

## Alignments, Tires & Curves... Oh My!

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After talking a bit about tires a few months ago, let's progress to the next topic... how to maximize the grip from those tires! The amount of tire in contact with the road (the contact patch) is only about the size of your open palm. That's not a lot, so maximizing that contact patch is important for safety, good handling and improved tire wear.

Suspension alignment is really the process of ensuring that the tires are pointed (aligned) the way we want them to be. While there are a number of adjustments, measurements and specifications, we'll deal with the three most important: Camber, Toe and Caster.

Camber – Camber refers to the adjustment of the wheel in the vertical axis. In other words, looking at the tire from in front of the car, is the tire vertical? Camber is considered negative when the top of the tire leans toward the car. Positive Camber is when the top of the tire leans away from car.

We're fortunate that Mazda designed the Miata's suspension with plenty of adjustment. On the other hand, the factory alignment specs are pretty wide.

y didn't specify Driving season's here! As I write this, our first club drive is next weekend. There will be plenty more as the season progresses. I hope everyone is ready and rarin' to go! As driving season kicks off, let's review a few items that are important to keep in mind when driving with, or leading a group.

Before I forget, I have a correction to make. In last month's installment, we talked about tires. For some inexplicable reason I mentioned the Toyo T1S... which has been replaced with the even better T1R. If you're looking for those Toyo's, ask for the T1R to get the latest and greatest. Also, there are many good tires out there, too many to have been included in the list. Don't be shy about asking around for recommendations or doing a little on-line research.

Ok, so the cardinal rule of group driving is: Keep the person BEHIND you in sight. If everyone does this, no one gets left behind and the leader doesn't run off.

If available, use walkie-talkies to stay in touch and advise the group of upcoming turns, road conditions, etc. Be sure to decide a frequency and tell everyone BEFORE you leave.

Don't dawdle! Keep up with the car in front of you... maintaining a safe distance of course! :O) Be ready to get through an intersection, stop sign, etc. before it's your turn. Keep an eye on what's going on ahead of you so you're ready to cross when it's your turn. Don't get so far behind that you have to drive super fast to catch up. Stay close in the first place.

Don't leave 'em behind! If you're leading, watch for the folks behind getting caught up in traffic or caught crossing intersections. It seems pretty simple, but a 15-30 second delay getting across an intersection can mean a quarter-mile to half-mile gap. If you're doing 60mph and they're doing 65mph, it'll take them **6 minutes** to make up a half-mile gap.

Two or three cars can often get through traffic more quickly than one. If you're running in the rear of a 2 or 3-car group, anticipate when the leader may need to change lanes. Make the lane change before he does, giving him a clear, easy lane change. This is called "clearing his six". You'll be surprised how well a small group can maneuver, truckers do it all the time.

If you're having a "spirited" drive with friends, consider having a checkpoint every so often where you stop for a few minutes and let everyone catch up. Turning from one road to another is an ideal place to do this. That way, each person can drive at their own pace and the person in front doesn't have to be concerned about losing anyone.

Remember, no racing on the street, save that for the track or the autocross course. Always leave yourself a little room for error, even on roads you know very well. You never know when you might find a little sand/gravel in a corner or when that deer might decide to cross the road at the last moment.

Now let's get out there and drive. Here's hoping everyone has a fun, safe Miata season! Zoom, Zoom!

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