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U-M survey finds

Senior drivers have poor record

Next to teenagers, drivers over 65 have the highest accident per-mile rate in the country.

Though their caution is high, their vision, alertness and reaction time have often diminished. Road signs are hard to distinguish among masses of commercial signs. Impaired hearing muddles the warning sounds of oncoming traffic.

Unlike the rest of the population, the elderly driver is seldom cited for speeding, tailgating or drink-driving, says University of Michigan Prof. Leon A. Pastalan. "His accidents are more often related to the normal physical changes that occur with aging."

Nationally the older driver causes less than six per cent of all traffic accidents, however, he also spends far less time on the road. When the accidents are viewed in proportion to miles driven per year, his record approaches that of the under-20 group. Furthermore, he causes just as many fatalities.

"Few states have faced up to the problem," according to Pastalan. Less than half require periodic license re-examination. Laws that require only persons over a certain age be required to take a re-test may be ruled age-discriminatory and thus unconstitutional.

AS DIRECTOR of research for the Institute of Gerontology, a part unit of the U-M and Wayne State University, Pastalan has been studying ways to help older driver compensate for their limitations. These one has been the development of "The Older Driver Refresher Course" under a grant from the National Retired Teachers' Association and the American Association of Retired Persons. The project staff included Beth Pomeroy, John Merrill and Arvid Osterberg. Pastalan also is professor of architecture at U-M.

There are 10 million drivers over the age of 65 in the United States today, Pastalan estimates. That's one out of 10 compared with only one out of 30 in 1950. In a nation committed to one major form of transportation, the private car, they have come to depend heavily on driving for seeing doctors, obtaining groceries, and meeting with friends. Nearly half of the elderly live in small towns or rural communities without public transportation. Without a car, many would be isolated and helpless.

MOST OLDER drivers have never had the benefit of formal instruction, Pastalan points out. Their knowledge, based on experience, may be incomplete or out of date. The 18-hour refresher course covers all of the points covered in the National Safety Council's defensive driver course, but focuses on the special needs and capabilities of the elderly.

The instructor's manual contains a lengthy orientation section about the aging process and how it relates to driving habits and abilities. During several months of field testing and research, Pastalan and his staff found that older drivers experience a number of common age-related problems.

VISION—Glare from intense sunlight headlights or other sources may temporarily block out some objects or blur the entire range of vision. Older eyes may also have difficulty in judging distances, changing focus from short to long distance objects or from bright sunlight to darkness.

COLOR PERCEPTION—Changes in the eye lens also cause some colors to fade—particularly blues and greens. Older people thus have more difficulty reading traffic signs if they lack bright contrasting colors.

HEARING—The elderly do not hear traffic sounds as loudly or sounds in the high frequency range, such as a shrill siren.

CHRONIC HEALTH PROBLEMS—At

least 85 per cent of the population over 65, chronic ailments or the medication they require, could lead to dizziness, disorientation, or other problems. General decreased muscle strength and coordination makes movements slower and more difficult.

Because age causes people to perceive and react to things more slowly, older people often encounter what Pastalan calls an "information overload." They may drive rapidly in a familiar, non-stressful environment, but under high speed, heavy traffic conditions they are at a definite disadvantage. Quick maneuvers such as lane changes are considerably more difficult for them.

The older driver may not realize the extent to which his processes have slowed down, the U-M researcher says, "or even that they have changed at all. Therefore he may have unconsciously altered his driving habits, evidenced by his moving too slowly on the freeway or inattention to traffic signs."

Most older drivers do, however, take certain precautions, such as avoiding night, bad weather and rush hour driving conditions, using back roads and side streets when possible and avoiding busy intersection.

THE PROFESSOR also recommends a passenger along who can help read road signs and observe traffic. Automotive safety options, such as glare resistant glass and wide-angle mirrors should also be considered.

The Older Driver Refresher course will be distributed nationally by the Institute of Gerontology and the American Association

of Retired Persons (AARP). It will be administered by AARP volunteers as well as by professional instructors in high schools and community colleges.

Meanwhile, Pastalan and his staff are engaged in a nationwide study of road signs. They are learning that the earthy red and gold shades of many traffic signs, while more aesthetically appealing, are less visible than the more vibrant colors. At some intersections, traffic signs are camouflaged by masses of commercial signs, foliage or other distractions.

"Our goal is to prevent accidents," Pastalan says. "This means making the environment more legible for drivers of all ages."

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Low-income workers must file for tax credit

Low-income workers who are eligible for a special payment of up to \$600 from the Internal Revenue Service will not receive their check unless they file an individual income tax return, according to District Director R.L. Platte.

Some workers entitled to the payment wouldn't ordinarily be required to file a tax return because their earnings are so low, he said.

However, the payment called the Earned Income Credit, can only be made to those qualified taxpayers who file an income tax return.

To qualify for the credit, individuals must have less than \$8,000 in total income from all sources including wages, salaries, or other employee compensation. Additionally, the workers must have paid more than half the cost of maintaining a home in the U.S. for themselves and at least one dependent child for the entire year. The dependent child must be under 19 years of age or a full-time student.

People who qualify and earned \$4,000 or less can receive a credit of 16 per cent of their earned income, up to a maximum of \$600. Those whose total income from all sources was between \$4,000 and \$8,000 can receive a reduced credit.

People who filed a return last year will find additional information and instructions for claiming the credit in their tax package. Those who did not file last year should get free Publication 888, Tax Benefits for Low Income Individuals and Form 1040A, from their local IRS office. Internal Revenue reminds taxpayers to remove the pre-filled address label from their tax forms package and affix it to the return filed with IRS. Taxpayers who go to a commercial preparer or to IRS for assistance should take their forms booklet with them for this purpose. Use of the coded address label will speed up return processing, according to Platte.

Christmas

Handmade jewelry

O&E artist is contest finalist

The cover of the 1975 Observer & Eccentric's special Christmas section is a finalist in the 1976 Publication Design Award competition sponsored by the Society of Publication Designers.

Wm. Keith LaRoche, Observer & Eccentric art director, designed and executed the cover featuring Santa Claus.

Submitted in the illustrated cover design category, LaRoche's cover has been framed and hung in the society's offices in New York where the judging will take place.

Gold and silver awards will be presented to winners May 11 in New York. LaRoche, 28, has been with the Observer & Eccentric for three years. During that time he has won numerous national and state awards from United States Suburban Press Inc. and Michigan Press Association.

This is the first time his work will be judged with others from prestigious national magazines, newspapers and books.

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Coordination of Benefits is now included in most Blue Cross and Blue Shield group contracts. It's one more way we're working to help contain and reduce health care costs. Blue Cross and Blue Shield members can help by reporting whether they have double health care coverage when making a health-care claim.

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