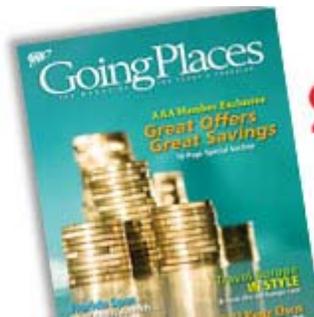




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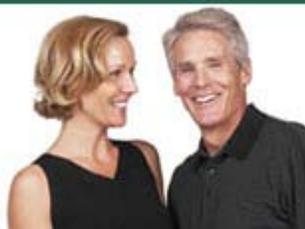
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Vehicle Features for Boomers... And Beyond

By Peter Bohr

Sixty may be the new 50, as baby boomers want to believe. But by age 40, we begin to lose a little of our mental sharpness. The thought process slows, and it becomes more difficult to juggle several tasks at once. By age 40, night vision and sensitivity to contrasting shades decline. Ninety percent of people over 50 require bifocal glasses to improve their vision.



Car interiors are becoming more senior friendly.

After age 50, reaction times can slow markedly—that is, our ability to see something, recognize it and take action. By age 60, muscle strength and range of motion decrease by as much as 25 percent, making it more difficult to turn our head to look over a shoulder, for instance. By age 70, many are afflicted with arthritic joints, making movement painful. Other ailments associated with aging—stroke, Parkinson's, diabetes—can compound the effects of the natural aging process.

To assist older drivers in selecting their next vehicle, AAA, together with the National Older Driver Research and Training Center at the University of Florida in Gainesville, identified some features on



Top Car Color in 2007

After seven years wearing color crown, silver has been dethroned.

For the first time this century more white cars were manufactured in 2007 than those in any other color, according to DuPont's most recent color study.

In North America, 19 percent of vehicles manufactured in 2007 were either white or "pearl white," which is white with iridescent or metallic sheen. Eighteen percent of 2007 vehicles were silver, and 15 percent were black, including black with metallic effects.

White has also taken a lead in other countries, including Japan and Mexico. In Europe, however, black was the top color, and away from white.

White had an even stronger showing among luxury cars where it made up 22 percent

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newer cars that can be particularly helpful to aging drivers.



Larger dashboard instruments are easier to read.

When it comes to selecting a new vehicle, knowing the features that are available to assist with physical limitations—for any age—can make for a more enjoyable ride over the long term.

Features that are Helpful to Aging Drivers

- **Active head restraints**—This type of restraint moves forward to cushion the head if the car is hit from behind.
- **Adjustable pedals**—With a push of a button, the driver can adjust the accelerator and brake pedals, a feature especially helpful for petite drivers, to reach the pedals while ensuring they are a safe distance (about 12 inches) from the airbag mounted in the steering-wheel hub.
- **Power-operated seats**—These require less strength to adjust. At a minimum, the seats should offer six-way adjustment: forward and backward, up and down, and seatback forward and backward.
- **Large knobs and buttons**—Audio and climate controls with large features are easier to see, and thus less distracting.
- **Large/wide-angle mirrors**—For those who have difficulty turning or twisting to look to the rear when changing lanes or backing up.
- **Moderate step-in height**—A low-slung sports car may look snazzy, but it requires extra strength and flexibility to get into and out of the vehicle. Likewise, a tall SUV requires extra effort to climb up into a seat.
- **Four doors**—Though not as sporty, four-door models make entry and exit easier, especially if the car has a rear seat. Two-door cars also have longer, heavier doors, requiring more strength to open and close.
- **Keyless entry**—Operated by a push-button on the key fob, this feature is good for those with arthritic hands who find it painful to twist a key.
- **Keyless ignition**—Utilizing a dash-mounted push-button instead of a traditional key, keyless ignition is beneficial to those with stiff or painful fingers.
- **Tilt/telescoping steering wheel**—The extra adjustments help the driver find a safe distance from the front airbag, as well as a comfortable position that alleviates knee, back, hip, neck or shoulder pain.
- **Brake assist**—Like the term implies, it helps the driver generate enough force during emergency braking to stop the car in time to prevent a collision.
- **Low trunk height**—Lower access to a trunk, as well as a wide opening, make it easier to load and unload heavy parcels.
- **Anti-lock brakes**—ABS prevents the wheels from locking during hard braking, helping the driver retain steering control and eliminating the need to "pump" the brakes, an action that might be challenging for some older drivers.
- **Side/side-curtain airbags**—Side airbags protect the torso, pelvis and head. Older, frail adults—more prone to

vehicles manufactured in (5 percent of those were white) and tied with the color black. Silver was the next most common color for luxury cars in 2007, at 20 percent. "Our report is based on quantitative data on paint sold to OEMs [original equipment manufacturers] from production data they share with us, and other sources," says DuPont spokesperson Richard Straitman.

The color white is increasingly dominant, not just in the automotive industry, but in home furnishings, fashion, consumer products, and industrial design, says Leatrice Eiseman, director of the Pantone Color Institute.

White was the most popular color among Chevrolet and Ford buyers, according to Power and Associates' Power Information Network, which tracks consumers' buying habits. Dodge buyers preferred red, while BMW, Cadillac, Lexus, and Mercedes-Benz buyers gravitated toward

White is also a popular color for so-called fleet vehicles, which are cars and trucks used commercially, such as by utility power companies and retail agencies, says Global Insight analyst John Wolkonowicz.

Despite white's victory in 2007, silver will still likely be the dominant color on the road for some time. "Given silver's popularity over the past several years and the fact that it is a popular color choice, you should expect to see a hi

death or injury in crashes than younger people—may especially benefit from additional airbags.

- **Dual-stage/dual-threshold airbags**—The airbag inflation force varies based on driver/passenger weight, distance from airbags and crash severity—important for frail adults who may be injured by airbags that deploy too hard.
- **Stability-control**—Helps prevent loss of control in a turn, especially on slippery roads. It's beneficial to older drivers with slowed reaction times, because it automatically makes quick corrections to keep the car on course.

Peter Bohr is a contributing editor for Road & Track magazine, is the automotive editor of The Press-Enterprise newspaper in Southern California and regularly writes for AAA magazines around the country.

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number of silver vehicles road for the coming years says Karen Surcina, color marketing and technology manager at DuPont.

Considering that the average vehicle is on the road for years, according to U.S. Department of Transportation estimates, it could take a decade or more for silver to start thinning out, and only if the color decrease popularity. "When silver first came on the scene [in the late 1990s], it was a high-tech color that corresponded with people's interest in technology and the future," Surcina says. The tech bubble burst and the economy started to suffer. As time went on, silver became a "safe" color that consumers could opt for and not worry about standing out too much or turning off potential buyers when it came time to resell their vehicles.

Even if white continues to rise in popularity and sparkling metallic particles give the color new life, the trends may not be seen on highways and in driveways for some time. "While the palate-cleansing white is expected to usher in a new era in car colors and iridescent paints, and sparkling metallic particles and unusual effects are gaining popularity among more adventurous types, car buyers are still sticking to safe colors like silver and black," says Christopher L. industry analyst at the Pc

Information Network.

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