

## AAA Research Helps “Silver Tsunami” Match Vehicle Features To Health Concerns

Written by Editors

Thursday, 20 December 2012 23:36

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TOWSON— With nearly 90 percent of motorists 65 and older suffering from health issues that affect driving safety, finding a car that not only adapts to conditions, such as lack of flexibility or muscle strength, while maintaining safety and comfort can be difficult. Data from a new AAA survey also reveals that only one in 10 senior drivers with aging health issues are driving a vehicle that has features like keyless entry and larger dashboard controls that can assist with such conditions.

To better equip the “silver tsunami” for driving safety and comfort, AAA has updated its Smart Features for Older Drivers resource to address a broader range of health conditions and include new data on 2012 vehicle features. As a leading advocate for senior driver safety, AAA launched Smart Features for Older Drivers in partnership with the University of Florida’s Institute for Mobility, Activity and Participation in 2008. In the update, Smart Features identifies vehicle features that optimize older driver safety and comfort, lists current vehicles with those features, and allows users to explore their individual needs through an interactive online tool.

“With 10,000 Americans turning 65 every day, we know that families will be coping with these age-related driving safety issues for years to come,” said Ragina C. Averella, Manager of Public and Government Affairs at AAA Mid-Atlantic. “The good news is that specific ‘smart features’ on today’s cars can help older drivers and their families deal with these conditions.”

Smart Features addresses a wide variety of conditions that are commonly experienced with aging, including diminished vision, arthritic joints, hip and leg pain and limited upper-body range of motion.

“As a person ages, muscle strength, range of motion and vision tend to diminish and can affect driving ability. Not only do these conditions affect a driver’s comfort, their presence can also reduce the ability to safely execute the complex task of driving,” added Averella.

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

\*Drivers suffering from hip or leg pain, decreased leg strength or limited knee 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 make it easier for drivers to enter and exit a vehicle.

\*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 with buttons. These features reduce the amount of grip strength needed and reduce pain associated with turning or twisting motions.

\*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.

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

AOTA's Older Driver Safety Awareness Week aims to promote understanding of the importance of mobility and transportation to ensure older adults remain active in the community—shopping, working or volunteering—with the confidence that transportation will not be the barrier stranding them at home. You can learn more about the AOTA [here](#).

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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 [www.AAA.com/SeniorDriving](http://www.AAA.com/SeniorDriving) .