

Common sense can keep drivers on the road for many years

There is no magic age for turning in the keys: handbook helps older, wiser drivers adapt to age-related changes in abilities

Last week we started talking about the impact aging has on our driving behaviour.

It's important to begin by stressing that growing older isn't a character flaw. Unfortunately, today's society has often painted a misleading picture of seniors and their capabilities. That's certainly not my intent with this article.

However, from a road safety perspective, it's essential to educate drivers that aging does, in fact, affect driving ability. It's not to disparage a specific demographic group; it's simply describing a reality we're all going to face at one time or another. I'm hoping that by openly discussing the subject, we can remove the stigma surrounding "senior drivers" and provide all road users with the real facts about the issue. I'm also hoping that those drivers finding themselves in the "mature" category are still with me, and will read on to the safe driving tips further in this article.

First, let's define "senior driver." For simplicity's sake, I interchange the



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term "senior driver" with "mature driver," mostly because it's more interesting for the reader, and secondly because my mother hates the term "senior." I'm assuming other people over the age of 50 do, too.

We all age differently

There are many definitions of "senior," but from a driver-safety angle, we're talking about drivers aged 55 and older. That's the age when medical practitioners say we may begin experiencing some of the physical changes that can affect our driving behaviour: the deterioration of our reflexes, flexibility, vision, and hearing.

Not every driver over the age of 55

is going to experience all of these changes, or experience them to the same degree. Every one ages differently. You'll hear about the 69-year-young spitfire who's still flying airplanes. That happens. But generally speaking, 55 is when we need to take an objective look at the relationship between our physical condition and our driving behaviour.

There are specific driving behaviours and situations that are particularly problematic for senior drivers. The Older and Wiser Driver handbook, designed by MPI in cooperation with the Manitoba Seniors Directorate and other partners including Driver and Vehicle Licensing, goes into these areas in greater detail. The handbook also provides a self-evaluation form, so you can test yourself and pinpoint areas needing improvement

The booklet also provides a wealth of information, including safe driving tips and transportation alternatives that could be useful for drivers of all ages. I'd like to highlight a few of

those safe driving tips here.

First, let's address the concerns of drivers uncomfortable with city driving. There are steps you can take to make it much easier.

Plan your route ahead of time, and make sure you're in the correct lane as early as possible. Always watch for construction signs and detours. Make a habit of scanning the traffic a block ahead, watching for brake lights and potential traffic problems. And lastly, avoid left turns if you can.

Highway driving

Older drivers often describe highway driving as particularly intimidating, too. These guidelines might make it a bit easier.

Always plan your route carefully, and make sure you know the names and locations of all of the roads and exits you'll need to take. Obey the posted speed limits and remember that they are for ideal conditions. If conditions are less than ideal, slow down!

Keep in mind that you should avoid

the left or "fast" lane unless you're passing someone. Don't follow other vehicles too closely, and never back up on the highway. If your trip is a long one, take frequent rest breaks; walk around, enjoy the scenery! Remember too, that fatigue can be a real danger with highway driving. If you find that you're getting sleepy, find a place to rest for the night.

The Older and Wiser Driver handbook contains much more information than I can share with you here. It's available through the Manitoba Seniors Directorate at 945-6565 or toll free at 1-800-665-6565. It's also on the Web at www.gov.mb.ca/sd/english/driver.

That's it for this week. Until next week, stay **RoadWise**.

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