



REBIRTH OF A CLASSIC

KELSEY TIRE TO PRODUCE GOODYEAR'S P255/60R15 GT RADIAL

■ BY TOM RUSSO



YOU MAY WANT TO HOLD OFF ON USING THOSE 30-YEAR OLD SWAP-MEET SET OF "ORIGINAL" GOODYEAR P255/60 GT RADIALS ... AND GET THE 2ND GENERATION! KELSEY TIRES INC IS ROLLING OUT A FRESH, NEW VERSION OF THE GOODYEAR GT RADIAL WITH ITS SIGNATURE RAISED-WHITE OUTLINE LETTERS. TIRES WILL BE PRODUCED TO THE DESIGN SPECIFICATIONS OF THE P-METRIC SERIES, FIRST SPORTING THE 1978 LIMITED EDITION PACE CAR AND OPTIONAL FOR 1978-'79 CORVETTE BUYERS.

The authenticity of this tire is remarkable, and despite thirty years, pages of tire safety regulations and a myriad of tests, this tire passed muster and is ready for America's

Sports Car. In an exclusive interview with John Kelsey, *Corvette Enthusiast* gains insights into the making of this very special tire. The objective from the outset was to manufacture a tire that "represented the highest level of authenticity for the consumer." As Kelsey explains, several variations



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1 Kelsey GT Radial with signature raised, white outline letters.

2 Original Goodyear P255/60R15 GT Radial mounted on a 2,675-mile pace car.

3 The TIN (tire identification number) is the single differentiating label between an original Goodyear GT Radial and a Kelsey GT Radial. Note date code 4409 or the 44th week of 2009.

4 GT Radial fresh off the UPS truck arrives

WHAT THE CONSUMER CAN EXPECT IS THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE GT RADIAL FIRST PRODUCED FOR THE 1978-'79 CORVETTE.

wrapped in Goodyear logo plastic wrap and shipping labels.

5 Tire label with mounting instructions to assist tire shops with correct mounting procedures.



6 Kelsey reports RPO QGR P225/70R15 Polysteel Radial will be rolled out in both small and large solid white letters before this article goes to press.

of a tire brand are manufactured in its formative years and especially with a tire like the GT Radial. Studying production variations is critical to the final design for a reproduction tire, such that it represents fairly and accurately the original tire. What the consumer can expect is the authenticity of the GT Radial first produced for the 1978-'79 Corvette.

WHY BUILD THIS TIRE? The 1978 Limited Edition Pace Car first rolled off the St. Louis factory floor over thirty years ago, making it a classic and one that remains a collectable. Tires on pace cars have aged as well. With a car that will remain around for a while, this was a tire that needed to be back on the market. Kelsey adds that "Kelsey Tires has received numerous

1978-82 CORVETTE

OEM TIRES BY SIZE, MODEL YEAR AND RPO

TIRE SIZE		MODEL YEAR & TIRE RPO					COMMENTS
Original	Service Replacement	'78	'79	'80	'81	'82	
P225/70R15	P225/70R15	QGQ					Goodyear Polysteel Blackwall Radial Tires
P225/70R15	P225/70R15	QGR		QGB		QGR	White letter SBR Tires Raised white block letter reads "Goodyear" and "Polysteel Radial"
P225/60R15	P225/60R15	QBS					White Letter SBR Tires Raised white letter outline reads "Goodyear" and "GT Radial"
P225/60R15	P225/60R15			QXH			White Letter SBR Tires Raised white letter outline reads "Goodyear" and "Eagle GT"

This table shows Corvette RPO options for tires 1978-'82. Shaded cells show tire options QGR and QBS to be reproduced by Kelsey Tire, Inc.

inquiries and interest in the tire over the years."

The 1978 model was the first year Corvette buyers were offered the option to upgrade base radial tires to a performance radial, the QBS P255/60R15. Through 1977, Corvette tire RPOs were cosmetic with options

for white letters, white stripes or the red or gold lines for those early shark cars. These tires lacked performance-matched design. But the introduction of the P-Series radials ushered in a performance tire capable of matching handling performance for the first time in Corvette's 25-year history. The matching

of tire to handling performance persists through the sixth generation with no end in sight. As Kelsey stated, "This is a tire that had to be built."

WHAT WERE THE CHALLENGES?

We asked Kelsey about the challenges of bringing the GT Radial to market.

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He explained the biggest challenge of producing the GT Radial was the belt construction package. The construction of the belts and the cutting of the Kevlar all presented challenges with the tire in the making for over two years. Kevlar was and is used in belt construction due to its strength over steel and its longevity in a tire under load. Goodyear has its own brand name for Kevlar, which is Flexten and appears on the tire. Flexten was embossed on the original and now embosses the 2nd generation GT Radial.

An additional challenge and one critical to the manufacturing process is building a tire that meets USDOT Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 139. As one might expect, tire safety regulations have changed dramatically from the 1970s, and as Kelsey stated, "Today's testing is aggressive compared to 1970s testing."

The new regulations, mandated September 2008, require safety tests for endurance, high-speed, lateral impact, low-pressure, road-hazard impact and bead-unseating, to name a few. In contrast, the original GT Radials met DOT 129 compliance requirements from 1971. In testing, the Kelsey GT Radial complied with all USDOT FMVSS 139 protocols. Embossed labels are used to convey compliance with these tests. But in 1978, much of what we see today was not required, such as safety warning labels and speed rating. Today, an array of tire codes denote regulatory compliance. Students of tire safety and compliance codes will find this tire complies with the safety standards of 2010 but captures the label authenticity of the original GT Radial. GT's successor, the Goodyear Eagle GT, was produced with the 102S speed rating (or 112 mph), a nice omission of authenticity that will keep those nit-pickin' judges on their toes.

But if you are an *aficionado* of Corvette authenticity, don't fret! You can still differentiate an original P255/60 tire from Kelsey's reproduction by the TIN date code. And the Kelsey GT Radial will sport

JOHN KELSEY

John Kelsey, owner and president of Kelsey Tire Inc., is based in Camdenton, Missouri. Kelsey was inducted into the Tire Industry Association Hall of Fame in November 2009. The first to license Goodyear brand classic tires, Kelsey built an industry-leading, worldwide business 39 years ago that specializes in replica Goodyear brand classic, vintage and musclecar tires from the past. He is NCRS member #85 and owns a 1978 Limited Edition Pace Car.

the TPC SPEC 1032. Not all original OEM tires (original equipment manufacturer) had the TPC SPEC 1032 embossed label.

THE BOTTOM LINE: The Kelsey GT Radial is built to the design specifications of the 1978-'79 Goodyear GT Radial but complies with 2008 DOT 139 regulations. Goodyear's P255/60 GT Radials did not have a 2nd generation successor like the Eagle GT, the service replacement for late-model Corvettes. C3 owners with a penchant for authenticity will find the Kelsey GT Radial the replacement tire of choice for those thirty-year-old originals you are never quite sure what to do with – afraid to drive on the road but also afraid to discard with all that tread life left.

It's said a collector car has come of age when the aftermarket begins to manufacture reproduction parts. And so it is with the late-model C3 Corvette. Kelsey Tire has begun production of the P255/60R15 series radial with the Goodyear lettering unique to the 1978-'79 period. This is a tire that had to be built and one you'll wish to own. As a 1978-'79 owner with RPO QBS and a passion for authenticity, you will not want to be seen profiling with anything but the Kelsey 255/60R15 GT Radial. ■

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

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