

## **Ersatz Rubber in Germany**

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Germany was the third largest importer of natural rubber in 1913 (after the USA and Britain), but it was almost entirely cut from supplies of natural rubber by the Allied naval blockade during the First World War. How did it solve this problem? A very small amount of natural rubber was obtained from stocks seized in occupied countries, seized Allied ships, blockade runners and alternative rubber-yielding plants. Synthetic rubber from acetone was becoming more important just as the war ended but was only ever a partial solution. It also took several months to polymerise. As pneumatic rubber tyres were a new innovation, there was a return to metal and wooden rimmed tyres. Factis (or factice), a vegetable oil based substitute previously used to extend natural rubber, was pressed into use with some success. Reclaimed rubber was also very important, not least to improve and extend synthetic rubber and factis. The crisis had no one solution; it was a combination of restricting consumption, reclaiming natural rubber, factis and synthetic rubber. Interestingly reclaiming, factis and synthetic rubber had all existed before 1914, the war did not introduce any new technologies.