

Reach Guide: Driving and Car Adaptations

First things first...getting your licence.

Do leave plenty of time, don't wait until you want to start your lessons! The minimum age for driving a car is 17 – unless you get the higher rate mobility component of DLA (awarded to those with severe mobility problems) in which case you can start to drive at 16. Once you have your provisional licence you can begin learning. Apply to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) for a provisional driving licence by filling in form D1 and D750 (now compulsory as the DVLA no longer issue paper licences, only photocard licences) available from a main Post Office.

The form includes a section called 'Your Health' with a checklist of conditions which require a yes/no answer. Number 19 says: 'any persisting limb problems which require your driving to be restricted to certain types of vehicles or those with adapted controls.' I would advise you to err on the side of caution if you are unsure as to whether you will need 'adapted controls'. As a rough guide though, the DVLA do not need to be informed if you have 'less than 3 digits absent on one hand'. Paradoxically, if you are applying for your provisional licence in order to start learning to drive you may not yet have realised that you need a modification to your vehicle, so if you are not sure whether this applies to you then you should tick the box anyway.

The purpose of this section of the form is not to enable the DVLA to discriminate against you or 'label' you, it is so that they are aware of anything that may affect your ability to drive a car safely. This is not the appropriate time to fight the system or resist the term 'disability' should it arise, it is in your best interests to be comprehensive and frank in your description and thus protect yourself from any possible comeback in the future. The DVLA insist that the onus of responsibility is on the licensee (you!) to disclose any relevant information, and there is a fine of £1000 should it come to light at a later date (for example if you are ever involved in an accident) that you have failed to inform them of something that they deem relevant. It is therefore crucial that

you make every effort to comply with the regulations. If you are in any doubt as to what you should report, leaflet D100 from the Post Office gives a brief description and the appropriate DVLA telephone

numbers for you to enquire personally. Once you have submitted the application forms (D1 and D750) the DVLA will usually respond with a 'medical-in-confidence' form requesting your permission to contact your GP for a report to the Medical Adviser at the DVLA.

Urban Myth: 'Registered Disabled'
There is no 'register of disability' as such in the UK.
By declaring a physical disability in your licence application you are not going to be sent a parking badge – blue, orange or any other colour!

Here to help: if you prefer not to contact your Limb Centre officially, you can speak directly to an experienced Occupational Therapist. Members of ULPOT (the Upper Limb Prosthetic Occupational Therapy Group) are willing to be contacted directly by Reach members and you can find their details on the Reach website or by phoning Reach Head Office

Information supplied about your limb deficiency will not appear on your licence, however, should you require modifications to your car in order to drive these **will** be recorded on your full licence as 'restrictions'. This means that if you need a steering knob on the wheel you will only be licenced to drive cars with a steering knob and if not previously disclosed by you, will be noted by your examiner. If you are tested in a car with automatic transmission you will be restricted to category B Automatic and

will not be licenced to drive a manual car.

How do you know if you need modifications to your car?

It is impossible to give specific answers to this question and so the best course of action is to get yourself assessed by the professionals. The first thing to do is to contact your Limb Centre (phone Reach Head Office if you don't know where your nearest centre is). They

can give you general advice over the phone or you can visit them for an appraisal. The Occupational Therapist should have lots of experience in these matters and will be able to give you an overview of the options. Basically, these depend on your level of limb deficiency, whether it is unilateral or bilateral, on the left side or right and whether you wear a prosthesis or not. Each of these factors can determine different outcomes and the permutations are too many to cover here. For example someone with a left-side only below elbow deficiency will have difficulty with the standard handbrake but may be able to change gear manually if wearing a prosthesis – using their 'good' arm to steer, while someone with the same deficiency on the right side would have no problem with the handbrake but may require automatic transmission if they can't steer with their prosthesis or stump while changing gear. Even people with the same level of limb deficiency do not have exactly the same requirements, everyone is

individual, and you need to achieve the combination that feels comfortable and safe for you.

If you have more significant limb deficiencies you should contact an accredited mobility centre. There are 15 centres in the UK and a list is available from either the Mobility Advice and Vehicle Information Service (MAVIS) or the Mobility and General Information Centre (MAGIC). A list of specialist driving instructors is also available from the MAVIS or from Queen Elizabeth's Foundation Mobility Centre in Carshalton (see contacts list for details). Many of the commercial driving schools have cars with the more simple modifications in place, but if you need substantial modifications you need to buy your car

and have the necessary modifications made before you can begin driving lessons on the road.

The MAVIS was set up by the Department of Transport to provide impartial advice and information to disabled drivers and passengers. They have the most up-to-date list of mobility

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centres and also run their own centre at the Transport Research Laboratory's site in Berkshire.

MAGIC is a free information service offered by Ford (Motor Company) and while helpful in locating centres or giving specific information on the suitability of Ford cars, it is primarily concerned with mobility issues and the Motability finance scheme. Motability is a Government scheme to help those in receipt of DLA (higher rate) mobility component to use their allowance to run a car. Unless you have additional disabilities (ie. not only upper limb deficiencies) it is unlikely that you will qualify for this scheme as the criteria for qualification are largely based around walking and mobility problems.

All the accredited mobility centres offer a free information service and it may be possible to answer your queries by phone or letter if an assessment is not indicated. Personal driving assessments are available at these centres to advise on the type of car and range of adaptations which will meet your needs. An assessment is based on your physical abilities including strength, your level of limb deficiency and your ability to drive, and an adapted car will be used driving on public and/or private roads as appropriate.

These assessments are not tests of your driving skills, they are simply to enable staff to offer suitable advice. These centres cannot stop you from learning to drive and cannot force you to take their advice. They are very useful if you are planning to buy a car and want to try out a particular modification. You can contact or visit any centre you choose and your nearest one is not necessarily the most appropriate as some have more experience than others of assessing drivers with upper limb deficiency. The typical client at these centres is an older driver with lower limb loss who is returning to driving after losing their limb. Check with the Reach office if you would like to know which centres we recommend for teenagers with congenital upper limb absence as there is a great deal of difference in terms of your abilities and requirements!

There are costs involved for an assessment but not for just the information, and where a charge is quoted for assessment you may well find that visiting the appropriate centre will save you money in the long term by enabling you to buy only those adaptations which are necessary.

LIZ BLEACH

If you would like to share your experiences of getting on the road please get in touch with Reach Head Office or email editor@reach.org.uk © Reach 2002

Useful Addresses

DVLA Drivers' Medical Unit, 2 Sandringham Park, Swansea Vale, Hansamlet, Swansea SA6 8QD

telephone: 0870 600 0301

~~The MAVIS have lots of information eg. lists of companies that will perform modifications, lists of insurance firms who insure disabled drivers, and excellent fact sheets with specific technical information on a wide range of related topics.~~

~~**telephone:** 020 7944 8300 email: mavis@dft.gsi.gov.uk~~

~~website: www.dft.gov.uk/transportforyou/access/mavis/~~

MAGIC is a Ford service created to provide free and comprehensive motoring and mobility information including a database of companies who can carry out modifications, searchable by postcode.

~~**freephone:** 0800 240241~~

~~email: help@fordmagic.co.uk~~

~~website: www.fordmagic.co.uk~~

Literature: Driving After Amputation published by the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association (BLESMA) and MAGIC, contains helpful information and illustrations, also a list of the Forum of Mobility Centres accredited centres. Available from Reach, or BLESMA, Frankland Moore House, 185/187 High Road, Chadwell Heath, Essex RM6 6NA

telephone: 020 8590 1124

Queen Elizabeth's Foundation Mobility Centre is one of the main centres accredited by the Forum of Mobility Centres and also has residential accommodation available.

Damson Way, Fountain Drive, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 4NR

telephone: 020 8770 1151