Notes: Disability

Disabled Drivers

The two categories of disabled persons, that a driving instructor may be asked to help, are:

1. Those disabled from birth.

2. Those disabled as a result of an accident or illness.

There are restrictions on the licences available to disabled people. These restrictions affect people with:

- Temporary disabilities
- These are disabilities that are not expected to last more than three months.
- Relevant disabilities

If a person is suffering, or has suffered, from one of the following disabilities then a licence cannot be granted.

- Bad eyesight: i.e., unable to meet the minimum requirement for the class of licence required.

  People who only have one eye, or sight in one eye only, may drive light vehicles if they can read a number plate at the required distance.

- Tunnel Vision: i.e., a field of vision of less than 120 degrees across the horizontal, with a 20 degree range above and below the horizontal. This effectively precludes people with tunnel vision from holding a licence.

- Epilepsy: People with epilepsy may not drive, however, if the sufferer has not had an attack for three years he/she may re-apply for a licence.

- Severe mental sub-normality.

- The tendency to have sudden fainting attacks.

Prospective disabilities

These disabilities are those of an intermittent or progressive nature which might, in time or otherwise, become relevant disabilities.

Prescribed disabilities

These are relevant disabilities which are controlled to the extent that driving will not be dangerous.

Limb disabilities

These are disabilities which consist of deficiency in the movement or strength of one or more limbs, or the absence or deformity of one or more limbs. A test must be passed on a suitably modified vehicle to obtain a licence.

Disabilities must be declared when applying for a driving licence or driving test. Some disabled people will be granted a restricted licence only.

Deafness

Deafness is not considered to be a disability when obtaining a driving licence. However, a driver wishing to obtain an LGV or PCV licence must be able to use a telephone (with an induction coupling device if necessary).

Vision

All drivers must be able to read a car number plate at the required distance. Drivers who have sight in only one eye may obtain an ordinary licence but will not be able to pass the medical required for an LGV or PCV licence.

The eyesight test for drivers in the UK is very basic when compared to the tests used in other countries. Because of this, it is possible that many drivers, currently driving, could have a vision defect which would make driving dangerous. These people are able to 'get around' the law, either deliberately or through ignorance, when they apply for their provisional licence.

The onus is on the applicant to declare any impediment which may affect their ability to drive. This responsibility continues after the licence has been granted. Unfortunately, not everyone abides by the ruling; in a recent police check, one elderly gentleman was found to have a forward range of vision of only ten metres.

Assessing vision

When assessing, whether a driver can read a number plate at the prescribed distance, it is advisable to note the following points:

1. Are the eyes being noticeably screwed up?

2. Is there an unnatural head posture, e.g., the chin up or down or the face tilted to one side?

3. Is there a tendency to close one eye? (Possible double vision.)

Double vision: This condition may not preclude entitlement to drive. It is usually at its worst when the driver is tired.

If you have a pupil suffering from double vision, lessons should be arranged for times when he/she is least likely to be tired.

In cases of severe double vision one eye must be covered. In the UK, sufferers are advised to cover the left eye as field of vision to the right is the most desirable.

Squints: These present no problem, providing that the driver can see adequately (to read a number plate at the requisite distance) and does not have double vision.

Colour vision

In most countries (including the UK) defective colour vision does not prevent the acquisition of a driving licence.

The most common form of colour blindness affects the red-green spectrum. Some diseases, including diabetes, can cause blue-brown blindness. Statistically, men are at greater risk, with 4% of men as opposed to under 1% of women, affected in the UK.

As red-green colour blindness is most common, it is essential that the driver can interpret the colours shown at traffic lights, under a variety of lighting conditions and that red circular signs are noted for their importance. Red is used as a danger signal in a variety of ways. Your pupil must be able to recognise the 'red cues' in whatever way is best for him/her.

Vehicle adaptations

By far the easiest and safest way for most disabled people to drive, is by choosing a vehicle fitted with automatic transmission as a starting point and then having it adapted for their particular needs. For many, an automatic in itself will be sufficient to cope with the disability. Using hand controls in a manual car, although possible, requires considerable dexterity. Driving, whether by a fully or less able person, should be made as simple as possible if it is to be as safe as possible.

Hand controls: These are usually only required if the driver has a disability in both legs (or has no legs). If only the left leg is affected, a normal automatic will suffice; if only the right leg is affected, then a left foot accelerator would be a simple adaptation. A steering ball may be required for some people who use hand controls, especially if either arm is also impaired.

Steering spinners: These are often fitted in conjunction with other hand controls. They can vary in shape but are usually round (ball-type). The positioning spinners is a matter of driver preference, however, it is normally recommended that they should be fitted at a position corresponding to ten o'clock when used by the left hand and two o'clock when used by the right hand. The latest steering balls have an infra-red control that can operate most of the minor controls.

Secondary minor controls: The minor controls can be adapted to be operated by hands, feet or even mouth. The switches are mounted in a position that suits the disability. The adaptation may well be stipulated as a licence condition when the driving test is passed.

Handbrakes: Various adaptations are available to enable operation of the handbrake. These range from a lever device, to enable the driver to press the release button, to full modification to allow foot control.

Combined accelerator and brake lever: These are normally fitted for right hand operation and allow the driver to accelerate by pulling the lever, and brake by pushing the lever. (It is possible for the accelerator and brake to be operated by separate levers, but these controls are less common than the combined control).

Radial control: This control travels in a radial plane around the steering wheel and operates the accelerator and brake.

Pedal guards: These may be fitted to driving school cars or cars where hand controls are fitted but where the normal foot pedals are left in place. The guards can prevent an artificial leg (or perhaps the possibility of the drivers own legs going into spasm) from interfering with the pedals.

Mirrors: Attention may have to be paid to the type and fitting position of mirrors. This can be important for people whose disability affects neck movement.

Banstead Place

The experts at Banstead Place Mobility Centre lead the field in disabled driver assessment, training disabled drivers and training ADI's to teach people with disabilities.

After assessment at Banstead Place almost any physical disability can now be catered for by the manufacturers of special controls. The adaptations range from conversions of standard production cars, to specially manufactured vehicles, which can now be driven directly from a wheelchair (the chair is loaded via a ramp or lift and locked into the driving position).

Other adaptations which are now available include:

- Electric handbrakes.
- Electric seating systems.
- Electric windows.
- Infra-red ancillary controls.
- Power brake and accelerator systems.

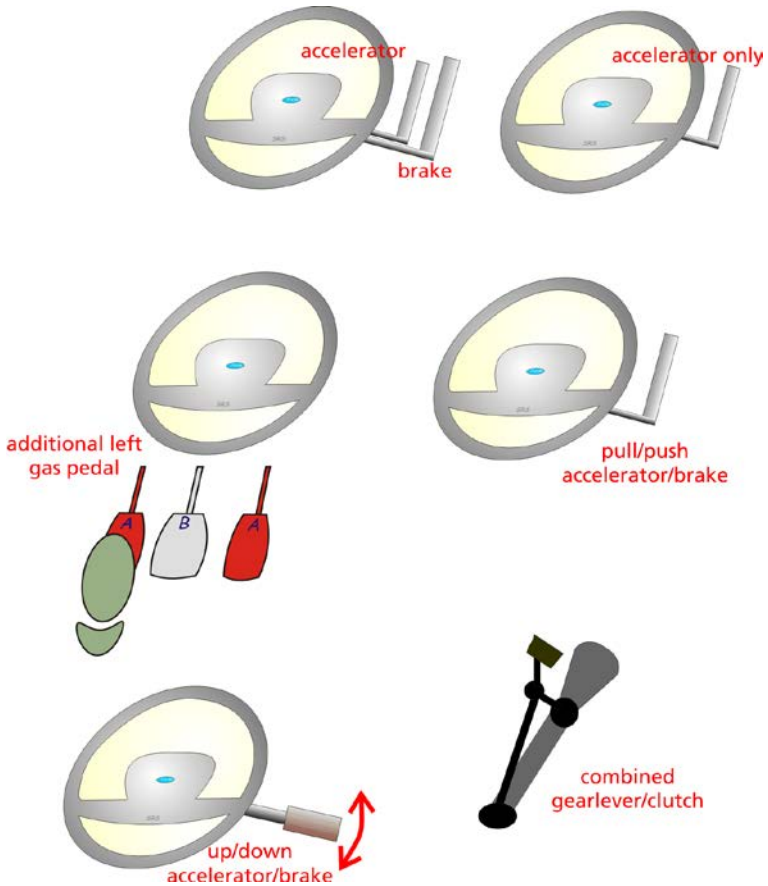
Those, who can benefit from modern vehicle adaptation technology, include people with spinal injuries; arthritis; muscular dystrophy; acquired limb disabilities; spina-bifida and hydrocephalus; polio; congenital limb deformities; multiple sclerosis.

Other centres

A full list of mobility assessment centres can be found at:

https://www.drivingmobility.org.uk/

Simple vehicle adaptations



Look at the illustrations above and then consider which adaptation might suit:

1. Someone with a weak left leg.
2. Someone with a right leg amputated at the knee
3. Someone with no legs