

# WHICH COMPANY MAKES THE MOST TYRES ?

*By Neville Barlow*

You would imagine that the main contenders would be Pirelli, Michelin or Dunlop.

Pirelli has 19 manufacturing sites around the world and 10,000 distributors. It is currently the only supplier of tyres to Formula One motor racing. They are also major manufacturers in the motorcycle segment.

Michelin manufactures tyres for the space shuttles, aircraft, automobiles, motorcycles and heavy equipment. They own in the U.S.A, B F Goodrich and Uniroyal, along with other brands.

Dunlop tyres are manufactured around the world by subsidiaries in North America, Australia and Europe. Also, in India by Dunlop India, in Japan, Asia and Africa.

All these manufacturers pale alongside the real major maker of tyres. Even the mighty Bridgestone is left trailing in the mist by the real winner, which is LEGO. Yes, the amazing maker of the children's building blocks. They make 320 million tyres each year for their models, far outstripping Michelin that make 170 million. LEGO's tyres are not strictly auto tyres but they are black and definitely rubber and fit the wheels of vehicles. The LEGO factories have to produce tyres 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, just to keep up. In 2012 They were awarded the Guinness World Record for the largest tyre manufacturer. Today the number has more than doubled.

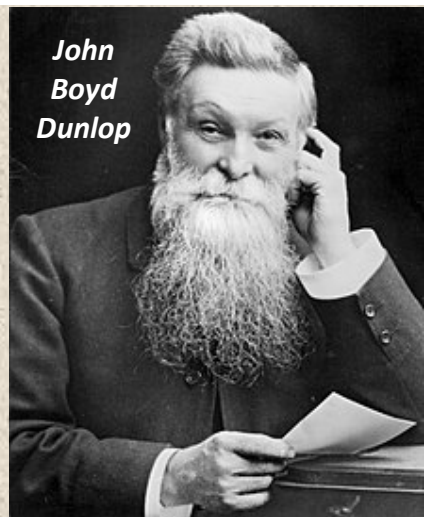


***Dunlop's first bike***

John Boyd Dunlop patented the pneumatic tyre in 1888 inspired by watching his son bumping across cobbles on his tricycle. His claim was rescinded because of the earlier claim by Robert William Thompson. He came up with the idea of an inner air-filled tube in 1847 but the strong thin rubber needed was too expensive to put into production. Dunlop tyres, however, revolutionised cycling and the car industry.

However, rubber wheels on toys are much older than LEGO or Dunlop. When the Spanish first made contact with the Mayans of Central America in 1511, they found children's play things with rubber wheels but no one at the time made the connection for barrows, carts or chariots.

In the 1920's Henry Ford of the Ford Motor Company became disturbed by the monopoly that the British had over the supply of rubber. Desperately he sought another source and found one in the Amazon forests. He negotiated with the Brazilian government and won a concession over an area of 2.5 million acres. In 1928 two merchant ships loaded with equipment and building supplies, enough to build a town to accommodate 2000 workers who it was envisaged would work in the plantation. This place was called Fordlandia.



**John  
Boyd  
Dunlop**

Henry Ford was sceptical of any so-called experts and therefore did not seek

the opinion of any one who knew about rubber trees. Difficulties arose from the very start of the operations. The Americans decreed that the workers must live like Americans, eat like Americans and adopt a strict social life.

The second problem was the over 7,000 rubber trees were planted in a sandy soil, totally unsuitable to their needs.



They were also planted too close to each other and leaf blight soon struck and quickly moved from tree to tree. In the forest rubber trees are protected by other bigger trees and most are found some distance apart. Very soon all trees lost their leaves and looked like skeletons and died.

In 1930 the workers rebelled and the Brazilian Army had to restore order. Fordlandia was abandoned and another site was tried, however, synthetic rubber had arrived, reducing the demand for natural rubber. Ford sold both towns they had set up back to the Brazilian government for a loss of US\$20 million. (\$208 million in 2013 dollars)

Small communities in Vietnam are benefitting from renewed interest in wild rubber.

Young men are going into the forest and bleeding these trees for their own personal wealth. In the past prosperity was gauged when one owned a moped, now it is by the ownership of a new 4-wheel drive Ute or SUV.

*Neville*

## **Fordlandia**

