

# Older Drivers Driving Older Cars

A snapshot analysis of the 1995 Nationwide Personal Travel Survey

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The aging of the driving population in the US has raised many safety concerns, particularly focused on elderly driver's declining vision and ability. The coming population bubble of drivers entering their golden years is important to understand for both policy and safety considerations. Even if older drivers drive at the much-reduced rate of current drivers over 65, the sheer number of added travelers will significantly increase national VMT.

In addition, this analysis has shown that the older drivers in the U.S. drive older cars than younger drivers. Insurance companies have indicated that the very young and the very old are statistically the populations more at risk in travel—a greater likelihood of being involved in an accident and a greater likelihood of injuries when accidents occur. The introduction of safety equipment into the U.S. fleet may have a time-delay in helping keep older drivers safe.

The analysis of fleet composition and age of the fleet in conjunction with the demographics of the main driver of each household vehicle shows that older drivers may be driving older, less safety-equipped vehicles. First a quick history of safety equipment:

- 1955 Volvo offers seat belts as standard equipment.
- 1956 Ford offers seat belts as an option (first U.S. manufacturer).
- 1968 NHTSA requires lap or lap and shoulder belts for front and rear seats in passenger cars.
- 1972 NHTSA requires lap or lap and shoulder belts for front and rear seats in multi-purpose passenger vehicles and trucks
- Starting with 1987 model year NHSTA requires either automatic seatbelts or driver-side airbags in passenger vehicles (cars and trucks).
- 1998 model year passenger vehicles are required to have passenger-side airbags.
- Mandatory seatbelt usage laws gained popularity in the 1990's and now every State but New Hampshire has one.

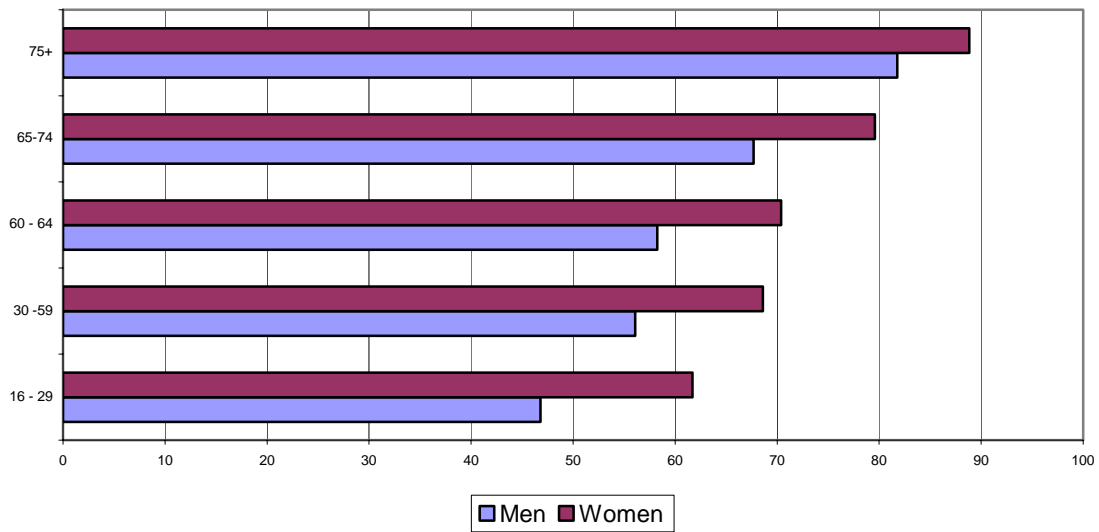
When we look at driver-side airbags and automatic seatbelts (the newest safety measures in force) many of the vehicles being driven by the older population may not have those features. The very old, those over 75, were more likely to be driving an older car. Forty-six percent of the older drivers (aged 66 – 75) were driving pre-1988 model year vehicles compared to nearly 55 percent of the elderly drivers (aged 76 and older). For the vast majority of drivers (in the 26 – 55 age group), only 37 percent were driving older cars.

Drivers of pre-1988 vehicles may have a newer car available to them in their household—for instance a spouse's car or a second car. The analysis shows that nearly 63 percent of the drivers of older cars do NOT have a newer car in the household. Men are more likely than women to have a newer car available to them, and younger people are more likely than older people to have a newer vehicle available to them.

Older drivers (aged 66-75 and elderly drivers aged 76 years and older) together represent almost 13 percent of the nation's drivers. The elderly drivers, aged 76 and older, were just over a third of these two age groups together, and have unique characteristics in travel and vehicle type.

Exhibit 1

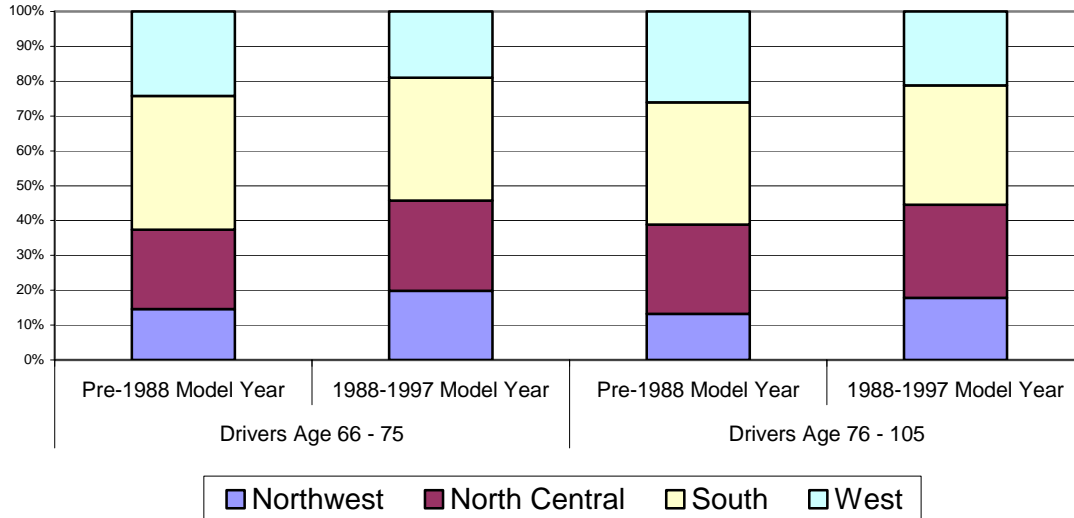
### Drivers of Pre-1988 Vehicles with NO newer Car in the HH



The majority of drivers older than 65 who are driving older cars reside in the South and the West—over 60 percent of the pre-1988 vehicles owned by older drivers are there.

Exhibit 2 –

**Older Drivers and Vehicles by Model Year by Region**



The vast majority of older vehicles are autos, although vans and pick-up trucks are well represented. Just looking at cars, vans, and trucks (excluding RVs, motorcycles, utility vehicles and other trucks which were a very small number), Table 1 shows the types of vehicles by model years driven by older drivers.

Seventy-seven percent of the cars, trucks, and vans driven by people aged 66 – 75 are autos of any model year, and eighty-five percent of the cars, trucks, and vans driven by people aged 76 and older are autos of any model year. About 45 percent of the total vehicles driven by older drivers are from model years prior to 1988 (44.6 percent of vehicles driven by 66-75 year olds and 46.4 percent of vehicles driven by elderly drivers). A surprising proportion of vehicles driven by older drivers are pick-up trucks—10.1 percent of the vehicles driven by 66-75 year olds and 7.3 percent of vehicles driven by drivers aged 76 and older.

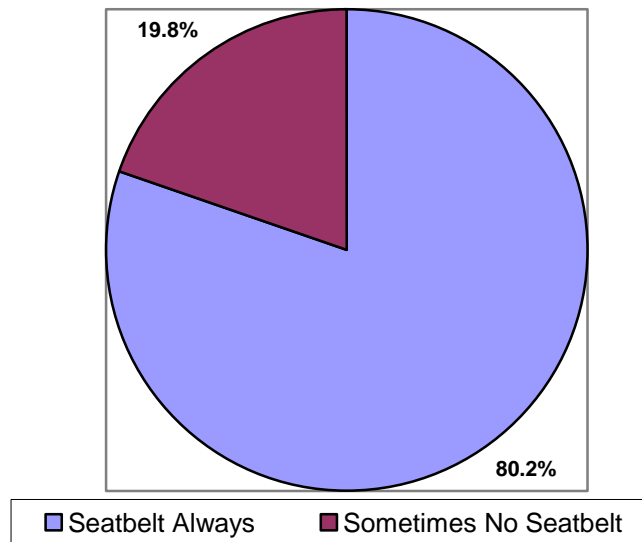
Table 1 - Type of Older Vehicles Driven by Older Drivers (This is still 1995 NPTS)

		Auto	Van	Pick-up	Total
Aged 66 - 75	Pre-1988	32.7%	1.8%	10.1%	44.6%
	1987-1997	44.3%	3.2%	8.0%	55.4%
	Sub-total for 66 – 75	77.0%	5.0%	18.1%	100.0%
Aged 76 and older	Pre-1988	45.4%	1.0%	7.3%	53.7%
	1987-1997	39.7%	1.9%	4.8%	46.4%
	Sub-total for 76 - 105	85.1%	2.8%	12.1%	100.0%

Most of the vehicles driven by older drivers will have at least a seatbelt available for use, but do older drivers use seatbelts? The 1995 NPTS asked a number of scenarios where a seatbelt might not be used (“When forgotten”, “When on just a short trip”, etc.). The good news is that older drivers are slightly more likely than drivers aged 15 – 65 to wear a seatbelt. The bad news is that nearly one out of five older drivers sometime do not wear a seatbelt.

Exhibit 3

**Likelihood of Seatbelt Use by Older Drivers, Ages 65 and over**



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