jumping ramp to ramp, busting through blazing barricades, skidding on two wheels — you know for sure the crash is going to come sooner or later."

No one is quite sure why Chitwood

did what he did for so long, subjecting himself to extreme conditions.

"But I know he loved it," his grandson said. "He just loved it."

It eventually had to end for Chitwood, but not for his family or his show.

Joie Chitwood died in January of 1988 at age 75, but through his sons and grandsons, his legacy lived on.

Chitwood's Thrill Show continued as one of America's oldest and most prestigious touring stunt shows. Founded more than 60 years ago, it continued on under the leadership of his two sons, Joie Jr. and Tim.

Every day, Joie III can look out of his office and see where it all began, from the mechanics garage to the stunt driving to the grandson who can still hammer a pace car around a track at 150 mph.

"The fact we're all still involved in the sport," Joie III says, "I know he'd be proud."

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## X5 successfully marries power, fuel economy

By ANN M. JOB

For The Associated Press

Don't let the two-ton weight and generous length of the BMW X5 fool you.

BMW's largest, most luxurious sport utility vehicle now rivals the 2009 Toyota RAV4 in fuel economy ratings.

Both vehicles, with all-wheel drive, are rated at an impressive 19 miles a gallon in city driving and 26 mpg on the highway by the Environmental Protection Agency. Only SUVs with four-cylinder engines and gas-electric hybrid powerplants have higher government mileage ratings for 2009.

The RAV4's strong mileage numbers stem in part from careful tuning of a gasoline-powered V-6. The Toyota vehicle also is smaller and more than 1,650 pounds lighter than the 5,225-pound X5.

The X5 retains the heavy, grounded character that BMWs are known for and still



ASSOCIATED PRESS/Courtesy of BMW

The 2009 X5 SUV retains the character BMWs are known for and still gets great mileage because of the fuel efficiency of a high-tech, diesel-powered engine.

gets great mileage because of the fuel efficiency of a high-tech, diesel-powered, six-cylinder engine.

In fact, the X5 with award-winning 3-liter, double overhead cam, turbocharged diesel, inline six cylinder can travel more than 580 miles on a single tank of fuel. The RAV4

doesn't have that kind of travel range.

BMW's new engine also delivers eye-popping torque, or oomph, of 425 foot-pounds starting at 1,750 rpm. This is better than that of a gasoline V-8 in the X5.

Best of all, the new-for-2009 BMW X5 xDrive 35d — the

final "d" is for diesel — is clean enough in its emissions that it can be sold in all 50 states. California and some Northeast states that have restricted diesel-powered vehicle sales in recent years because of emissions find the diesel X5 doesn't violate their emission standards.

Only problem is, the newest X5 is pricey. Starting manufacturer's suggested retail price, including destination charge, is \$52,025. This includes standard all-wheel drive, plentiful safety features, automatic transmission, burl walnut trim inside and panoramic moonroof.

The diesel model price is \$3,700 more than a base X5 with gasoline-powered, six-cylinder engine that's rated at just 15/21 mpg.

I pushed just a bit on the accelerator, and the X5 moved forcefully out the garage and to the street. Diesel engines have strong torque at low engine

Price as tested: \$64,070

Engine: 3-liter, double overhead cam, turbocharged, diesel, inline six-cylinder

City/highway fuel economy: 19/26 miles per gallon

Length: 191.1 inches

Wheelbase: 115.5 inches

Curb weight: 5,225 pounds

Built: Spartanburg, S.C.

rpm, and the six cylinder in the X5 is no exception, especially since it's turbocharged.

So, quick merges into city traffic are easy. Don't worry about going too fast and having to ride the brakes to slow down. The X5 accelerator pedal is very sensitive to pressure changes and readily helps modulates power to the wheels.

The diesel X5 qualifies for a federal tax credit of up to \$1,800.