



Driving With Confidence: A Practical Guide to Driving With Low Vision by Eli Peli & Doron Peli (River Edge, NJ: World Scientific, 2002); paperback, 212 pages; \$18.00.

Reviewed by Kent Higgins

Driving With Confidence is a very timely book. Older drivers represent the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. driving population and they are most likely to experience vision loss due to age-related eye disease. The authors are to be commended for tackling the often controversial issue of driving with vision loss.

Currently, all states require applicants for an unrestricted personal driver's license to meet one (or more) vision standards, the most prevalent being that an individual have a visual acuity of 20/40 or better. The general public is likely to believe that such standards can separate safe drivers from unsafe drivers. This book will do much to dispel such beliefs.

The first chapter discusses the importance of the driving privilege, the potential impact of losing this privilege and, most important, introduces the point that no hard scientific evidence justifies existing vision standards for driver licensure. Chapter 2 provides a cursory review of several vision tests, age-related changes in vision and existing research. In their brief review of existing data, the authors correctly note that, at best, only weak statistical relationships exist between people's performance on vision tests and their ability to drive safely. And, they add, there certainly is no sufficient evidence supporting the belief that a particular level of visual acuity clearly distinguishes safe from unsafe drivers.

The book targets individuals who have experienced vision loss but wish to either gain or retain some form of driver licensure, even

though they may not meet their state's vision standards for an unrestricted license. Indeed, the book was produced in large-print format, and the authors one (E. Peli) an internationally recognized low-vision specialist and researcher have made a concerted attempt to explain technical concepts in relatively non-technical terms.

The authors set out to educate the general public about the low-vision-driving controversy, which has been around for more than 30 years. Much of the debate has occurred on the pages of professional journals, where it has been fueled more by opinion than hard scientific data. The continuing uncertainty concerning the validity of existing standards is indicated by the fact that “while all states accept visual acuity of 20/40 as sufficient for unrestricted licensure, almost no two states have the same visual acuity requirements for people not meeting that standard. What better proof that there is no consensus (evidence) on the visual acuity actually necessary to drive safely!” the authors wrote.

This point is important because it provides the justification for the book and its underlying argument that numerical values representing vision-test results should not be the sole basis for granting or denying the driving privilege. People with vision loss who have appropriate low-vision aids and training frequently show a remarkable ability to compensate for their diminished visual abilities. In the words of the authors, “*Driving With Confidence*’ is not just a catchy title for a book; it is a statement of empowerment. The message is simple: In many cases, persons with low vision conditions can and do receive, retain and exercise their driving privileges, safely and on a daily basis.”

Chapter 3 provides a brief review of how the eye works and an overview of the more significant eye disorders. The following chapter contains some excellent advice to help one make an informed decision about one’s fitness to drive.

Assuming that one decides to pursue licensure, Chapters 5-7 outline the steps necessary to ensure that an individual secures the right visual aid (if any), understands the importance of learning to use it effectively and efficiently, and gets training from a certified driving instructor. For many years, certified driving instructors have trained individuals with physical disabilities to learn to drive with the use of adaptive devices and controls. These same instructors can, and do,

train individuals with visual disabilities to drive. Sometimes the applicants are successful, sometimes not.

The book contains several appendices that provide information including the possible implications of the Americans With Disabilities Act for driver licensure, a catalog of organizations that serve as important low-vision resources, a dictionary of terms relevant to low vision and a list of potentially useful aids for those with reduced vision.

Appendix E is particularly noteworthy: It provides an excellent summary of each state's vision standards for an unrestricted driver's license and more important, outlines any possible options for restricted licensure. Previously, such information was accessible only through a search of professional journals and books, so Appendix E is a particularly valuable resource for the general public.

This book should be of interest to the numerous professional groups that provide services associated with vision loss, aging and driving. In addition, the book also should be of great interest to people with vision loss who fear losing their driver's license. *Driving With Confidence* provides an advocate and a potentially encouraging word to older adults with visual problems who want to continue driving.

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