

MARKED UP COPY OF CLAIMS:

WE CLAIM:

1. (Original) A method for preparing a tread for application to a tire carcass, the method comprising:
  - providing a tread having:
    - a thickness extending depthwise between a top side configured to engage a ground surface during tire operation and a bottom side configured to attach to a tire carcass;
    - the tread thickness extending in a longitudinal direction and in a lateral direction between opposing sides of the tread;
    - the tread further including a void extending within the tread thickness and an extension of the tread extending across a width of the void and having a portion protruding outwardly from the tread bottom side by a distance;
    - stretching the tread such that the width of the void increases and the distance by which the extension protrudes from the bottom side decreases; and,
    - abrading the bottom side of the tread.
2. (Original) The method of ~~claim~~ as claimed in claim 1, the void comprises a groove.
3. (Original) The method of ~~claim~~ as claimed in claim 2, the groove extending into the tread thickness from the top side between the top side and the extension.
4. (Original) The method of ~~claim~~ as claimed in claim 2, the groove extending lengthwise in a longitudinal direction of the tread, the tread being stretched in a lateral direction in the step of stretching.
5. (Original) The method of ~~claim~~ as claimed in claim 1, where the step of abrading is performed with at least a portion of the protruding portion positioned within the void.
6. (Currently Amended) The method of ~~claim~~ as claimed in claim 1, where the extension is stretched during the step of stretching.
7. (Original) The method of ~~claim~~ as claimed in claim 1, where the step of stretching repositions at least a portion of the protruding portion within the void.

8. (Original) The method ~~of claim as claimed in claim 1~~ further comprising the step of:  
applying an abrading member to the bottom side, the abrading member deflecting at least a portion of the protruding portion of the extension into the void.
9. (Original) The method ~~of claim as claimed in claim 1~~ further comprising the step of:  
supporting the top side of the tread while performing the step of abrading.
10. (Original) The method ~~of claim as claimed in claim 1~~, the tread having a length extending between a pair of opposing terminal ends.
11. (Original) The method ~~of claim as claimed in claim 1~~ further comprising the step of:  
constraining opposing portions of the tread prior to stretching the tread.
12. (Original) The method ~~of claim as claimed in claim 11~~, the step of constraining being performed by grasping at least one of the opposing portions.
13. (Original) The method ~~of claim as claimed in claim 12~~, where the grasping is performed by a pair of opposing clamps.
14. (Original) The method ~~of claim as claimed in claim 12~~, where the step of stretching includes moving a constraining member used to constrain one of the opposing portions of the tread.
15. (Original) The method ~~of claim as claimed in claim 1~~ further comprising the step of:  
conveying the tread to and from one or more stretching members for performing the step of stretching.
16. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for abrading a bottom side of a tread comprising:  
an abrading member configured to abrade the bottom of a tread;  
a pair of tread constraining units configured to engage opposing, spaced apart portions of the tread;  
a means for stretching the tread wherein at least one of the pair of tread constraining units is moveable and the means for stretching is configured to move the at least one of the pair of tread constraining members away from the other tread constraining unit.

17. (Currently Amended) The apparatus ~~of claim as claimed in claim~~ [[13]]16, wherein the abrading member is a rotational abrading member.
18. (Currently Amended) The apparatus ~~of claim as claimed in claim~~ [[13]]16, wherein at least one of the pair of tread constraining units is a tread grasping member.
19. (Cancelled) ~~The apparatus of claim as claimed in claim 13, wherein at least one of the pair of tread constraining units is moveable and the means for stretching is configured to move the at least one of the pair of tread constraining members away from the other tread constraining unit.~~
20. (Original) The apparatus ~~of claim as claimed in claim~~ 16, wherein the pair of tread constraining units comprises a pair of clamps.
21. (Currently Amended) The apparatus ~~of claim as claimed in claim~~ [[13]]16 further comprising:  
a conveyor configured to transfer the tread to and from the abrading member.
22. (Currently Amended) The apparatus ~~of claim as claimed in claim~~ [[21]]20, where each of the pair of clamps is operably connected to a conveyor configured to transfer the tread to and from the abrading member.