

## THE OLDER DRIVER

Growing older should never be taken as an indicator of reduced driving ability, and no individual should have a licence taken away from them solely because of age.

However, there is evidence that for many drivers the skills necessary for safe driving begin to decline at about age 60 and decline quickly after about age 75.

There is also evidence that older drivers can cope safely with this decline provided they take steps to limit the way any change in function, affects their driving.

The older driving population can suffer from a variety of conditions that may affect their operation of a motor vehicle (Psychomotor Skills) and ability to make sound decisions (Cognitive Skills) as well as reduce their ability to perceive the driving environment accurately (Perceptual Skills)

These can be placed into two categories: Medical and Non Medical Barriers.

Some of the medical barriers that confront the older driver are:

- Vision loss
- Slow reaction time
- Limited mobility
- Various medications
- Dementia and early Alzheimer's disease.

Non medical barriers to safe vehicle operation and actually hinder the older driver includes:

- Seating position of the driver. e.g. Seats that cannot accommodate a person's shape, size, medical condition or provide comfort to the operator.
- Illogical ergonomics regarding the operating switches and instrument panel.
- Seat belts that are difficult to use because of limited mobility.
- Visibility problems due to vehicle structure. i.e. pillar post placement, high dashboards etc.
- Exterior design problems like large hoods, heavy and cumbersome doors and operating a vehicle too large in size.
- Roadway engineering such as traffic control signs, worn road markings.
- No self assessment or self regulation by the older driver in relation to safety, i.e. is driving at night a problem? And being aware of the changing rules and laws pertaining to driving.

## **Biological and Physical Impairments**

### **Mobility problems:**

- moving arms, legs and head decline with age
- Reflex and reaction time slower.
- Peripheral vision deteriorates: e.g. the ability to notice vehicles around them or in their blind spot and leaving driveways or pulling away from intersections.

### **Answers to some of the older driver's problems are:**

- Receive regular medical / visual assessments and advice regarding medications from your doctor / pharmacist.
- Drive a vehicle that suits their size or make the proper adjustments prior to driving.
- Look for accessories that will help them to accommodate to any Physical impairments.
- Get a professional to evaluate their driving ability and be open to suggestions that may help or improve their safety.
- Stay informed of rule changes or traffic control signs.
- Choose safer and less congested routes (plan your routes)
- Use exits with traffic lights rather than exits into moving traffic (It is hard to judge space plus slower exits impede other road users.)
- Eliminate distractions inside the vehicle and don't get involved in your passengers conversation.

**\* By the year 2020 the number of drivers over the age of 70 will have doubled.**