

Nearly Nine in 10 Seniors Drive a Car That Doesn't Fit Their Aging Needs

AAA says that 'smart features' available in today's cars can help drivers and their families cope

BOISE – (Dec. 3, 2012) – With 10,000 Americans turning 65 every day and nearly 90 percent of them suffering from health issues that affect driving safety, finding a car that adapts to their conditions need not be difficult – thanks to a new interactive online tool from AAA.

Unfortunately, only one in 10 seniors with aging health issues is currently driving a vehicle that has features like keyless entry and larger dashboard controls that could address their lack of flexibility or muscle strength, while maintaining safety and comfort.

AAA has updated its Smart Features for Older Drivers resource to address a broader range of health conditions. The resource – which is available at AAA Idaho offices in a complimentary brochure form and as an interactive online guide at www.SeniorDriving.AAA.com – has been updated to identify vehicle features and the cars that have them.

"For all the families coping with age-related driving safety issues, the good news is that specific 'smart features' on today's cars can help older drivers deal with a variety of conditions that they commonly experience," said AAA Idaho Public Affairs Director Dave Carlson.

Smart Features addresses common conditions including diminished vision, arthritic joints, hip and leg pain and limited upper-body range of motion.

Because everyone ages differently, AAA recommends older drivers look for vehicles that address their specific needs and medical conditions. Some of the recommendations in Smart Features for Older Drivers include:

- **Drivers suffering from hip or leg pain**, decreased leg strength or limited range of motion should look for vehicles with six-way adjustable power seats and seat heights that come between the driver's mid-thigh and lower buttocks. These features can ease vehicle entry and exit.
- **Drivers with arthritic hands**, painful or stiff fingers or diminished fine motor skills benefit from four-door models, thick steering wheels, keyless entry and ignition, power mirrors and seats and larger dashboard controls and buttons. These features reduce the amount of grip strength needed and reduce pain associated with motion.
- **Drivers with diminished vision**, or problems with high-low contrast will find vehicles with auto-dimming mirrors, large audio and climate controls and displays with contrasting text helpful. These features can reduce blinding glare and make controls and displays easier to see.

Senior Crash Data

Underscoring the critical need to improve older driver safety is new research by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety that found older drivers have the highest rates of death compared to other drivers due to the inability to survive a crash.

"Call it the 'fragility factor,' which is a measure of a driver's susceptibility to injury due to a crash," Carlson said. "But that is not to be confused with driver 'involvement,' which is calculated by dividing the percent of drivers in crashes by the percent of licensed drivers each age group represents," Carlson said.

In Idaho, for instance, drivers ages 65-74 represent six percent of all licensed drivers, but their involvement rate of .6 is lowest among all age groups, based on data from the Idaho Transportation Department.

"The object of analyzing crash data and coming up with the appropriate resources is to allow drivers to maintain their driving mobility as long as it is safe for them to do so," Carlson said.

Research by the AAA Foundation found significant gains in overall motorists' safety in the past decade. While crashes per mile driven decreased for drivers of all ages between 1995 and 2010 by 28 percent, the biggest decreases were found in drivers ages 75-79, down 42 percent; and drivers ages 80-84, down 40 percent.

AAA is highlighting research findings and its updated 'Smart Features' materials in support of the American Occupational Therapists Association (AOTA) **Older Driver Safety Awareness Week, December 3-7, 2012**. AOTA's Older Driver Safety Awareness Week aims to promote understanding of the importance of mobility and transportation to ensure older drivers remain active in the community – shopping, working or volunteering – with more confidence that transportation will not be a barrier stranding them at home.

For more information on which vehicles are the right fit for you and to access all the free resources AAA offers to senior drivers, visit SeniorDriving.AAA.com.