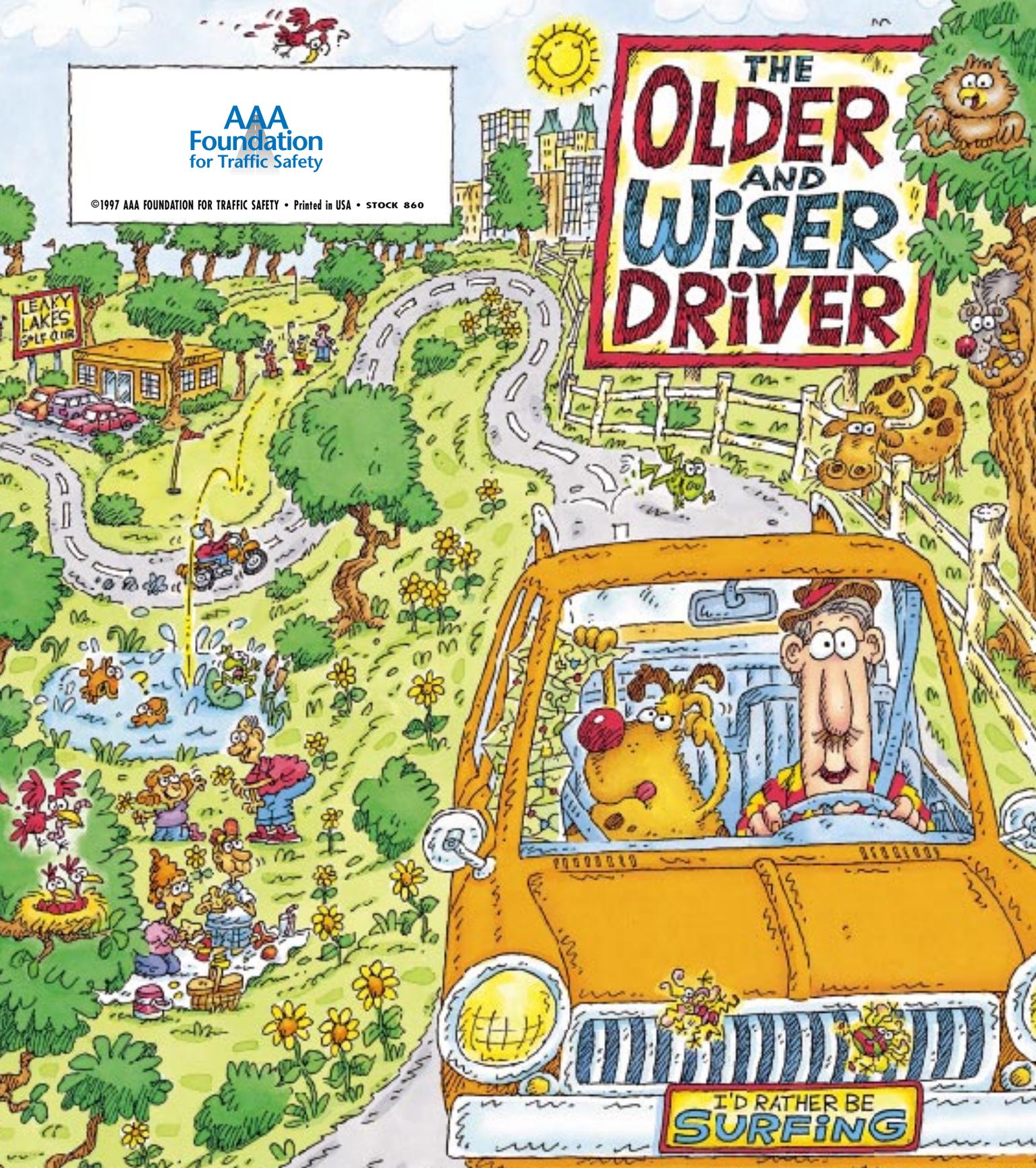
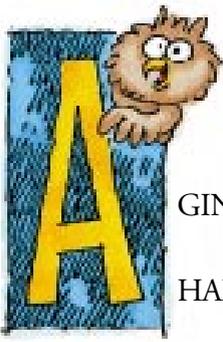


**AAA**  
Foundation  
for Traffic Safety

©1997 AAA FOUNDATION FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY • Printed in USA • STOCK 860

# THE OLDER AND WISER DRIVER





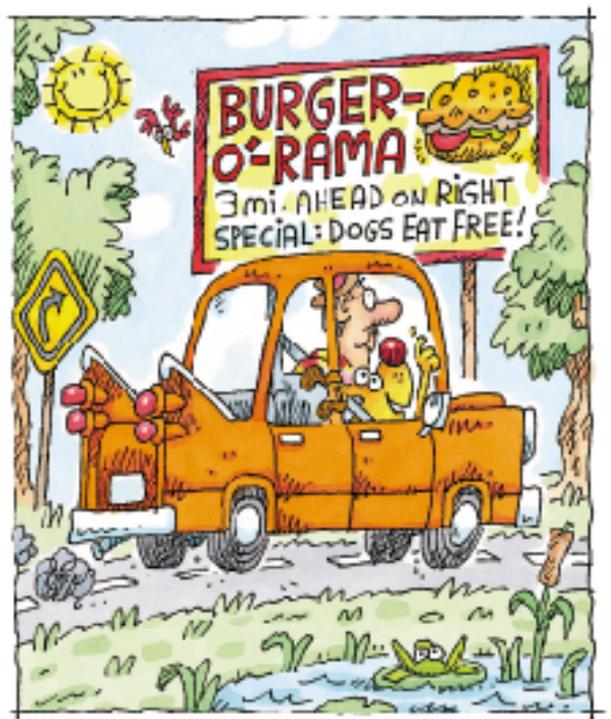
AGING IS INEVITABLE — IT  
HAPPENS TO EVERYBODY.

BUT GROWING OLDER DOESN'T have to mean giving up an active life. While aging does impose physical limitations, many people achieved their greatest success when they were over 60. For example, businessman Henry M. Leland founded the Cadillac Automobile Company when he was 59. A few years later he left that company and started the Lincoln Motor Company at the age of 74.

Traffic safety is vital for drivers of all ages, but older drivers experience physical changes that can affect driving ability — changes in vision, reaction

time, and flexibility. Yet while older drivers as a group do have more crashes than people in their 40s, their individual safety records differ as much as those of any other group.

Here are some suggestions about how to become an older *and wiser* driver.



# Vision

As everyone over 40 knows, eyes change with age, and not usually for the better. Physically, the eye's lens loses the ability to change focus quickly, peripheral vision narrows, and the retina becomes less sensitive to light. A driver aged 60 needs three times as much light to see as a teenager, and will take more than twice as long to adjust to a change from light to darkness. Since 90 percent of decisions made while driving are based on information acquired through the eyes, good vision is crucial to safe driving.

- Get regular eye exams. See a doctor at least every two years and more often if your eyes are changing rapidly. Cataracts are common and can be corrected with surgery; the progress of many other eye problems can be slowed if they are detected in time.



- If you have trouble with night vision or glare, limit driving to daytime hours.
- Turn your head frequently to compensate for diminished peripheral vision.

- Keep headlights, mirrors, and windshields clean — including the glass inside the car.
- Add a larger rearview mirror to increase the range of visibility.



- Keep your eyes up — look at the road ahead to see trouble before you reach it. In the city look at least one block ahead; on the highway look at the section of the road you'll reach in 20 to 30 seconds.

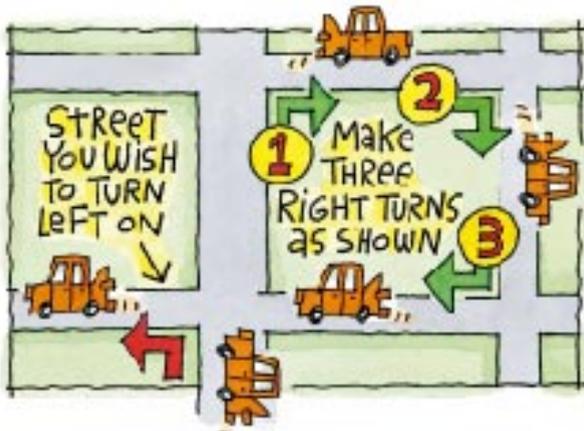
# Cognition

While older minds are just as sharp as younger ones, and even keener in some ways, they react more slowly. Age lengthens the time it takes the brain to process information and also makes it harder to ignore distractions. Reacting to a situation while driving involves three steps: sensing, deciding, and acting. For an older driver, each step takes longer — and possibly so long that it becomes dangerous. Here are some ways to overcome the natural tendency to need more time to act:

- Leave more room in front of the car. Allow a greater distance between you

and the vehicle ahead, so you'll have plenty of time to stop.

- Avoid left turns if you are uncomfortable



making them. You can sometimes make three right turns to avoid having to make a left. If you must turn left, pay extra attention to the speed of the cars coming toward you. Make sure you have enough time and space to safely cross oncoming traffic before turning, and watch for pedestrians who might force you to stop before you can safely complete your turn.

- Eliminate distractions, such as the radio

or cellular phone. If people in the car are distracting you, tell them they'll have a safer ride if they're quiet.

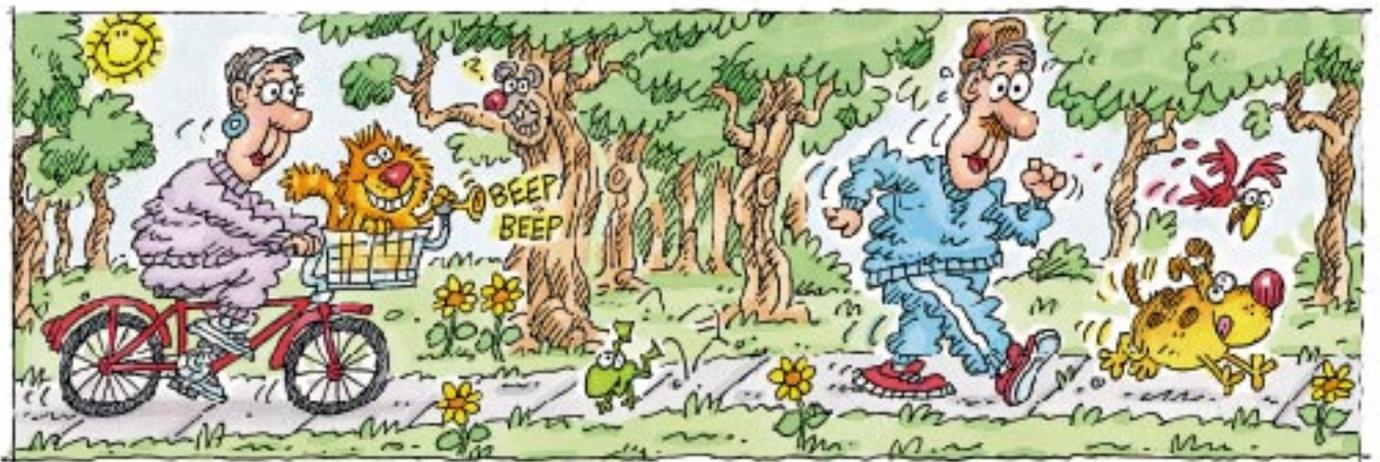
- Plan and go over your route ahead of time, so you won't reach an intersection and have to make a last-minute decision about which way to turn.
- If freeways are confusing or feel too fast-moving, use side roads. By the same token, if rush hour is stressful, limit your driving to slower times of day.

## Fitness



Driving is a physical activity, and a driver who gets no physical exercise may not have the strength, flexibility, and coordination to operate a vehicle safely. It may seem like a paradox, but taking a brisk walk every day can help make you a safer driver.

- Stay physically fit. Walk for at least 20 minutes five times a week, or the equivalent. Gardening, golf, tennis, and other



sports can also help keep you in good physical shape.

- Stay mentally active. Using your problem-solving skills in non-driving ways can help mental flexibility — including activities like jigsaw puzzles or crosswords. Learning a new skill or hobby is fun at any age, and helps keep your mind flexible.



## Medication

Medications can interfere with driving by making the driver drowsy or distracted. This includes many over-the-counter medications, such as decongestants or cold remedies. Some of the worst offenders include tranquilizers, pain pills, sleep medicines, antidepressants, cough medicines, antihistamines, and decongestants.

- Read the fine print. If a medication you're taking is labeled "Do not use while operating heavy machinery," let someone else drive.
- Inform your doctor about what nonprescription medication you are taking. This includes alcohol, which can interact with

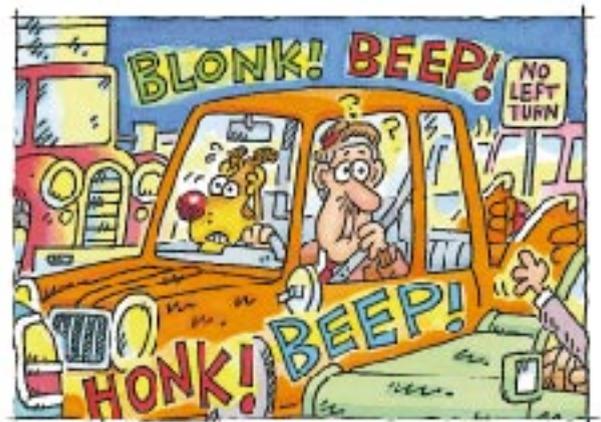
some drugs to cause serious side effects.

- Discuss your medication and its effects with your doctor or pharmacist.
- Always check with your doctor before stopping any medication.
- Avoid driving when you first start taking a new medication. Side effects such as drowsiness are often worse for the first few days, but lessen as the body adjusts to the drug.
- If any medication makes you feel sleepy or disoriented, don't drive.

## When to Stop

A driver's chronological age is not a good predictor of driving ability. What counts on the road is performance. Here are a few of the signs of diminished capacity for driving safely:

- Having a series of minor accidents or near misses.
- Having wandering thoughts or being unable to concentrate.



- Being unable to read ordinary road signs.
- Getting lost on familiar roads.
- Having other drivers honk at you frequently.
- Being spoken to about your driving by police, family, and friends.

## GETTING ADDITIONAL HELP

Many motor clubs affiliated with the American Automobile Association and the Canadian Automobile Association offer refresher courses for older drivers. So do some chapters of the National Safety Council and the American Association of Retired Persons. These courses can update you on changes in traffic laws, signs, signals, and markings, and offer safe driving tips. Some also offer actual behind-the-wheel assessments, which can be especially helpful in sharpening your driving skills. Behind-the-wheel assessments are also offered by some physical rehabilitation specialists; these can be very important when one's driving abilities have been affected by a stroke or other serious ailment.

## Know Your Limits

Being a safe driver means more than avoiding crashes. It also means paying attention to road conditions and being aware of your own changing abilities. Just a few simple adjustments, such as limiting your driving to certain times or adding an extra-wide mirror — can help protect you and those around you from deadly crashes.

Follow the simple guidelines in this booklet and you, too, can remain an older *and wiser* driver!



AND REMEMBER —

**ALWAYS WEAR YOUR SAFETY BELT!**

