

ALIGNED WITH TOMORROW

Wheel alignment more important than ever – find out how to make the most of the opportunity



Vehicles are becoming increasingly safe thanks to technology, but for garages the price is the need to work to an even more precise standard. Accurate wheel and body alignment is now an absolute necessity so that a host of systems function correctly. Properly marketed, wheel and body alignment can also be a great profit centre too.

In addition, it's not like the roads are perfect either. In fact, there's no shortage of statistics concerning the poor condition of UK roads. A report published by the Asphalt Industry Alliance (AIA) concludes that more than 40,000 miles of the UK's roads could become unusable by 2023. The consequences are reported by organisations such as the RAC, which confirmed that breakdowns relating to potholes between April and June last year resulted in almost 4,100 vehicles suffering damaged shock absorbers,

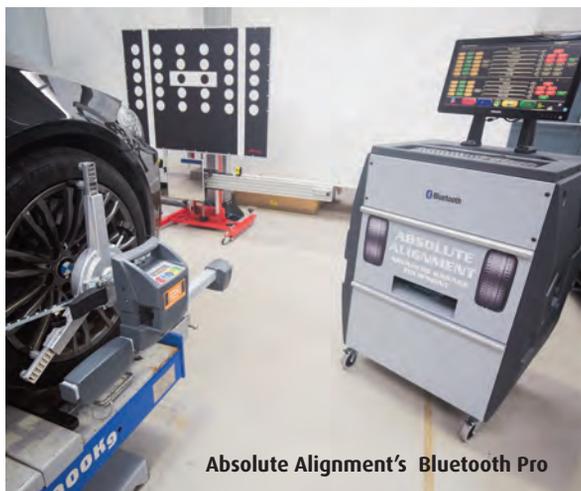
Above:
On the ramp

broken springs or distorted wheels; a 15% rise from last year's figures and a three year high.

Chris Coyle, Sales Director at Sigmavision comments: "The impact on tyres, wheel alignment and suspension is well understood within our industry, but the damage can be less obvious to the vehicle owner and often not acted on, especially if the symptom is just a slight 'pull' to one side. Of course, undetected misalignment over time results in uneven tyre wear and, ultimately, the need for premature tyre replacement, and a higher cost of ownership for the vehicle owner."

Swift inspection

To make the most of the opportunity, businesses need to start the conversation with the customer: Chris explains: "When a customer arrives on site in their vehicle, a swift inspection of tyres and a conversation with the customer



Absolute Alignment's Bluetooth Pro

can be all it takes to create a tyre or alignment sales opportunity. For many businesses, tyre checks form part of the standard vehicle inspection on every car arriving on site. However, some operators are still missing out on replacement tyre revenues and are unable to convert failed or advisory tyres into replacement tyre sales, or alignment revenue.

"Best practice recommends wheel alignment checks every 10,000 miles, subject to driving style and road conditions. However, there are no stated requirements from vehicle manufacturers. As a result, garages stand to gain by putting in place new technology, systems and processes, to educate their customers about importance of tyre maintenance and correct wheel alignment."

Scale of the opportunity

Tyre condition trend data from the tyre sales management service TreadManager, provided by Sigmapvision, makes interesting reading. Chris Coyle takes us through the numbers: "The data reveals that 10% of all tyres scanned using TreadReader tyre measurement equipment have a tread depth of less than 1.6mm and are therefore illegal. In addition, 22% of tyres are shown to fall into the 'advisory' category, with a tread depth of between 1.6mm and 3mm.

"TreadReader 3D tyre measurement technology also diagnoses wheel misalignment or incorrect inflation. 12 months of TreadManager data reveals that 29% of tyres present with uneven wear due to incorrect wheel alignment. This data, together with the knowledge that there are over 31 million passenger vehicles on UK roads and 24,496 miles of roads will need repair during 2019, confirms that there is significant requirement for businesses to offer tyre management and wheel alignment services."

Educate

"Educating the motorist remains the first step to changing behaviour and boosting sales," says Chris Coyle. "Industry solutions, such as the TreadReader3D tyre measurement technology from Sigmapvision, serve as powerful conversion aids for tyre and alignment sales.

"In the case of TreadReader the technology produces colour-coded 3D scans, revealing tread depth and tyre wear in a way that is immediately understood. This makes them compelling for the vehicle owner and valuable to the retailer as a means to build customer trust."

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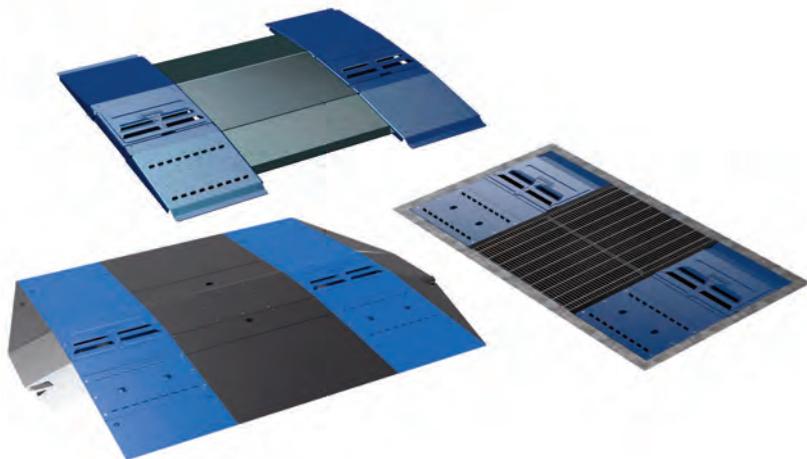
Chris Coyle adds: "Sigmavision is currently working with independents to help them achieve increased revenues from tyre and alignment sales."

Significant improvement

The need for proper wheel and body alignment is becoming much more understood according to Paul Beaurain, Managing Director at Pro-Align: "In recent years, there has been a significant improvement among workshops in the UK about the need for and the opportunities associated with professional four wheel alignment. Our research indicates that nine out of every 10 cars on the road suffers from some form of misalignment so it's no surprise that many workshops have now woken up to this opportunity. What's more, with potential profit margins of around 88% compared to services such as replacement brakes and tyres which offer just 49% and 16% respectively, it's easy to see why many have finally opened their eyes.

"Aside from the financial arguments for workshops to introduce four wheel alignment, there are many compelling business and customer service reasons too. Firstly, most motor manufacturers' servicing schedules now state that for any steering and suspension related job to be completed properly, a four wheel alignment check is an essential final stage of the process."

Then there's ADAS: "This position has been further re-enforced with the introduction of many new advanced driver assistance systems (ADAS)," says Paul. "Systems such as adaptive cruise control, lane departure and many others rely on accurate information from the Steering Angle Sensor (SAS). In order to deliver that information accurately, the sensor needs to be calibrated as part of a safety system alignment, with the thrust line of the



Above:
Sigmavision's
TreadManager
Drive Over ramp

vehicle, which again, is required at the end of any four wheel alignment check and adjustment."

Customer service factors

It's for the customers in the end says Paul: "In addition to the financial and technical reasons why workshops should be offering a four wheel alignment service, there are also important customer service factors that alignment offers too. By carrying out a four wheel alignment check and adjustment on customers' cars, workshops can show, especially after undergoing under car work, that they have taken the time to ensure that the car is aligned in accordance to, and as the motor manufacturer intended. This ensures lower fuel bills, reduced tyre wear and improved ride comfort which can only help improve the long-term customer relationship.

"Some workshops have been reluctant or misinformed, and have felt that delivering a high quality, four wheel alignment service is out of their reach. Too many

businesses are missing out without fully considering the overall financial argument. Some have simply looked at the initial investment required rather than the revenues that can be generated and the rapid payback period which can be as short as just a few months.

“To help workshops overcome this mindset challenge, we have recently introduced our value Hunter Essentials Range. Within this range are two high-quality Hunter wheel alignment systems which offer some key top range technical features, not available with other comparable aligners in the market. Reassurance also comes with the same high levels of Pro-Align service support as with any system in our range and that all important Hunter-name that workshops aspire to and customers actively seek out.”

Paul adds: “If your workshop isn’t yet offering a professional four wheel alignment service, maybe now’s the time to reconsider?”



Best practice

Wheel alignment’s importance has increased thanks to ADAS, as we have seen.

Absolute Alignment champions ADAS best practice, and recommends that four wheel alignment checks should be part of the standard MOT for any ADAS-equipped vehicle.

Chris Dear, Absolute Alignment’s Technical Director, comments: “ADAS tech has been fitted on vehicles for some time now. Commonly seen systems include including lane change warnings, adaptive cruise control, autonomous braking and brake control. ADAS sensors rely on correct rear thrust angle; hence four wheel alignment is now an even more important factor in road safety as a millimetric misalignment can result in ADAS errors.

“If any part of a vehicle is changed with regards to the suspension, steering, sub-frame, body or windscreen, or even if a slight adjustment is made to the steering using only a front end tracking gauge, it could impact on the ADAS sensor calibration. This would mean four wheel alignment needs to be carried out to ensure ADAS accuracy.

“With ADAS-equipped vehicles, in the event of an accident, diligent investigators will be asking awkward questions as to why ADAS has let the driver down. Different manufacturers have varying approaches to checking ADAS sensor alignment, but there are two factors that are common to all – correct tyre pressures and correct

Right:
Fixing alignment



four wheel alignment.

Chris Dear adds: “At Absolute Alignment we believe the safety of the driver comes first. There is only one way to be certain that Advanced Driver Assistance Systems function as they should, and as they have been designed to do in order to protect drivers and passengers. The way to do it? Administer a four wheel alignment check as part of any standard MOT carried out on an ADAS-equipped vehicle.”

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