

DUNLOP TOUCH TECHNOLOGY

STAY IN TOUCH

Dunlop has developed a distinct philosophy that's influenced the development of its range of performance tyres. With Touch Technology it aims to sure-up the crucial link between the driver and the road. Steve Walker reports...



Feedback when driving is an interesting concept. Most of us don't fully realise we're getting it and given the choice, many motorists would claim they'd rather do without it but feedback is central to how we enjoy driving and crucial to driving safely. It's the way your car communicates with you, warning you of the road conditions, your speed and the amount of grip. If you drive, you almost certainly receive and act upon this information already but you may not know it. Dunlop's Touch Technology has influenced a range of tyres that aim to bring feedback to the fore.

Your car communicates with you on every journey you make, not in a camp English accent like Knight Rider's KITT or with irreverent blasts on its horn like Herbie the lovable Beetle but through the vibrations that it sends from the wheels into the cabin through the steering wheel, the pedals and the seat. The most communicative cars are the most enjoyable cars to drive and they also have some of the highest levels of active safety, precisely because they engage in a two-way link with their driver. As the only part of the car in contact with the road, the car's tyres are obviously an essential part this link.

In wet driving conditions, we've all felt the reduction in steering torque and the lightness in the wheel that signals lower levels of grip on the road. We may also have felt our tyres struggling for grip under acceleration or when braking. This is your car giving you feedback. In many cases, we won't even register it consciously but subconsciously we'll know that the road conditions require us to slow down and take more care. Dunlop's Touch technology works to maximise the amount of feel and feedback communicated to the driver, allowing you to make best use of your car in the prevailing conditions. It's achieved through a series of innovations. Things like the Multi Radius tread designs that help the tyre perform in a smooth, predictable manner. Then there's the continuous middle rib in the tyre's tread that enhances steering precision. Oh and the flat tread profile that maximises the contact patch, improving the tyre's link to the road.

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The Dunlop SP Sport Maxx GT is a high-end performance tyre that's been engineered in line with the Touch Technology themes. Its purpose is to deliver the highest levels of grip and performance to the world's most powerful performance cars without sacrificing wet weather grip and durability in the way that a completely focused track tyre would. The tyre seems to fulfil the brief with some aplomb. A large contact patch (the area of the tyre that's touching the road at any given moment) has long been a Dunlop trademark and the Sport Maxx GT advances this feature giving noticeable improvements in handling and braking over rivals. Its tread pattern is optimised with strong inner shoulders, solid central ribs for grip and stability plus larger blocks on the outside of the tyre for composure under hard cornering.

The information from the road is transmitted from the Sport Maxx GT through the tyre's stiff sidewalls through beads which have been especially designed to form a tight connection to the wheel rim. Then, it's up through the suspension and the brake callipers to the driver. In hard driving conditions, the tyre produces excellent lateral stability and assured braking performance. Any break in traction is telegraphed to the driver immediately, giving you the maximum window to react. There's an increase in noise over the standard Sport Maxx and Dunlop's own testing has revealed a small drop off in aquaplaning performance but in wet and dry weather, the benefits to the keen driver should far outweigh the costs.



We can't all drive high performance cars and Dunlop have not restricted their Touch Technology to the exclusive end of the market where the Sport Maxx GT competes. Owners of less extreme vehicles can opt for the Dunlop SP FastResponse which uses Touch Technology to fulfil a more mainstream remit. Here, the emphasis is shifted from all out handling on the limit to grip and stability in a range of driving conditions. Just as performance driving is about edging the car closer to its limits, driving safely is about recognising those limits without exceeding them. The Dunlop SP FastResponse tyre is designed to make it easier to do both.

A track test in wet conditions quickly marked the FastResponse product out as an assured performer when the rain falls. The tread is split into three zones, each designed to fulfil a specific purpose. The inner area of the tyre is focused on providing the feedback and fast responses to driver inputs while the central rib works to aid high speed stability. The large, stiff outside tread blocks are designed to enhance control, completing the all round package.

On the road, braking in wet conditions is very impressive and the tyre holds on tenaciously in corners, giving you an accurate appreciation of how much grip there is right up to the limit. The FastResponse tyre also uses a special Silica compound not as sticky as that of the more performance-orientated Sport Maxx GT but more durable to extend the life of the tyre.

The communicative nature of the Sport Maxx GT and the FastResponse tyres from Dunlop has the potential to give the enthusiastic driver an invaluable edge in terms of safety and performance. Feedback from the car and its tyres is vital to the way all of us drive and through the use of Dunlop's Touch Technology, these tyres make the most of it.

For owners of performance cars, the GT model makes lots of sense. Highly adept on the road or the track but retaining that crucial level of wet weather performance that makes it a usable everyday tyre. The FastResponse still has performance and driving enjoyment at its heart but the high level of feel and responsiveness that the tyre provides is as valuable from a safety standpoint as from that of the enthusiast seeking unadulterated driving fun.

And you thought tyres were just black and round.....