BUYING YOUR FIRST (MOTABILITY) CAR

Buying an adapted vehicle could change your life. It's important to know what to look for. Able can help.

Having a disability is certainly not a barrier to driving. There is a proliferation of companies based in the UK that have made adapting vehicles the focus of their business. The term 'adaptations' covers a multitude of ideas that solve a whole variety of different issues from cushions to give more height and comfort through to major 'coachwork' that allows for 'drive from wheelchair' options.

Adapted vehicles don't always have to be driven by disabled people. This might be pointing out the obvious if you're a parent of a disabled child but it also holds true for people with disabled partners that can't drive. Irrespective of whom the adaptations benefit, they are still subject to the same VAT exemptions on the cost of parts and of fitting them.

If you've never bought an adapted vehicle before you may not even realise the choices that you've got. The starting point is the vehicle rather than the adaptation. It is always a good idea to visit a specialist to discuss what you might need and whether the type of model you have in mind is suitable to work with.

Most vehicles available in the UK can be adapted to a certain extent, with at least small adaptations such as hand controls.

For major structural adaptations involving lifts, ramps and moving major bits of the vehicle around your best bet would be to utilise a specialist coachwork company or indeed buy a specifically adapted vehicle that can be tweaked to a personal 'fit'.

MOTABILITY

You may well have heard the word 'Motability' tossed around too. This is a scheme that helps disabled people with the costs of a vehicle and its adaptations.

If you receive the Higher Rate Mobility Component of the Disability Living Allowance or the War Pensioners' Mobility Supplement, you are likely to be eligible for the scheme. Motability allows you to simply turn part or all of that allowance into the car of your choice. There are no waiting lists, credit checks or assessments required.

More: www.motabilitycarscheme.co.uk

Motability provides the car and the support, including:

- Over 4,000 brand new cars to choose from
- Insurance, servicing and maintenance
- Full RAC breakdown assistance
- Annual tax disc
- Tyre and windscreen replacement
- 60,000 mileage allowance over three years
- Many adaptations at no extra cost
- You don't have to drive - you can nominate up to two other drivers and pay a little extra for a third

The policy continues right to the end of your three-year lease with a seamless transfer to your new car.

Adaptations to vehicles can commonly include:

HAND CONTROLS
For control of accelerator and brake instead of traditional pedals.

STEERING WHEEL KNOB
Very handy for precision parking and alleviates some of the aggro of turning the steering wheel to 'full lock'.

HOISTS AND LIFTS
Access is often the most problematic issue to solve but once it's sorted you're free to roam.

CUSHIONS, COVERS AND SUPPORTS
Long journeys can be painful if you don't protect yourself from postural problems.

ADAPTED MIRRORS
Helpful for people that find twisting their bodies or necks to look into the blind spot.

SAFETY BELTS, SEAT BELTS AND HARNESSES
Can be specially fitted and are also a safety essential. They can also be used to secure wheelchairs and other kit whilst driving.

ROTATING SEATS
Help enormously for people that transfer from wheelchair to driver or passenger seat.