



Choosing a car

Choosing a car can be a complicated decision. Manufacturers' brochures and the internet will help you weigh up and compare such things as performance, running costs and reliability. However, if you have a disability or are just getting older, there are additional things you may need to consider.

Introduction

Many cars have features that will make your life easier, and there are simple gadgets and more complex adaptations that can help with almost any driving problem.

We describe some of the simpler equipment that can make driving a car easier. Once you know what features and specifications you need, you can find the car that best matches your needs .

Steps to getting on the road

Prepare to compromise, as you may not find everything in one car. Think about what you need now and what you may need in the future.

i) Ask some basic questions

Will you drive the car?

If not, you only have to think about getting yourself and any equipment you use into the car and your comfort once inside.

If you are going to be the driver, you need to think about how you're going to drive safely and comfortably, and whether you'll need specialist equipment to help you.

Will you need specialist equipment?

There's a wide range of specialist controls, from the simple such as wider mirrors and steering knobs to the more elaborate - Hand Controls, remote control signalling aids and Left Foot Accelerators that make it possible for almost anyone to drive.

You can also get specialist equipment to help with getting in and out, from swivel cushions and transfer boards to powered lifting and swivelling seats and hoists. Note the powered lifting options work mostly for passenger side transfers due to the restrictions imposed by most steering wheel placements.

How much space will you need?

You may need space for passengers, luggage or equipment such as wheelchairs or scooters. If you have bulky mobility equipment, you may need more room for shopping trips or holidays.

Will you travel with someone?

If not, will you need any equipment to help you get in and out, or to help with anything you may carry?

How will you transport your wheelchair?

Think carefully about how you will carry your wheelchair in any car you are considering. How will you transfer from the wheelchair to the car? Will the wheelchair fit in the boot or rear cargo space? Will you need equipment to help you?

If transferring is difficult, or if you prefer to travel in your wheelchair, some cars and vans can be adapted to make this possible.

ii) Collect information

There's a lot to think about when choosing a vehicle, and it's unlikely that you'll find all of the information you need in one place. Comfort, reliability, performance - including fuel consumption and CO2 emissions - price and running costs are things everybody needs to consider. Motoring magazines, the internet, newspaper reviews and manufacturers' brochures should help you piece together the information you need.

Particularly helpful sources of general information

There's a wide range of motoring web sites with advice, news and car reviews. Most reviews tell you about equipment that is particularly useful for older and disabled motorists, such as automatic transmission, air conditioning, power steering, remote central locking, electric windows and mirrors, electric seat adjustment and remote door opening.

There's a wealth of information elsewhere on the internet. Try these sites for safety-testing information, reviews, features and specifications:

- [Automobile Association \(The AA\)](#)
- nzta.govt.nz/vehicle/choosing
- rightcar.govt.nz
- carjam.co.nz

Things to think about if you have a disability

After you've looked at articles in magazines and on motoring web sites as well as manufacturers' brochures, you'll need to work out how all of this applies in relation to your disability.

If you need to find a car that is easier to get into and out of, or one big enough for your wheelchair, draw up a shortlist. Find cars with, for example, with the widest doors, lowest sill, most headroom or where the car seat is the same height as your wheelchair. If you need to stow a wheelchair or other equipment, work out the minimum rear storage you will require.

Most people will simply choose a car at a dealer. However, if you need specialist or made-to-measure adaptations, you'll have to discuss this with a specialist adaptation company before choosing your car – to make sure they will fit.

iii) Try out before buying any car

Try out before buying any car you are considering. Dealers may bring one to you and should be able to find an automatic version. Try getting in and out several times. If you have to stow a wheelchair or scooter, check that it fits.