

GETTING THE BEST OUT OF YOUR ELECTRIC SCOOTER OR WHEELCHAIR

The categories of road users in the Highway Code are: Pedestrians, Cyclists, Motorcyclists and Motorists.

As a wheelchair or scooter user you do not really fit into any of these categories.

Some wheelchairs/scooters can only be driven safely on the footpath, except for crossing roads. Others are designed so that they can be driven safely on the road. This does not always make it safe to do so. To drive safely on the road it is advisable to have a vehicle capable of doing 6 to 8 miles an hour, which should be equipped with headlights, rear lights, flashing indicators and a horn. Even with all this you may not use dual carriageways unless you also have an additional flashing beacon light and you are not permitted to use bus lanes or cycle tracks.



Under NO circumstances is it permitted to drive scooters or wheelchairs on motorways.

General points to consider before buying your vehicle

Make sure you are fit and able to use it safely.

It is usually possible to get advice through your local Mobility Retailer or Shopmobility scheme, who may also be able to offer you some driver training.

You need to be able to:

- See well enough to be safe.
- Adequately control your vehicle and do all the possible manoeuvres, such as reversing, climbing and descending kerbs and turning safely.
- Cross busy roads. This is not as easy on a scooter/wheelchair as on foot.
- Know the rules of safety and consideration, for yourself and other people.

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Insurance

At present there is no overall legal obligation about insurance, though some finance companies insist on it. Nevertheless it is a good idea to make sure you are covered for fire and theft, accidental and malicious damage, and third-party damages, just in case.

Comfort and Safety

Make sure your vehicle is the right one for you. Get advice when choosing and watch for things like seating and handling positions and height. It is important you are comfortable and in full control of your vehicle. The reasons for choosing three or four wheeled vehicles are varied and depend on many factors such as your weight, size and height, weight of chair for lifting and quality of your roads. You need to be extremely careful when ascending and descending kerbs and when turning, as if this is not done correctly the scooter may tip.

Range

The manufacturer's literature will tell you the range of your vehicle but remember this is a guide only. Generally they tell you the range if driven on the level on a smooth surface and when the batteries are new. Rough surfaces, hills, gradients, cold weather, kerbs and carrying a load of shopping will all reduce the distance you can do without charging your batteries. Recharge your batteries according to the manufacturers instructions.

***Do not be too ambitious where distance is concerned.
Get to know your machine well first.***



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Speed limits

On the footpath the speed limit is 4 mph whatever the capacity of your vehicle. On the road it is 8mph. If driving a Class 3 vehicle on the pavement it **must** be switched to 4mph mode.

Carrying Loads

Do not overload. It may make the vehicle unstable and reduce its range. Place heavy loads inboard (in the middle) not behind the back wheel which can lighten the steering or can cause the front end to lift off the road on a bump, and not at the front, which might make steering heavy.

Watch your brakes

Never try to drive, or even sit on your vehicle while it is in "free wheel". The electronic brake will be out of action and the vehicle could run away with you.

Maintenance

Get your vehicle serviced regularly according to manufacturers advice.



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Tyres

Keep tyres at the pressure recommended by the manufacturer. They will last longer and be safer. Replace when they become worn.

Lights

Check bulbs regularly and replace when needed. Use your lights frequently, at dusk onwards, on a dull or rainy day.

When using the footpath

Just because you are on the footpath or in a pedestrianised area does not make you a pedestrian. If you are on a motorised vehicle you are no longer a pedestrian.

Remember pedestrians always have right of way!

Many people on foot will be kind and helpful to the drivers of a wheelchair/scooter. But not everyone!

In a crowded precinct, market area, or footpath, it is your responsibility to ensure you do not run into anyone or do any harm with your vehicle.

While many people will make way for you, you cannot expect everyone to do so. Some will appear to not even realise you are there. They will climb round and even over your vehicle rather than allow you room to move.

Do not yield to the temptation to ram them!

When climbing or descending kerbs – Always approach at right angles, with your front wheels straight on to the kerb. In some powerchairs it is necessary to descend high kerbs backwards. Do not try to climb or descend kerbs higher than the manufacturer recommends. Move carefully to avoid traumatic bumps – to yourself or your vehicle.

Watch out for

Children

They may well run in front of you without warning. You may only be moving very slowly, but you could still injure them.

Elderly People

They may be unable to quickly move aside to let you pass. Give way to them.

Disabled people on foot

They too may be unable to dodge you.

People with visual problems or impaired hearing

Give them space and time.

Other motorised vehicle users

You may be doing all the right things. This does not guarantee they will do the same.

When you need help

You may need to ask people to open doors for you. You will find that most people are willing to help, if asked politely. Don't struggle to do very difficult things when there are people around who would help if asked.

Driving inside shops and buildings

Many bigger shops and even some quite small ones are now accessible to wheelchairs and scooters. Once inside the store it is your responsibility to drive safely and not damage the fittings, the stock, or hurt other shoppers or store workers. You may need to ask for help. Again in most cases people are willing if asked properly.

Don't risk pulling down a whole display to reach the top shelf.

ASK FOR HELP.



Speed in shops and buildings - Reduce it!

It is a good idea to set the speed control to a lower level to avoid any accident. Be especially careful if you need to reverse, that your way is clear of shop fittings and people.

On the road

Remember you are not driving a car, but a very small and slow vehicle, which is therefore more vulnerable.

If it is possible, use the footpath. It is wise to avoid using roads, particularly busy ones.

When driving your vehicle on the road

Remember although this is legal for all vehicles it is not always safe or sensible to do so. You are responsible for your own safety and that of other road users. The normal rules of the road apply - but modified.

You must observe the law about:

- Driving on the left side of the road *Never drive against the traffic.*
- One-way streets - *Never drive against the traffic.*
- Giving way where cars would give way (details in the Highway Code)
- Obeying traffic lights and all other road signals and instructions.
- Giving way to pedestrians on crossings

But always remember your vehicle is not a car but is small and vulnerable.

If you need to turn right across traffic, try to get on to the footpath before the turn and then use a safe pedestrian crossing or traffic light control crossing. Only try to turn right if you are completely sure it is safe to do so. Do not rely only on your mirror. It may give a false impression of distance. Always give clear indication of intention to turn left or right.

Remember - The car you can see when you look behind may appear a long way away, but it is almost certainly moving faster than you are - often deceptively so. It could well be upon you before you complete your manoeuvre. And it may not be able to stop in time.

When passing a parked vehicle - take great care you are not moving into the path of a faster moving vehicle coming behind you, or towards you. Always signal your intention to pull out.

In the event of a difficult or dangerous situation - *Use your hazard lights. But do not drive with them on unnecessarily.*



Stockton Shopmobility Ltd
3 – 5 Bridge Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1BH
01642 605676
(Registered Charity No: 1048199)
www.stocktonshopmobility.com