



## Some car features make it easier for older drivers

### Senior Lookout

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As we age, a lot of our needs and perceptions change. For example, the car we lusted after during our teenage years might have been a hot rod, or a '65 GTO, or a Corvette, or even a Chevy or Ford (and we all know that's like being a Republican or a Democrat, there's no middle ground) pickup truck.

But, when you get old enough to have a few creaks and twinges, some vehicles might be more appropriate than others, and yet, hopefully, will still come in a package that satisfies even older Americans' love affair with their cars.

The University of Florida National Older Drivers Research and Training Center undertook to determine which features older drivers could benefit from in their cars. As the population ages, this market will need to consider buying automobiles that meet their needs.

According to AARP, many people who are in the 40s already have some additional difficulty driving at night, or recovering from headlight glare. By the 50s, some of them will be wearing bifocals and have diminution of their reaction time. In the 60s, range of motion and muscle strength can have lessened by 25 percent, and by the 70s, many of us have arthritic joints or some limitations in our mobility.

The training center determined that some features that make it easier for older drivers were: six-way power seats, four doors, thicker steering wheels, keyless entry and ignition, power mirrors and windows, larger dashboard controls with contrasting text (buttons instead of knobs), and large wide-angle mirrors.

Edmunds.com is a Web site that provides "unbiased market reviews, ratings and expert advice" about cars. It has listed the following models to be the 10 best new cars for older drivers: Toyota Avalon, Ford 500, Toyota Prius, BMW 7 Series, Toyota Sienna, Pontiac Montana SV6, Buick Lucerne, Honda Civic, Audi 8, and Chrysler 300.

Some of these cars are expensive, some reasonable, but they all have features that will appeal to drivers who need some of the features mentioned above. The Audi retails in the \$50,000 range, but the Buick Lucerne is in the \$29,000 range. The Honda Civic, known as a particularly reliable little car and a gas sipper instead of a gas guzzler, can be had for \$18,000 or less, probably, and is twice as fuel efficient as most of the others, excluding the Prius, which is also in the 40-mpg range. Such cars reduce the largest hidden cost of car ownership, which is fuel.

The bottom line is that whichever car an older driver chooses, it should be comfortable and safe to drive, especially in the presence of any of the normal aging-related changes to perception, reaction time, vision, and ease of operation.

In the next couple of decades, the number of drivers over age 70 in the United States is expected to triple. As a group, they are more likely than any other group, except the very young drivers, to be involved in multiple vehicle crashes, largely due to lessened ability to deal with complex traffic situations and diminished reaction time, etc. If older drivers want to remain on the road and maintain their independence, they can choose to purchase and drive cars that are designed specifically with their needs in mind, in addition to keeping current on driving skills, and taking counsel from others. When family and friends start to comment about your driving, or more pointedly, won't ride as a passenger in your car, it's time to hang up the keys. In the meantime, happy shopping and happy motoring.

Anne Springer is the public relations director for SeniorCare Inc., which serves Beverly, Essex, Gloucester, Hamilton, Ipswich, Manchester, Rockport, Topsfield and Wenham. Its mission is to provide and coordinate services to elders, enabling them to live independently and remain part of their community.

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