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AAA and UF recommend vehicle features for senior drivers

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GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Thicker steering wheels, wide-angle mirrors, larger dashboard controls and six-way adjustable seats are features seniors should consider when choosing a vehicle.

[AAA \[http://www.aaa.com\]](http://www.aaa.com) and the [University of Florida \[http://www.ufl.edu\]](http://www.ufl.edu) [National Older Driver Research and Training Center \[http://driving.php.ufl.edu/\]](http://driving.php.ufl.edu/) are making these and other recommendations for addressing the physical, visual and cognitive changes that affect senior drivers as part of the Smart Features for Mature Drivers program. AAA and UF announced the smart features today (March 21) at the [New York International Auto Show \[http://www.autoshowny.com/\]](http://www.autoshowny.com/).

Reduced range of motion, arthritic joints, diminished fine motor skills and trouble with night vision and recovery from glare are all common age-related physical changes that can affect driving ability. A recent AAA survey found that 43 percent of drivers over 55 suffered from at least one of nine driving-related difficulties commonly caused by aging.

"There are ways to counteract the difficulties brought on by age-related changes so that seniors can maintain their safe driving abilities," said [Dennis McCarthy \[http://agenetwork.php.ufl.edu/training/mccarthy.htm\]](http://agenetwork.php.ufl.edu/training/mccarthy.htm), co-director of the National Older Driver Research and Training Center and a research assistant professor in the [UF College of Public Health and Health Professions' \[http://www.php.ufl.edu/\]](http://www.php.ufl.edu/) [department of occupational therapy \[http://ot.php.ufl.edu/\]](http://ot.php.ufl.edu/). "One of these is through proper use of particular vehicle features."

In 2003 about one in seven licensed drivers was 65 or older. By 2029, that proportion is expected to rise to one in four drivers, according to the [AARP Public Policy Institute \[http://www.aarp.org/research/ppi/\]](http://www.aarp.org/research/ppi/).

"The goal of Smart Features for Mature Drivers is to ensure that mature drivers are comfortable in their vehicles and to keep them driving safely as long as possible," said Desiree Lanford, a UF driving rehabilitation specialist.

Smart Features for Mature Drivers recommends particular vehicle features based on the driver's needs. For example, thick steering wheels, keyless entry and ignition, power mirrors and larger dashboard controls can make driving easier for seniors with arthritic hands or diminished fine motor skills. The doors on four-door models require less strength to open and close than two-door vehicles. Those with limited range of motion in the back, neck, shoulder or arm should consider large, wide-angle mirrors, tilt steering wheels and comfortable, six-way adjustable seats with lumbar support when choosing a vehicle. Seniors with vision issues may benefit from extendable

sun visors and larger dashboard controls with contrasting text.

"The best vehicle features are those that fit the individual person and his or her limitations or needs," Lanford said.

AAA and UF experts also suggest all mature drivers consider proven crashworthiness, antilock brakes, head restraints to reduce the risk of neck injuries, dynamic stability control to help prevent loss of control in a turn, and side and dual-stage or dual-threshold air bags that inflate based on the severity of the crash, lowering the risk of injury if airbags deploy with too much force.

"Safe driving is a function of person, environment and vehicle factors," said Sherrilene Classen, a UF older driver injury prevention researcher and project team member. "The Smart Features for Mature Drivers project recognizes normal age-related changes and provides beneficial vehicle features to accommodate such changes – a critical step in injury prevention."

To learn more about the Smart Features for Mature Drivers program, visit the Web site www.AAA.com/seniors [<http://www.AAA.com/seniors>].

"By providing public services such as Smart Features for Mature Drivers, AAA aims to keep our growing senior population safe behind the wheel," said AAA President and Chief Executive Officer Robert L. Darbelnet. "We encourage older drivers and their families to use this as a guide in the selection of their next vehicle or evaluating their current one."

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Credits

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