

The Promised Land

30 September 2008

After more than a month of driving chicken bus roads, where our typical day's average speed hovered around 20 to 30 kilometers per hour (12.5 - 18.6 mph), it was heaven to be on the Panamericana cruising along at a blistering 80 - 100 kph (49.7 - 62 mph).

We were so enamored with the smooth asphalt and warp speed we were able to more-or-less ignore the pervasive, endless-border-town creepiness of the Panamericana.

As I hummed along with the first music pumped out of the stereo in months, I plotted the hundreds of kilometers we'd make in the remaining hours of the day. I planned to drive deep into the night to make up for the many hours of errands and provisioning we expended before our departure.

My mental map was well up the coast toward our destination at a small coastal village for a GivingPictures project when my daydreams were shattered by an explosion from the rear of the Fuso.

I dropped off the throttle and gently applied the brakes, working our way onto the narrow shoulder. I had to wait for a truck passing no more than a foot (.3 m) away before I could open the cab door and run back.

At my first safe opportunity, I sprinted down the driver's side of the truck. The outer duallie was good. I ran to the rear, dropped down and looked back toward the front of the truck, the inner duallie was OK too. I jumped over to the passenger side and there it was, the inner tire was shredded. Exploded. Disintegrated.

And there we were, with one multiple-patched spare and the other multiple-patched spare with a split sidewall, its sidewall patch nothing more than a symbolic statement that the tire could still hold air as long as no weight was placed on it.

I looked up and down the desolate stretch of the Panamericana. A bus roared by at 120+ kph, barely making a dent in the steady-state force 8 winds peppering me with sand.

I glanced to west, and then held my arm out, palm inward. There were four fingers between the horizon and the sun.

"We've got about an hour," I grimly said to Steph.

Her hazel eyes, windows to her moods, hardened into a determined gray.

We went to work.

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S7.49688 W79.41186

First look.



Photo by Douglas Hackney

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Neither of us saw any road debris, so we think this tire, the inner duallie, just disintegrated.

When the inner tire blew it took a chunk out of the tread of the outside tire (not pictured), but we didn't have a spare to replace that one. We would need to crawl back to Trujillo and hope it stayed together.



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

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What an exploding tire will do to a heavy gauge stainless steel fender liner.



Photo by Douglas Hackney

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The tire change.



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

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Photo by Stephanie Hackney

The detail.



Photo by Stephanie Hackney

The only vehicle to stop and help pulled up just as I was putting the tools away. Two middle-aged guys wearing crisp white company logoed shirts got out and walked back to us.

Once they found out we were done with the job, the driver told us it was a very dangerous stretch of road. His companion glanced at Steph, back to me, and nodded solemnly. We didn't get the feeling the driver was referring to road debris. The driver, not sure we understood enough Spanish to comprehend our peril, worked his way through a list of nouns and adjectives regarding that stretch of the road. We recognized a few, especially banditos.

Energized with a new sense of purpose, the rest of our tool and equipment stowing was completed in record time.

We climbed into the cab at last light and I started the motor, the truck still pointed north towards our now impossible destination.

We were on a dangerous stretch of road. Our outer, passenger-side duallie tire was damaged. We had no spare tires. We were more than 100 kilometers (66 miles) away from any known safe city. And, it was dark.

I drove forward until we could find a place wide enough to turn around, then we headed back south towards Trujillo, Peru.

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"I'm going to try to make it to that gas station with the restaurant," I said to Steph as I worked up through the gears. She just nodded in agreement, her eyes were glued to the pavement on high alert for road debris.

I leveled out at 60 kph / 40 mph and joined her in the vigil.

Not a word was exchanged as we drove south, neither willing to break concentration. All it would take is a piece of sharp metal, even a pointed rock, and we would be stranded along this highway, at the mercy of the night and its denizens.

Kilometer by kilometer, we moved slowly down the road. We involuntarily flinched at every scrap of paper and grunted at every irregularity in the surface.

The small towns along the road that looked so carefree and inviting on our way north now looked ominous, filled with little but furtive glances and narrow-eyed stares. I locked the doors and we kept moving, ever southward.

After what seemed an eternity, we saw the glow of the gas station on the horizon. We pulled behind a semi and tucked up next to the restaurant in the brightest corner of the parking lot.

We were home, at least for the night.

But, we weren't done. We still had to find eight new tires, tires of a specific size and weight capacity, in a Spanish speaking city in Peru.

Drained by the stress, we collapsed into bed and fell into a fitful sleep.

I awoke with a start. Steph shoved me again, harder this time.

"There's someone beating on the door!" she said urgently.

I could see soft light filtering through the roof vent, so I knew it was early morning.

I scrambled out of the berth and cautiously approached the camper door. I didn't see any human shapes through the milk glass of the door, so I carefully pulled apart the venetian blinds above the sink and peeked out. Standing outside was a security guard, complete with bullet proof vest.

I cracked the door and greeted him with a good morning. He replied with the same, then launched into a few paragraphs of Spanish, of which I caught only two words, banditos and pagar (bandits and pay).

"Un minuto," (one minute) I replied, and closed the door.

I turned to Steph and said, "I think he wants a tip for guarding the camper overnight."

She rolled her eyes and let out a huge sigh of relief.

I scrounged up some change, opened the door and gave the grinning security guard a few Sols. For him, it was a great way to finish his shift.

For me, my shift was just beginning. That day, my job was to locate and procure a complete set of tires for our Fuso.

As I drank my morning tea, I stepped through the logic tree for the coming challenge. Find tire store, yes / no. Suitable tires available, yes / no. Suitable tires available in Lima, yes / no. Time required for shipping from Lima, acceptable / unacceptable. And on and on and on.

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By the time we pulled out of the lot and headed for town I had harvested some suggestions for suitable tires from the online forum I participate in for overland vehicles, Expedition Portal, via our Inmarsat BGAN satellite data system. Armed with some community knowledge and assurances of support, we headed towards Trujillo.

Our first goal was to locate a Goodyear store the driver of the car who stopped to help us suggested. He told us all we had to do was follow the Panamericana south into Trujillo and the Goodyear store should be right there. Of course, my first official act was to take the wrong road into Trujillo and we ended up on the west side of town instead of the north.

Using our standard techniques of logic and asking every available sidewalk stroller and cab driver, we found our way back to the Panamericana. We joined it at an unusual hybrid traffic circle intersection, the only one of its type I've seen anywhere in the world, and I've driven in most of the major cities the planet has to offer. We managed to find our way around it and headed north so we could find the Goodyear store, all the while creeping along, doing our best to nurse our crippled tires through the potholes, speed bumps, broken glass and other typical urban debris.

We drove north slowly, kilometer after kilometer, until we reached the northern edge of the urban area. No Goodyear store. Resigned to our fate, we made a U turn and headed back south, again crawling along and slaloming around what debris we could manage to avoid. Block by block, kilometer by kilometer, we made our way south back into the city. All the while, I was hoping we wouldn't have to drive all the way through the city of nearly 700,000 people. I doubted the outer duallie, damaged in the blowout, would survive it.

We both saw it at the same time, shrieking "Goodyear!" in unison, if not harmony. The sign was huge, towering over the city. It was the tallest sign we'd seen in Trujillo except the giant yellow sign we saw at that strange intersection where we'd rejoined the Panamericana. But, wait, the Goodyear sign was just behind that giant yellow sign. How could that be? That would mean the Goodyear store was, was, was *right on the corner!*

We were sitting at the stop light directly in front of the Goodyear store when we turned left back onto the Panamericana. We were so intent on finding the highway, navigating the bizarre intersection and heading north we completely missed it. We had just driven countless, needless kilometers on at least one tire that was on its very last legs.

I pulled into the Goodyear store's parking lot and looked at Steph. We both laughed.

We had found the Promised Land.

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Photo by Douglas Hackney

The Promised Land

With real truck tires.



Photo by Douglas Hackney

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And even a pneumatic impact wrench, a rarity in our experience with tire shops in Peru.



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They offered to brand our tires for fleet management / inventory control purposes.



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But, since our fleet consists of one (1) vehicle, we thought we could do without it.



Photo by Douglas Hackney

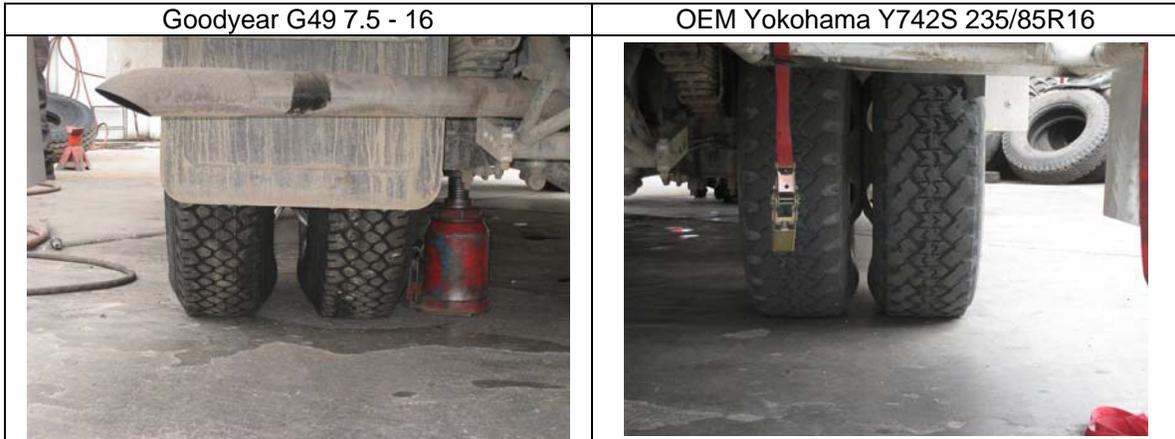
While waiting for the mounting and balancing, we got to see how you set the bead on a tire without a tire machine or a ratchet belt: you fill a tank with air, stick the flattened output tube down into the bead/wheel junction, and open the dump valve.



Photo by Douglas Hackney

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Our new tires are a little bit narrower than the OEMs.



Photos by Douglas Hackney

But, they are load range F versus the OEM tire's E, and increased weight capacity is highly valued in our fleet operation.



Photos by Douglas Hackney

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The team at the Goodyear shop, from the owner to the technician, was efficient, fast and very professional. Within four hours we researched several alternatives, called Lima to check the warehouse, struck out there, selected a different candidate, mounted two of those candidate tires to check clearance at the rear wheel well, mounted the remaining six tires, balanced four wheels and tires, checked the front end on the alignment rack, paid and pulled out.

The Goodyear crew was so efficient we even had time to stop at Sodimac and the grocery store on our way back to the campground we stayed at two nights before. By 5 pm we were parked by the pool, enjoying well deserved sundowners.

It had been a very good visit to the Promised Land.



Photo by Douglas Hackney

The Promised Land

The promised land is at S8.09558 W79.03909 and is known locally as Pimentel (Alfredo Pimentel Sevilla, S.A.), Avenue Nicolas De Pierola No. 1385, Urb. Los Cedros, Trujillo, Peru. Phone: 51.44.222-240; Fax: 51.44.200-670. Email: pierola@pimentel.com.pe or flotas.pier@pimental.com.pe . Web: www.pimentel.com.pe We utilized the Flotas and Minas (Fleets and Mines) department.

The tires we purchased were: rear - Goodyear G46 7.5 x 16, front - Goodyear G32 7.5 x 16. I used a more street oriented tread pattern on the front to reduce the tire noise and that has proven very effective. The two different model tires are matched in size (diameter, loaded radius, etc.) and are designed to work together on the same chassis.

The Expedition Portal forum is located at: <http://www.expeditionportal.com/forum/index.php>



Photo by Jorge Valdes

Douglas and Stephanie Hackney are on a two to three year global overland expedition.

You can learn more about their travels at: <http://www.hackneys.com/travel>