



Older Drivers' Needs Addressed

Recognizing the need to help older drivers improve their skills and prevent traffic accidents, AARP offers the **AARP Driver Safety Program** to all motorists age 50 and older. The eight-hour classroom refresher was the first and is now the largest nationwide, comprehensive curriculum designed especially for the older motorist. The program is available to both Association members and nonmembers. The graduates to date exceed eight million.

AARP's involvement in driver improvement education for older Americans began in 1969. In that year the Association began teaching the National Safety Council's (NSC) Defensive Driving Course (DDC) to older Americans nationwide. The program grew dramatically, and by 1979, when the DDC was phased out, more than 400,000 older Americans had completed the course. In addition, the National Safety Council honored AARP as the number one civilian trainer of drivers every year between 1969 and 1979. The ten consecutive awards cite outstanding contributions to adult driver education.

One reason for the program's extraordinary growth was the enthusiastic response from Association members who volunteered to become instructors. More than 4,500 instructors age 50 and older were trained by AARP during the involvement with DDC.

Beneficial as this training effort was, the DDC program had some limitations for older motorists. The DDC was not geared to compensate for the age-related physical changes of older persons because it was designed for all drivers age 16 and older. It was felt that another program was needed, one that would include a specific classroom refresher curriculum for older motorists on age-

related physical changes, declining perceptual skills, rules of the road, local driving problems, and license renewal.

An additional change deemed necessary was in the manner of program presentation. Older adults learn best and have the greatest retention rate when the opportunity to participate in the learning process is maximized.

Creation of the AARP Driver Safety Program

Convinced that older drivers should have a training program of their own, AARP decided to create one. AARP curriculum developers collected data from all the nation's state departments of motor vehicles, state agencies on aging, state offices of highway safety, and state departments of transportation. They also reviewed materials and contribu-

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tions from safety councils, associations, universities, and various agencies of the federal government. They held discussions with many of the nation's distinguished traffic safety educators to obtain their views regarding the needs of older drivers.

During this process they uncovered a total of 12 older driver courses that had been developed since 1961. Most had been short lived, but they were examined for their successes and failures.

The result was the first comprehensive driver education program fashioned specifically to meet the needs of older motorists: The **AARP Driver Safety Program**.

The Program concentrates on those driver education concerns important to older Americans. In the United States, there are approximately 57 million registered drivers age 50 and older. This constitutes 30% of all drivers on the nation's roadways. According to U.S. government figures this percentage is expected to increase significantly in the years ahead.

The Accident Record of the Older Driver

Drivers over age 50 are a unique population and have specific physiological considerations and driving problems. How do these individuals compare with other age brackets in safe driving practice and incidence of accidents? In order to obtain an accurate picture it is not enough to consider only age and numbers of accidents; it is also necessary to factor in the annual number of miles driven per year. Research shows that the number of annual miles driven by motor vehicle operators begins to decline significantly after age 55. Therefore, the criteria used to determine accident involvement statistics are important to consider with regard to the safe driving practices and abilities of older persons. The record of the older driver is good when calculated on the basis of accidents per driver. When the same figures are examined on the basis of miles driven annually a different picture emerges. This more significant and meaningful statistic highlights the urgent need for corrective measures to re-educate older drivers.

Since older persons drive fewer miles, corrections must be made for driving exposure. When this factor is included in accident involvement rates, and the involvement per exposure is determined, a U-shaped curve of accidents versus age results. Violations and accident rates per mile are higher for the youngest and oldest

drivers and lower for those in the middle ranges. Although one can quibble over the exact placement of the curve, a general "U" configuration has emerged in every major study undertaken during the past 30 years.

The National Safety Council reports that when the number of miles driven is taken into account, drivers age 55 and older have a poorer accident record than drivers in their middle years.

The U.S. Department of Transportation identifies the older driver as being age 60 and older and in a group that requires special consideration in the development of driver improvement training procedures. The National Highway Safety Forecast points out that the older driver is adjudged at fault more frequently than middle-aged drivers. Because of the population age shift currently underway in America, the potential for hazard created by older drivers is one of the fastest growing highway safety problem areas.

The Differences of Older Drivers

Older drivers do not commit traffic violations such as speeding, drunk driving, or reckless driving to any significant degree.

Older drivers do have problems when involved in driving situations requiring quick response, full vision, and interaction with other drivers. Typical violations include failure to yield right-of-way, improper turning, and incorrect lane changing, passing, and entering and leaving expressways.

The older driver learned to drive during the first 40 years of this century, well before the advent of formal driver education programs in the public school systems. The older driver who has completed a formal driver training course is the exception rather than the rule.

These individuals may experience physical changes that affect driving ability and attitudes. People age at different rates, so age alone is not a fair criterion for determining driving competence, and there is no question that driving ability can be affected by the aging process. The gradual failure of sensory acuity associated with aging reduces the quantity and accuracy of information capable of being processed. This reduces the ability of the individual to respond or react to his environment with the speed and judgment current traffic often requires.

Eighty-five to 90 percent of all sensory input needed to drive comes via the eye. Unfortunately, as one ages, the need for illumination increases, glare sensitivity rises, dark adaptation lessens, and peripheral vision narrows. Hearing loss also presents problems for older drivers. It is also broadly accepted that as one ages, muscles tend to weaken or atrophy.

Research shows that normal age-related physical changes begin to accelerate at age 55. Accidents per mile driven begin to increase at this same age. We accept all motor vehicle drivers age 50 and older because this allows the 50-54 year old age group to prepare for the normal age-related physical changes and anticipate accident behavior. It gives them a head start.

Curriculum: Edition 5

The curriculum consists of eleven chapters. The course is typically given over a two-day period. Each session lasts four hours.

- Chapter One:** Getting Started
- Chapter Two:** Judging Yourself
- Chapter Three:** Physical Changes
- Chapter Four:** Potential Trouble Spots
- Chapter Five:** Aggressive Driving/
Road Rage
- Chapter Six:** Safety Considerations
- Chapter Seven:** Driver Guidance
- Chapter Eight:** Your Vehicle
- Chapter Nine:** Intersections
- Chapter Ten:** The Freeway
- Chapter Eleven:** Driving Retirement

Conduct of Courses

Courses are conducted by qualified volunteers. These volunteers are recruited and trained by AARP in a three-phase process. An Instructor training session provides the overall training to conduct educational discussion groups and review educational learning skills. In the second phase the Instructor's first course is conducted as a practice teaching session monitored by a volunteer supervisor. The last phase is an ongoing supervision process supplemented by regular in-service training workshops.

Each participant is charged a minimal fee to help offset overall program costs that include Instructor recruitment and training, Instructor

out-of-pocket expenses, ongoing supervisory training nationwide, and program materials and their distribution. AARP subsidizes the remaining expenses. Each Instructor volunteers his/her time.

National Sponsors

The cosponsorship of the program by national organizations grows each year. Current cosponsors include the following: American Bankers Association, American Hospital Association, American Legion, American Optometric Association, International Association of Chiefs of Police, American Academy of Ophthalmology, National Sheriffs Association, and Veterans of Foreign Wars. Cosponsors provide such assistance as facilities for holding the course, slide projectors or VCRs used in presentations, publicity, etc.

Independent Evaluations

Numerous evaluations have been conducted on the program. The results demonstrate effectiveness. A major insurance company reports that one hundred thousand graduates tracked over many years demonstrate a 10% accident claim reduction (1990, 1992, and 1994). Evaluations involving tens of thousands of graduates by the California Department of Motor Vehicles (1989), the New York Department of Motor Vehicles (1988), and the New York Department of Insurance (1987) demonstrate reductions in traffic violations and in accidents that otherwise result in injuries and fatalities.

The U.S. Department of Transportation evaluated the program in the early 1980s. Project researchers found a large and statistically significant increase in knowledge in the treatment group that was retained during the entire evaluation period. Drivers taking the course showed a trend in violation reduction; however, although several thousand people participated, the numbers of evaluation participants were not large enough to demonstrate statistical significance regarding accidents.

Insurance Premium Discounts to Graduates of State-Approved Courses

State	Discount	Age	Effective Date	State	Discount	Age	Effective Date
AK	Appropriate	55+	1988	NJ	Appropriate	All	1996
AL	Appropriate	55+	2000		(Minimum 5%)	licensed drivers	
AR	Appropriate	55+	1981	NM	Appropriate	55+	1987
CA	Appropriate	55+	1987	NV	Appropriate	55+	1989
CO	Appropriate	55+	1991	NY	10% on liability, personal injury protection and collision	All licensed drivers	1981
CT	Appropriate (Minimum 5%)	62+	1983	OK	Appropriate	All licensed drivers	1986
DE	10% on liability and personal injury protection	All licensed drivers	1982	OR	Appropriate	55+	1990
DC	Appropriate	55+	1985	PA	Appropriate (Minimum 5%)	55+	1990
FL	Appropriate	55+	1986	RI	Appropriate	55+	1984
GA	Appropriate (Minimum 10%)	All licensed drivers	1989	SC	Appropriate	55+	1994
KS	Appropriate	All licensed drivers	1993	SD	Appropriate	55+	1988
KY	Appropriate	55+	1984	TN	Appropriate	55+	1984
ID	Appropriate	65+	1989	TX	10% of premium	All licensed drivers	1974
IL	Appropriate	55+	1982	UT	Appropriate	55+	1988
LA	Appropriate	55+	1984	VA	Appropriate	55+	1985
ME	Appropriate	55+	2001	WA	Appropriate	55+	1986
MN	Appropriate (Minimum 10%)	55+	1985	WV	Appropriate	55+	1986
MS	Appropriate	55+	1988	WY	Appropriate	55+	1983
MT	Appropriate	55+	1987				
ND	Appropriate	All licensed drivers	1983				

Insurance Reduction

Currently, several automobile insurance companies in selected states voluntarily provide premium reductions to graduates. In addition, legislation has been enacted in 36 states and the District of Columbia requiring all automobile insurance companies conducting business in those states to provide a premium discount to graduates of state-approved improvement courses. The program is approved in every state.

Many other states are currently considering this legislation.

For further information, write:

AARP Driver Safety Program
P.O. Box 93114
Long Beach, CA 90809-3114

Or, call toll free:

1-888-227-7669 (1-888-AARP-NOW)
www.aarp.org/drive

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization for people 50 and over. We provide information and resources; advocate on legislative, consumer, and legal issues; assist members to serve their communities; and offer a wide range of unique benefits, special products, and services for our members. These benefits include AARP Webplace at www.aarp.org, *AARP Modern Maturity*, and *My Generation* magazines, the monthly *AARP Bulletin*, and a Spanish-language newspaper, *Segunda Juventud*. Active in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, AARP celebrates the attitude that age is just a number and life is what you make it.