Decoding speed rating marks on tire sidewalls

And why Z is not the ultimate anymore.....

Speed ratings are based on laboratory tests where the tire is loaded against a large diameter metal drum to reflect its appropriate load, and run at increasing speeds in 6.2 mph steps in 10-minute increments until the tire's required speed has been met.

Speed rating markings on tire sidewalls in years past may have appeared in one of three formats, shown by the following examples:

225/50SR16
225/50SR16 89S
225/50R16 89S

Beginning in 1991 to the present, speed ratings are placed immediately following the load index number. For example: 225/50R16 89S.

M	**81 mph**
N	**87mph**
P	**93mph**
Q	**99mph**
R	**106 mph**
S	**112 mph**
T	**118 mph**
U	**124 mph**
H	**130 mph**
V	**149 mph**
W	**168 mph**
Y	**186 mph**
(Y)	**186 mph+**
Z	**149 mph+**

When Z-rated tires were first introduced, they were thought at the time to reflect the highest tire speed rating that would ever be required, with the Z rating indicating that the tire was capable of speeds "in excess of 149 mph."

Eventually, the tire industry added W and Y speed ratings. A Z rating may still appear on the tire on its own (indicating a rating of 149 mph+), but may also appear in addition to a W or Y rating symbol (with W indicating a rating of 168 mph; and Y denoting 186 mph). To make matters even more confusing, some tires may feature a rating symbol of Y (following the load index), with the load index and speed rating encased in parenthesis.

Example: 285/35ZR19 (99Y). If the Y is seen within parenthesis, this indicates a speed rating "in excess of 186 mph."

Tires referred to as "ultra-high performance" include those featuring V, W, Y, (Y) AND Z speed ratings. MAM