

The Difference Between Rims, Wheels and Hubcaps

When someone is shopping for wheels online and they say they're interested in buying a set of aftermarket rims, we don't raise an eyebrow – even if technically, they actually mean wheels.

But since you're here, you're probably looking for an answer to the following:

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RIMS AND WHEELS?

While “rims” are used both more colloquially and universally when referring to what your vehicle has its tyres mounted on – its wheels – the truth is that a rim is just a part of the wheel. We know it's not the popular way to refer to it, but unless you're talking about this specific area of the wheel, the rim is just the area the tyre goes on, that surrounds the decorative area of the wheel's hub and spokes.

The actual rim is what the tyre is seated on, the circular area that runs circumferential and is connected to the hub by the wheel spokes. For more wheel terminology, check out our tyre and wheel glossary.

However, at the end of the day we're right there with you whether you call them rims or wheels.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CENTER CAPS, HUBCAPS AND WHEEL COVERS?

The difference between a wheel's centre cap and a hubcap is simple: the centre cap usually bears the wheel's manufacturer name or logo, and is secured onto the hub by clips or screws, while a hub cap is normally clipped or hammered on in order to cover the lug nuts. When equipped, the wheel holes and spokes remain bare.

A wheel cover is secured similarly, but covers the whole diameter of the wheel. These include plastic imitation spokes that give off the appearance they are the actual wheels.

Wheel covers are generally equipped on entry-level compact and subcompact vehicles, or on base models. It's not uncommon to see cracked or broken wheel covers on the side of the road after they've come flying off of a vehicle after a collision (or even from hard braking). Cracking of the plastic clips that secure the wheel cover from becoming loose over time is also very common.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HUBCAP AND A WHEEL?

As stated above, the hubcap effectively covers the centre portion of the wheel, including the lug nuts and bolt assembly. In the case of comparing a hubcap with either an aftermarket or OE wheel, a hubcap is an attachment to the wheel and rim assembly itself.

For what it's worth, aftermarket wheels generally will not require a hubcap, instead using branded centre caps to cover the bolt assembly.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU DAMAGE A WHEEL, RIM OR HUBCAP?

If you damage a hubcap or wheel cover, finding a replacement can be difficult and expensive, especially if you're looking for an OEM-version. While it's still an option, we recommend simply opting for replacement aftermarket wheels altogether.

Along with performance, aesthetic and fuel economy benefits, putting on aftermarket wheels will also likely increase the resale value of your vehicle when the time comes for an upgrade – especially over factory wheels that use hubcaps or wheel covers.

And if you ding, scratch, rub or otherwise damage a wheel or rim, you still have several options to choose from.

First off, some wheel materials can either be buffed out or straightened, depending on the location and severity of the damage. However, other materials like chrome will either have to be treated at a specialized wheel repair shop. While painted wheels may simply be able to be colour matched and sprayed over again, some curb rash just simply can't be fixed.

When it comes to actual structural damage, such as bent or cracked spokes, concave dents in rims from impact with a pothole, curb or debris in the road – it's more than likely that the whole wheel will need to be replaced.

On top of this, if that kind of impact is able to damage a wheel badly enough that it needs to be replaced, it may be time to check your vehicle's alignment and suspension. When a vehicle is out of alignment not only can it affect overall drivability and ride comfort, but it can also cause premature and uneven tyre wear.

In the meantime, if you're in the market for new wheels or "rims" for your car, truck, trailer or SUV, browse our wheel inventory online or give us a call on [08 8371 5711](tel:0883715711), email us at sales@wheelworx.com.au or submit an online enquiry. We are here to help!