

# “Blackwalls Rule” by Richard Lentinello

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There’s been a friendly debate going on recently in Recaps about the pros and cons of wide whitewall tires. Some of the owners like them; others don’t. In our country’s grand democratic system, it’s good that we can choose to do what we want without being told otherwise. Freedom to choose is what makes living here so wonderful and what makes the collector car hobby so interesting and entertaining.

I’ve always been a huge fan of backwall tires, and I vowed long ago, back when I was a teenager, never to have any of my cars fitted with whitewall tires, be that band of white narrow or wide. I just don’t like the way they look. Whenever I see a car fitted with wide whitewall tires, I can’t help but think, “There goes another fine automobile rolling on fat, spongy marshmallows.” The cars look as if they’re suspended off the pavement, protected from touching the asphalt by a pair of caring clod hands. But what I find most upsetting is just how feminine wide whitewalls make a car look. Yep, feminine. As in girly-girl. To my eyes cars shod with blackwall tires look truly masculine, with a toughness that most men can readily appreciate.

A car is a mechanical object, so why doll it up with pretty decorations that only distract from its utilitarian good looks? Cars fitted with wide whitewalls remind me of a cheap hooker all dolled up with three pounds of makeup and a sequined skirt to make her look attractive. In many cases, not only do these tacked-on decorations not work, but they make them look far uglier than if they didn’t wear any makeup at all. Embellishment for the sake of embellishment is counterproductive. Whenever I travel down to Brooklyn and go to Spumoni Gardens for a couple of squares, it’s considered a sin to add extra cheese to what is regarded as the world’s best-tasting Sicilian pizza. That delicious taste of fresh tomatoes and



savory mootsa-rella just can’t be beat, so why ruin it with frivolous dressing?

Same with a car.

Wide whitewalls distract from a car’s natural beauty. They draw your eye away from the car’s shape, with a “hey, look at me” attitude that reminds me of an annoying rug rat that never stops screaming because he’s desperate for attention. Blackwall tires let me view a car’s lines and body design the way its stylists intended it to be viewed. The blackwalls disappear into background, allowing the design of the body to take center stage, and to be appreciated for what it is. Admiring the flow of the fender, the crease of the beltline, the attractive trim and the way the styling affects the body’s proportions just can’t be done to the same level of honest enjoyment when wide whitewalls sidetrack your vision.

My disdain for whitewalls goes beyond the four-inch-wide variety, but also includes the thin whitewalls that became so popular in 1961. Even when I was a kid and spent many Saturdays cleaning my dad’s 1958 Oldsmobile 88 or his 1970 Buick Electra 225, I always wanted to spray-paint those whitewalls, and thought it was a sign of middle class success, as opposed to these cheap cars with their plain-looking blackwalls.

A Shelby Cobra or G.T. 350 Mustang wearing Good-year bluestreaks looks perfectly normal; Pontiac GTOs and Firebirds, along with Triumph TR6s, look great with redlines. For some reason, that thin bead of color enhances the appearance of those cars, without distracting from their good looks.

For those fans of the wide-whitewall look, rest assured that I would never let my own prejudices against those unsightly tires prevent us from featuring cars so equipped. As you all have seen in this magazine, we regularly feature cars-and now trucks-wearing wide whites, and we will continue to do so. When I view the photos of these cars, I have to squint my eyes and try to imagine just how much better that car would look with blackwalls. It always does.

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