Staying on the road: A guide for older drivers on motor insurance
independent money expert Martyn James

How old is “too old?”

The question of when people become too old to safely drive has been taxing individuals, experts and insurers for some time. The fact is everyone’s different, so there shouldn’t be a single cut off point – say, 80 years old, for example - where everyone is prohibited from driving. Older people have much more experience behind the wheel – and for many the car is a lifeline, a way to retain independence in later life.

But all motorists have an individual responsibility to keep both fellow drivers and pedestrians safe. So it’s vital that older drivers are honest about whether their health or age might make them less safe when driving.

The law doesn’t impose an upper age cap on drivers. But the cost of insuring your vehicle – which is a legal requirement – can become so expensive that you might find yourself priced off the road.

So what are the rules?

Age discrimination

The Equality Act was introduced in 2010 and banned age discrimination in many areas, like the workplace. This means that in many cases a business can’t discriminate against you because of your age. But there is an exception in the law for providing financial services such as banking, insurance, credit, mortgages and investments.

The reasoning behind this is that a person’s age can have an impact on the way many financial services work. For example, a bank or insurer might conclude that your age can be a significant factor in how it creates or prices products like medical insurance, because the older you get, the more likely you are to claim.
In practice, there’s traditionally been a link between age and financial products like insurance. The two groups most likely to make motor insurance claims (or put in high value claims) are young people and older people by some distance.

But while financial businesses can factor in your age when offering you a product of setting the price level, it can only do this if it can demonstrate that the information it’s basing its decision on is widely available and accepted.

And some things are flat out unacceptable. A business can’t harass you or victimise you in relation to your age. And if you don’t think you’ve been treated fairly, you can challenge the business to explain why it’s made a decision – and take it further if you still feel you’ve been discriminated against.

Know your rights

We’ve heard from many Rip-off Britain viewers who think they’ve been discriminated against because of high insurance premiums once they hit a certain age.

- Firstly, many insurers will increase your premiums every year regardless. This practice is legal but questionable – and the insurance industry has been criticised strongly for it. So being loyal is a false economy – you often get a better deal by moving insurers. Make a diary note of when your insurance is due to renew and shop around. Let the insurer know you’re doing this – they might come up with a reduced deal for you.

- Secondly, as you get older, it’s likely that the cost to insure you will go up. But if you don’t think the increase is fair or proportional, you can make a formal complaint to the business. Ask them to explain why the increase in premiums has taken place and get them to confirm that all of their customers are being treated in the same manner.

- If you’re not happy with the response, you can make a complaint to the [Financial Ombudsman Service](https://www.ombudsman.org.uk) – even if you go to another insurer. The ombudsman is a free service – and they’ll look in to what’s happened and how they can help. They can’t make the insurer offer you insurance if they’ve followed their rules. But if they’ve not treated you fairly, they can tell the business to pay you compensation. If you’re still not happy you can take the business to Court – but this can be complicated and expensive. So speak to a legal expert about your chances before proceeding.

What if none of this works?

It can be frustrating trying to find an insurance company online – particularly if you are worried about your age. Here’s a few tips:

1. Price comparison websites can be useful for finding insurers willing to cover you – but they don’t have all insurers on their sites, so a better deal may be out there.
2. Check out what other people your age are saying. There’s loads of consumer sites aimed at older people. Use them to find out information about potential insurers, from the good, to the bad (and the ugly!)
3. Speak to organisations like the [British Insurance Brokers’ Association (BIBA)](https://www.biba.org) – their members could help you find an insurer. Or check out the [Association of British Insurers](https://www.abi.org.uk) for the stats on older drivers.