

Vehicle choice and technology

Disabilities

If a disabled person receives one of four qualifying mobility benefits at a higher level (HRMC of DLA, ERM of PIP, WPMS or AFIP), they can use it to lease a car, scooter or powered wheelchair on the Motability Scheme. Although Motability works closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on issues related to the Motability Scheme, Motability has never had any role in determining who is eligible to receive DLA or PIP, or any other benefit; that is solely the responsibility of the DWP.

Around two-thirds of recipients are awarded mobility allowances for conditions such as arthritis, back pain, diseases of the muscles, bones or joints, heart disease, neurological diseases, chest disease, cerebrovascular disease (e.g. stroke) and spondylitis (a degenerative disease process affecting the spine). These are physical impairments, often progressive, which mean that the disabled person in most cases is not a full-time wheelchair user. Many can access suitable vehicles with little or no assistance, and may be capable of driving a suitable vehicle. Increasingly, with the introduction of PIP, people with cognitive disabilities are also being awarded mobility support at the enhanced level.

Vehicle choice

With around 1,600 model variants available, Scheme customers can choose a vehicle with the specific features to meet their individual and family requirements. Features that are necessary for some customers include specific seat features such as electric adjustment (to ease access); leather (to assist sliding into position); and heating (to minimise discomfort). Other important features can include sliding doors and electrically operated doors, both of which aid accessibility.

Factors such as ride comfort, seat height and door width for ease of access, and boot space for mobility aids (e.g. walking frames, crutches etc.) or other equipment are also important to our disabled customers as they choose a vehicle that meets their needs.

Other considerations include fuel economy, where Scheme customers benefit from newer more fuel-efficient technology by leasing a new vehicle through the Scheme. This also ensures a higher level of reliability for disabled drivers and passengers.

Motability Scheme specialists at dealerships are trained to provide advice on the specific issues most relevant to disabled people.

Drivers

As vehicle technology has developed over the last decade, in part to address the needs of an ageing population, many features required by disabled drivers, which in the past would have been post-production adaptations to the vehicle, have become part of manufacturers' general vehicle specifications, e.g. power assisted steering, electric windows and mirrors, parking sensors, electronic handbrakes and push-button starting. Other features such as automatic transmissions are available

from manufacturers, albeit not as standard. Automatic transmission is particularly important for our disabled drivers and is required by 43 per cent of them, e.g. when they have full use of one leg or limited upper body range and strength.

In addition, a further 10 per cent of disabled drivers require further specific vehicle features to be fitted post-manufacture by an adaptations specialist to enable the disabled customer to drive safely and in comfort. These include changes to pedal layouts, hoists, swivel seats, etc. which enable the driver to access the vehicle and drive safely and in comfort. In the most complex cases, the disabled person enters and drives the vehicle while remaining in their wheelchair. Motability works closely with a wide variety of vehicle and adaptations specialists and our specialist staff can advise customers on which vehicles are likely to meet their requirements.

Many popular adaptations such as hand controls are supplied and fitted at no extra cost when arranged at the same time as ordering a car.

Passengers

Whilst 60 per cent of customers drive their Scheme car, others travel as passengers as they are unable to drive due to the severity or nature of their disability. These vehicles do not generally require modifications as they are driven by carers and family members. For passengers who need to travel in their wheelchair, wheelchair accessible vehicle conversions are also available through the Scheme.