

Get your staff up to speed on tyre sales and safety

Earlier this month, a group of safety-savvy car dealership staff took a trip to Bruntingthorpe Proving Ground to get to grips with the benefits of high-quality tyres.

The event at the Leicestershire test track, which saw sales managers get behind the wheel to experience the benefits of traction and safety offered by some of the market's most sophisticated rubber, was hosted by Continental.

Designed to improve retailers' engagement with their tyre sales and equip them with a product knowledge that could increase profits as well as the safety of their customers, it forms part of the German tyre specialist's 'Vision Zero' programme.

Echoing Volvo's drive to prevent all fatalities on the roads by 2020, Vision Zero brings together different strands of the business in the name of safety.

Peter Robb, Continental's UK marketing and communications manager, said: "Continental is one of the largest automotive suppliers in the world now, certainly in the top three.

"Just about the only thing we don't produce is the shell of the car. Tyres currently account for about a quarter of our business. One third of all new cars in Europe roll off the production line wearing Continental tyres."

Apart from its tyre division, Continental has four other automotive divisions: powertrain; interior – producing technology as varied as satnavs and massage seat systems; chassis and safety – engineering radar, autonomous emergency braking and anti-lock brake systems; and ContiTech.

Also among its current projects is an

autonomous car programme, which has resulted in the 'cruising chauffeur' concept, a self-driving Chrysler 300C that has been testing in the Nevada desert since Continental won the first automotive supplier licence to test in the state in 2012.

By then, Continental had already been working on the long and short-range radar systems behind the vehicle for six years.

Robb said: "More than any other manufacturer we understand the real breadth of car tech. This benefits our work with tyres, but the fact that we make all these safety systems means that we will have the ability to positively influence the elimination of deaths and then any kind of injury on the roads."

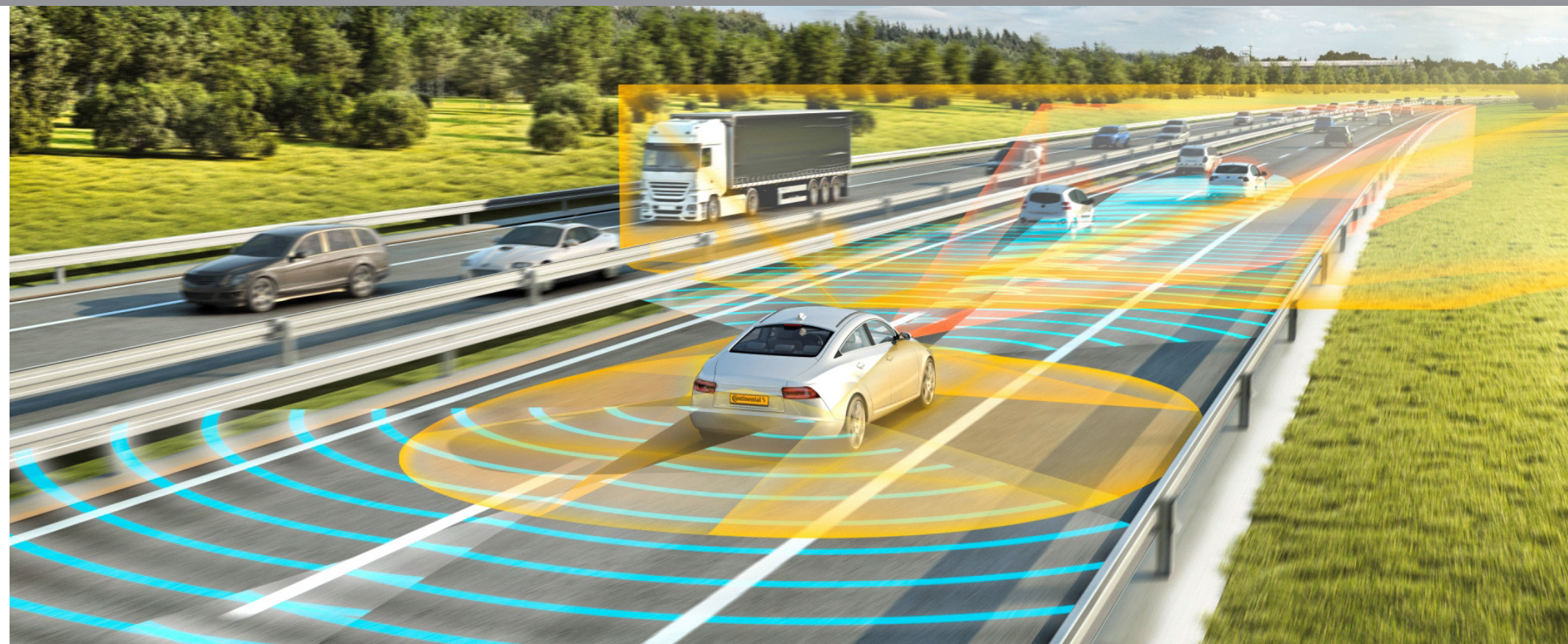
The brand is keen to educate car dealers in the benefits of selling manufacturer-approved tyres to customers, encouraging an investment that could not only benefit their bottom line, but road safety too.

Robb acknowledges that retailers have a challenge on their hands.

Earlier this year, a survey of 2,000 consumers by Thatcham Research found that as many as nine million drivers were unwilling to pay extra for safety features on their car. The take-up of optional safety equipment remains at just 3.5%, if found.

Matthew Avery, director of research at Thatcham Research, said: "Our good safety intentions seem to evaporate on arriving at the dealership. Safety should be a deal-breaker, not a 'nice-to-have'."

Robb agreed: "Most people spend a lot of money on a new car and then go and fit the cheapest tyres they can find when it comes to replacing them.



"They have to be made to understand that a quality item is key to their safety. This is four postage-stamp-sized patches that dictate how effectively their vehicle turns and stops.

"Even through large dealer groups where large numbers of nearly new cars coming through the workshops, many are already fitted with non-OEM-approved tyres so there is clearly a real educational job to be done around the importance of high-quality tyres."

The UK tyre market is a crowded space – Continental said there may be as many as 300 brands battling for a share of an estimated 38 million tyre sales a year.

Few tyre-makers expose themselves to the three years of rigorous testing required to gain manufacturer approval. Continental recommends that all franchised dealers advocate tyres bearing an "OE" stamp.

It is keen to deliver its know-how to UK retailers and increase the share of business commanded by its premium offering. Franchised dealers' share of the UK replacement market is 7%, compared with 13-15% in the rest of Europe, according to Robb.

One part of improving sales among new car dealerships is Continental's Shared Resource programme, which incorporates its Tyre Trade Management (TTM) scheme. Led by sales manager Simon Clark and free to dealer groups, Shared Resource has been implemented in more than 250 dealerships, reaching 1,300 network staff and creating a dedicated "tyre champion" within each group.



On-site workshops, online training and experience days, such as the event held at Bruntingthorpe, are all part of the scheme, which improves product knowledge, advises dealers how best to sell the benefits of a premium tyre and also offers advice on stocking and marketing.

Robb was unwilling to share details of the benefits experienced by participating dealers, but Roy Stokes, group tyre manager

at Listers Group, said: "TTM provided flexibility in learning, the modules were comprehensive, providing an all-round training experience. I would have no hesitation in recommending TTM Online."

Robb said the TTM scheme was currently active with 125 dealerships, but he hoped for greater adoption.

One of the hurdles the scheme has had to overcome is the difficulty faced by dealers

in extracting from their systems the information the scheme needed to provide accurate advice.

"We have seen quite clearly that we can add real value to dealer groups, particularly those of five sites or more, where the complexity of stocking and sales means real gains are possible with the right approach," said Robb.

"The scheme is a partnership, though, so we do ask for some of the data about levels of business passing through the workshop and what tyres are selling to inform our advice. That can prove an issue for some operators."

Continental is keen to demonstrate that it is putting dealerships on the path to a more efficient tyre business that is a benefit to customers service as well as a retailer's bottom line.

Robb said: "Franchised dealers have an awful lot to think about, we understand that, but tyres are another area where they can compete with a high quality of service."

"Sound advice on tyres will not only make our roads safer, but it can increase sales and provide another reason for customers to return to workshops again and again."

SOUND ADVICE ON TYRES WILL NOT ONLY MAKE OUR ROADS SAFER, BUT CAN INCREASE SALES AND PROVIDE ANOTHER REASON FOR CUSTOMERS TO RETURN **PETER ROBB, CONTINENTAL**

For more on Continental's Shared Resource programme, please contact Simon Clark at: simon.clark@conti.de

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