



Ancillary F1 - Bridgestone

Welcome to the first episode of the Sidepodcast mini-series: Ancillary F1. This series aims to look a little bit closer at the companies involved in Formula 1, the names you might hear around the paddock, but that aren't directly competing. Today we're looking at Bridgestone.

Bridgestone's origins began, believe it or not, as a footwear company. Shojiro and Tokujiro Ishibashi started putting rubber soles on shoes back in the 1920s and they soon worked their way up to rubber tyres. The name comes from the English translation of Ishibashi – which means stone bridge. They reversed it, and the company flourished.

Despite the war, Bridgestone survived, and in 1950 they made a deal with Goodyear to once more enter the tyre industry. In the 70s, the automotive industry went through a massive boom, and by the 80s, Bridgestone was becoming a worldwide brand. Towards the end of the 80s, they bought out Firestone, who were already running tyres in Formula 1.

Bridgestone were dominating the karting industry, and expanding into Formula 2 and F3000. With the Firestone acquisition they had the connections but the money wasn't there. Finally, in 1996, Bridgestone joined forces with the Arrows F1 team, and started winning over other competitors. Goodyear left the sport in 1998, which left Bridgestone as the sole tyre supplier. Michelin joined the fun in 2001, but just five years later, they left again, meaning F1 is once again supplied only by Bridgestone.

F1 tyres are made near Tokyo, where they are designed and tested, analysed and refined. There are many different materials that go into the makeup of a tyre, rubber, obviously, but also, oil, carbon, and steel. Approximately 60,000 tyres are produced each year and they go on an incredible journey from the moment they are made. Upon leaving the factory, the tyres are given an FIA barcode, and a number which makes each one individually identifiable. That way they can be tracked and allocated correctly to the teams. For European races, the tyres are shipped to Bridgestone's racing base at Langley, in the UK, before being transported to the Grand Prix destinations.

Bridgestone control the fitting of the tyres to the team-supplied rims, and have to start the process on the Wednesday before a race weekend. The defending championship team gets first priority, and so on down the previous years finishing order. The tyres are delivered to the teams, and monitored throughout use. If a tyre fails during a session, either from a puncture or otherwise, they are quick to collect the tyre from the team, wrap it, and take it away for analysis. This can be done initially at the track, but the defective tyre will most likely be sent back to Langley, and in extreme cases, to Japan.

As a race weekend progresses, Bridgestone stockpile up the used tyres and return them to the UK base. These can be used for analysis purposes and many are recycled.

For the future, Bridgestone have been developing the slick tyres that return to F1 in 2009. We've also recently found that they will be seriously investigating the possibility of a single wet tyre, to cover all wet conditions, rather than the two specifications that are currently used. Whatever direction the sport goes in for the future, it looks like Bridgestone are here to stay.

That's it for this first episode of Ancillary F1. I'd love to hear your feedback on this show, and what you think about Bridgestone. You can call our voicemail on 0121 28 87225, leave a comment on the blog or email me Christine @ sidepodcast.com. I will be back tomorrow with another episode and another company.