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FILL 'EM UP

*Pompano
Beach firm
builds on
nitrogen
technology*



Kreska Technologies President Jay Lighter operates the NitroFill machine at EF Tire and Auto

BY JOHN T. FAKLER

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This product isn't just a lot of hot air.

As of March 22, more than 100 dealers are offering Jay Lighter's nitrogen-based alternative to tire inflation. The product purports its 95 percent pure nitrogen delivers better gas mileage, improved performance and handling, extended tread life and requires less maintenance than those filled with just air, Lighter said.

The NitroFill program, distributed by Pompano Beach-based Kreska Technologies, is a key component in inspiring customer loyalty, a huge focus in the auto service industry, said Lighter, the company's president, who also runs EF Tire and Auto Repair in the same city.

"We need a Web guy," said Lighter, whose business, launched in July, is looking to already expand. "We are looking for sales people all the time."

Lighter, who sells mostly to auto dealers such as Fort Lauderdale-based AutoNation (NYSE: AN), said that, starting at \$3,000, the company provides a turnkey system that includes generator, on-site product and sales training, e-mail service reminders, regional and national marketing, product development and industry newsletters and use of business analysis software.

Car dealers have quickly jumped on board using the product, Lighter said, while tire dealers are taking a back seat, waiting for people to demand it.

AutoNation, for example, is "preloading new cars with NitroFill," he said.

Nitrogen has been the choice for tire inflation of NASCAR, Formula One, the Tour

de France, the U.S. military, even the Moon Buggy, the company said. With consumers still leery of recent Firestone tire explosions, Lighter hopes to capitalize on the growing trend for tire safety.

"It makes sense to have a government mandate that tires are filled with nitrogen; it's so much safer," said Lighter, adding that most of the Firestone blowouts were the result of low tire pressure.

One industry trade organization and one major tire manufacturer appear to support Lighter's business model. The Tire Retread Information Bureau (TRIB) said nitrogen inflation helps optimize tire costs while providing environmental benefits.

TRIB, a nonprofit, member-supported industry association dedicated to tire maintenance and the recycling of tires through retreading and repairing, said the most-critical factor for maximizing tire life and minimizing the chance of catastrophic tire failure is maintaining the proper inflation pressure for a given tire size and load. Properly inflated tires not only last longer, but also are safer, TRIB said.

"One way to help maintain proper tire inflation is to fill tires with nitrogen, instead of compressed air. Nitrogen allows a tire to retain more of its original properties."

Less pressure loss, longer tread life

Among the benefits of nitrogen inflation: less inflation pressure loss for a more stable, consistent tire pressure; cooler-running tires; longer tread life; less oxidation of tire components; and reduced rim and wheel corrosion. The result is increased tire life, improved fuel economy, reduced tire aging and a more durable casing for improved retreadability.

Tires inflated with air tend to run hotter

and fluctuate in pressure more, according to Bridgestone tire FAQ: "That's why racers where fractions of PSI can radically change handling, are inflated with dry nitrogen."

Lighter said his focus is on the benefit to dealers such as tires shops, auto repair centers, car dealerships and quick service centers like Jiffy Lube. His product is in more than 100 dealerships, he said, despite being to reveal current revenue, though he recently inked several distribution deals.

South Florida is his busiest region, Lighter said, followed by North Carolina, California and Pennsylvania.

"It's pretty hard pavement pounding," Lighter said. "People don't call up and ask for like this. The industry understands how valuable it is, but they have struggled to make a business case for it."

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