

Bringing freedom and independence to wheelchair users

*An introduction to wheelchair
accessible vehicles*



RICHARD SUTTON & CHRIS LEECH

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Introduction

Although a wheelchair accessible car may not be the vehicle you always dreamed of buying, it could well be the most influential purchase you ever make. Whether you're a chair user looking to regain your independence or a relative or partner searching for a way to improve the quality of life of your loved one, wheelchair accessible vehicles can offer the solution.

Though there are clearly negatives that come with being a wheelchair user, difficulty of transportation need not be one of them. Unfortunately, however, too few people are unaware of the enormous benefits that wheelchair accessible vehicles offer chair users and their families, and also just how simple these vehicles are to use. Plus, they come at a price that won't break the bank!

In the following pages we will cover everything from how chair users get in and out of the vehicle to what details it is necessary to provide in order to ensure you will end up with a car that fits your needs exactly.

Once you are finished, not only will you understand the types of vehicles available and the incredible impact that they have on the lives of the people who use them, you will also know exactly what to consider when it comes to looking for a vehicle yourself.

Richard Sutton and Chris Leech

Wholesale Car Company

Will a vehicle have a big impact on an individual's quality of life?

The answer to this question is simple – yes! For those who make the investment in a wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV), the results can be truly life-changing.

This is particularly true for retired people. Unfortunately, people who become disabled beyond the age of retirement aren't entitled to the enhanced rate of personal independence payment required for the Motability programme, which assumes that they will no longer need transportation. However, this is simply not the case for a large percentage of retired wheelchair users. With the retired population in Britain on the rise, and with people living to increasingly fine ages, more and more people are in need of help when it comes to managing transportation. Whether they suffer from respiratory conditions, heart conditions, arthritis or strokes, being unable to get around easily can have a hugely negative effect on an individual's quality of life. As well as restricting their personal freedom, having no method of transport can make it difficult to keep in contact with loved ones or even pop to the shops, especially if the person in question lives alone.

As accepting a disability can be extremely tough, frequently people will go several years before they finally accept the fact that they need to have additional transport. However, once they or a loved one makes the decision to purchase a wheelchair accessible vehicle, they are often unable to fathom how they ever lived without it. Indeed, a lot of people have said to us that they wish they had bought the vehicle earlier as it made such an impact to the wheelchair user's lifestyle.

Whatever your age or disability, a wheelchair accessible vehicle will provide you with a remarkable level of independence and freedom. If you're looking for a drive-from-chair vehicle, we will be able to provide you with a vehicle that will meet your requirements at a price you can afford.

Assessing requirements

This is the one vehicle that you never wanted to have to buy, but it's the one vehicle that it's most important you get right.

Unlike in a midlife crisis when you might suddenly decide that you're going to buy yourself a motorbike or a Porsche, only to find yourself thinking "why on earth did I buy that?" a few weeks later, wheelchair accessible vehicles require a lot more

forethought. Unlike with previous vehicles, it is important to get this purchase right first time around.

Because of this, we will spend however long is necessary discussing your requirements in detail with you so as to be sure that you make the right choice. There are a great many things that need to be taken into account if you are to end up with a vehicle that is perfectly suited to the needs of the chair user, from whether they have a scooter, a wheelchair or a power chair and what its dimensions are, to their requirements in terms of passenger carrying capacity.

In some cases, people will come to us with preconceived ideas of what they think they need. However, when we discover the size of the chair they have, or that they've got a scooter to transport, for example, we will often have to inform them that the vehicle they have in mind isn't the most suitable available.

Similarly, often people will simply be unaware of the range of options available. For example, as well as being able to offer drive-from-chair vehicles and a wide range of vehicles where the chair user is secured firmly in the back of the car and able to enjoy excellent visibility, there are also models where the wheelchair user is able to ride in the front passenger position. Needless to say, we always take the time to talk through the various options and considerations with interested parties.

With every purchase, the primary concern is to meet the needs of the chair user. To some degree, compared to the importance of getting this right, considerations such as styling and colour pale into insignificance.

Drive-from-chair vehicles

To cater to the needs of chair users who, despite being disabled, are still perfectly able to drive, we offer a range of drive-from-chair vehicles. Perfect for those customers who have suffered amputations or lost the use of their lower limbs yet still want to retain their independence, these vehicles allow the chair user to pass through the rear of the vehicle straight into the driving position.

With the aid of a remote control, the chair user is able to lower a ramp at the rear of the vehicle remotely, enter the vehicle, travel through to the driver's position, engage their chair in a docking station specifically designed to lock their chair in position and then fold the ramp back up again, all with extreme ease and without the need for help from a third party.

Generally, these vehicles will be fitted with hand controls, but in some cases people will still have the use of one leg and will therefore want the pedals adjusted to suit their needs, which can also be arranged. Ordinarily, this involves an accelerator which can fold down to the side of the brake pedal, with the other pedal folding back up out the way in order to allow the chair user to drive an automatic, even if the pedals are the opposite way round.

“What details will I need to provide?”

In order to ensure that you make the right choice of vehicle, the more details you can provide us with, the better! The most critical details we need, however, are the basic dimensions of the chair, the length of chair including foot plate and the ‘ground to head’ height of the chair user when they are sat in the chair.

Vehicles will vary in terms of internal headroom and visibility, so providing these measurements is crucial if the chair user is to get the best end result.

If, as is often the case, the chair user is unable to come to our dealership themselves, should a partner/loved one come in with these details, we will be able to complete pre-qualification with them without the need to see the chair user. Alternatively, if they haven’t got the chair measurements, by coming equipped with the make and model number of the chair, we can usually get the relevant measurements from the chair supplier’s website.

How does the chair user get in and out of the vehicle?

All WAVs are fitted with either lifts or ramps. Lifts are usually limited to larger vehicles and are able to raise the chair user to entry level with the use of a remote control. Ramps, though shallow, will often be fitted with a winch system designed to help those responsible for loading the chair users. This type of system is particularly useful for elderly couples or if the chair user is particularly heavy.

Loading

Whatever the vehicle, the chair loading process is generally very straightforward. However, so as to be 100% sure that customers are fully acquainted with their

car's safety features, we always give full instruction both during the purchasing process and at the point of delivery.

How are chairs secured?

At Wholesale Car Company, safety is our number one concern. As such, in all our vehicles, chairs are held down by full security straps. These usually come in the form of two electro-reel belts which are attached to the base of the chair when it is still outside the vehicle and ratchet in as the occupant enters, with two further straps securing the rear of the chair.

In addition, every wheelchair user will also have their own seatbelt. In order to accommodate many different shapes and sizes of passenger, unlike a regular seatbelt, this belt system will be highly adjustable. This way, rather than having to worry constantly about sharp corners or swift braking, chair users will be able to feel enormously secure.

Whatever the vehicle, don't worry – we won't rest until we are sure you fully understand all the safety features of your car.

Conversion companies

There are several different converters of wheelchair accessible vehicles across the UK and all convert their cars slightly differently depending on the shape, size and design of the vehicle. This means that variables such as headroom will generally differ between converters, as will the access width and wheelchair bed.

Therefore, so as to be able to meet customers' requirements more exactly, we stock vehicles from a broad base of converters.

Modifications

Whenever we sell a vehicle, our primary goal is to cater as efficiently as possible to the needs of the chair user. In order to help us to meet individual requirements more exactly, we have a technician who is able to make modifications to the vehicles. Whether you need extra seats fitted, winches attached or lifts installed, we are able to help you optimise your vehicle to ensure the comfort and safety of the chair user.

The vehicles we offer have all come primarily from the Motability programme. This means that having been first produced by the manufacturer, vehicles are then purchased and modified by a converter on behalf of an end-user.

With drive-from-chair cars in particular, although the basic concept of each vehicle remains the same, every car will be customised to suit individual requirements. For example, some vehicles will be fitted with cruise control, as people who have a hand accelerator and braking system generally find that, even if they are able to hold the accelerator, after 15 minutes or so on the motorway, their hand will start to ache.

In short, our aim is to make life as easy as possible for those who will be using the car. Often, simple modifications, such as the installation of grab handles or winches, can make a huge difference to the customer and will greatly reduce the chance of accidents occurring when the chair user is entering or exiting the vehicle. When it comes to comfort, safety and security, it isn't worth running any risks. If you think that there is a particular modification that would make life easier for either the chair user or the person responsible for helping them, just mention it to us and we'll be happy to help – ensuring the comfort and safety of vehicle users is part and parcel of what we do.

Things to consider

How many people will be travelling in the vehicle with the chair user?

This is a key thing to consider when deciding on a WAV, as there are only a few domestic wheelchair accessible vehicles that are able to accommodate 3 or 4 people along with the chair user. However, by discussing your needs with us in detail, we are almost always able to get you the vehicle you are looking for.

For example, there are some WAV converter companies which specialise in conversions in which all the original seats are kept in the form of fold-down chairs. These vehicles enable you to fold down the double bench section as part of a 60-40 split; meaning that they are able to carry 4 people once the chair is loaded (including the chair user). WAVs such as these can be extremely useful for customers looking for a car which is able to both transport a wheelchair user and also function as a multi-passenger vehicle.

Seating positions

Seating positions are fairly restricted and are determined by the conversion and style of car. For example, because of the difference in headroom, a taller person will normally be far better off in a Doblo than a Kangoo.

This is just one of the things that we prompt customers to consider when they are buying a car for a disabled relative or partner and is another reason why it is essential to provide us with as much information as possible.

Insurance

As wheelchair accessible vehicles are fairly rare, the majority of mainstream insurance companies will put an excessive load on policies because they don't understand the marketplace properly, which can hit the car owner hard in the pocket.

However, we are able to direct customers to several insurers who have a particular depth of knowledge when it comes to insuring wheelchair accessible vehicles. In fact, often the cost will be lower than that which customers have paid for previous vehicles.

Although there are some wheelchair users who, having bought their WAV, can barely be separated from their new car, the vast majority of wheelchair accessible vehicles achieve very low mileage for their relative years.

Generally speaking, most people want this type of vehicle simply for convenience. Although they may not be driving it every day, having a WAV can allow wheelchair users to see friends, go shopping, get to hair appointments etc. This means that very often the vehicles won't be driven much further than a radius of around 10 to 15 miles from the wheelchair user's home.

Those insurance companies that specialise in wheelchair accessible vehicles are aware of how these vehicles are used and will reflect this in the policy cost.

Hire

In addition to selling wheelchair accessible vehicles, we also have a small fleet of WAVs available for short-term and long-term hire. These can be perfect for people wishing to take a disabled relative on holiday with them, for example.

However, just as when we are selling a vehicle we put the needs of the customer first, when people approach us looking to hire a vehicle, we won't just give you the keys and say "there's your car, off you go" – we will spend around 20 minutes going through the loading process with you to be sure you are confident in using the car. We want people to leave knowing exactly how to secure the chair user to ensure their safety.

Having experienced the incredible flexibility that a wheelchair accessible vehicle affords chair users and their carers first-hand, on returning their hired vehicle to us, people will commonly express an interest in buying one for themselves.

Frequently asked questions

- **“Whereabouts are you located and do you provide home demonstrations?”**

Based in the East Midlands and only three miles from junction 26 of the M1, we are able to provide a national service.

Subject to consultation with you over the telephone, we can arrange to demonstrate the vehicle at your home.

- **“Do you deliver?”**

For a small additional charge, we are able to arrange delivery to anywhere in the UK mainland.

- **“Are you able to finance these vehicles?”**

Yes, we are! However, this isn't done through the Motability programme. Instead, we have a specialist finance company called Southern WAV Finance who specialise in financing this type of vehicle.

- **“Will I have to pay VAT?”**

Providing the car is being purchased for the benefit of a sole chair user, there is no VAT to be paid. Similarly, if the car is being provided to a charity, there is also zero VAT to be paid, as many charities are exempt from VAT.

- **“Will I be exempt from paying road tax?”**

If you are currently receiving the war pensioners' mobility supplement or the higher rate disability component of disability living allowance, you are automatically

exempt from having to pay road tax. However, as mentioned earlier, people who fall ill after retirement age aren't eligible for this higher rate and, as a result, many retired wheelchair users will still have to pay road tax.

For more details, see DVLA leaflet V188.

- **“Am I eligible for a blue badge?”**

As this scheme is managed by the local authorities, you will need to apply to your local Social Services department to see if you're eligible for a blue badge. Generally speaking, however, vehicle users will usually qualify.

- **“Where do these vehicles come from?”**

The majority of our vehicles are sourced from Motability, a national charity set up by the government. As one of the largest companies of their kind in the UK, all their vehicles come to us with a full service history as part of the Motability programme.

- **Buying back**

As a high percentage of vehicles are bought by or for people who are either ill or of an older generation, it may be the case that after several years, you may no longer need the vehicle and wish to sell it on. If this should prove to be the case, we are often able to help. As long as the vehicle isn't too old and is still in good condition, we will be happy to buy it back.

Why choose us?

Appearance and quality

At Wholesale Car Company, we pride ourselves on the quality and appearance of our cars. All of our vehicles are serviced and fully prepared before delivery. What's more, if the manufacturer stipulates that due to the age and mileage of the vehicle, the car is due a new cam belt, we will include this as part of our preparation process. Further, we take particular care to ensure that all our vehicles are prepared to an extremely high standard as we are acutely aware of the fact that these vehicles will be going to people that require reliability.

We don't send vehicles out that are badly scratched and dented. Where there are small cosmetic issues to be sorted, we will fix them before they get to you.

Warranty

Unlike most WAV providers, to give you peace of mind, we provide all of our vehicles with a 12 month, nationwide warranty which is backed by us, not insurance backed.

Furthermore, even if you experience any difficulties with your vehicle after your warranty expires, such as a problem with the chair security system, we are often able to help out. Rather than washing our hands of customers as soon as possible, we are well aware that people require ongoing support and advice and are committed to helping customers however we can for as long as they own the vehicle.

Width of choice

At the moment, the choice of wheelchair accessible vehicles across the country is extremely limited. Although there are one or two dealers that carry around 5-10 different models, we are virtually unique in carrying in excess of 50 units.

The importance of having this width of choice should not be underestimated. By offering customers such a wide range of vehicles, we are able to match wheelchair users with a vehicle which suits their needs perfectly.

Part exchange

Despite the fact that it can make purchasing a vehicle a great deal easier, many people are still embarrassed to ask about part exchange. At Wholesale Car Company there is no need to be, as we will take anything in part exchange. Everything's got a value, and we have outlets for regular cars, so whether your car is a £250 banger or a £20,000 prestige vehicle we will be able to help you out. Even if you are in the position where you have a vehicle that is worth more than the car you are looking to buy from us, we are not averse to doing 'backwards deals'.

Further, if you or your partner should fall ill, we are quite happy to arrange 2-for-1 vehicle exchanges. In short, we do everything in our power to try to make the whole process as easy and painless as possible for the customer.

Referral incentives

Because of our high levels of customer care and the overall quality of our vehicles we get an extremely high level of referral from our customers, who are keen to recommend us to friends and family.

So as to prompt people to spread the word about how purchasing a wheelchair accessible vehicle has helped change their life or the life of a loved one, we offer a rewards scheme for such referrals.

We really care!

Lastly, and most importantly, we really do care about our customers. Throughout the whole process, our priority is to make life as easy as possible for those using the car. Whenever we encounter someone interested in purchasing a car, not only do we go to great lengths to ensure that they end up with the right vehicle, but we will also ensure that they are fully aware of how to operate all of the equipment before they leave our premises. Further, we are always happy to help those in need of ongoing help and support. Whether you need advice, new safety fittings installed or are simply looking to sell the vehicle, we are only ever a phone call away.

Conclusion

I hope that this guide has proven both helpful and informative and that you are now much more aware both of the benefits of wheelchair accessible vehicles and how they work.

In closing, let me reiterate the enormous impact that a vehicle can have on the life of a chair user. Not only will it enable them to see friends and pop to the shops, it will also help them to regain their independence and freedom, something that will vastly improve the chair user's quality of life.

Entering this market for the first time can be quite daunting and we are acutely aware of the need to supply customers with the right car first time around.

Now, let us tell you a little about Wholesale Car Company...

About us

Having founded the company in 1986, we draw on a wealth of experience in the industry, enabling us to offer clients a great deal of help whatever their needs.

As one of the UK's leading suppliers of used wheelchair adapted vehicles, we pride ourselves in our human, caring approach [something that is highly appreciated by customers, as our testimonials clearly illustrate].

Based in the East Midlands, we are ideally situated to help customers throughout the country, and have recently dealt with clients in countries as far away as Ireland, France, Malta, Cyprus and even New Zealand!

For more information and to view the wide range of vehicles we offer, just visit our website...

www.wholesalecarcompany.co.uk

We look forward to working with you!

What previous customers say about us...

[The following comments are taken from the Derbyshire County Council's Trusted Trader website, which you can find at www.derbyshire.gov.uk/community/trusted_trader/]

"This is the second vehicle we have purchased from this supplier. Nothing is too much trouble for them. No pressure selling, just good old fashioned service which gives you confidence in what you are buying. Can recommend them unreservedly. Hope to continue to use them in the future."

07/12/2012

"I was really pleased with the company. They really took care of me and my disabled son from start to finish."

29/10/2012

"Professional and excellent service. Second vehicle purchased from this company. Would not hesitate to highly recommend them. First class."

06/09/2012

"Very helpful, co-operative and understanding. Even though I am on the West Coast of Scotland we were able to use the internet and emails to part exchange my old wheelchair adapted car for a newer one."

28/08/2012

"The salesman with whom I dealt was very sincere and wanted the car I bought from him to be absolutely right for my needs. He spent a lot of time and effort to be sure that I was satisfied with my purchase."

13/08/2012

"Would definitely recommend. Our salesman showed genuine commitment to ensuring that our needs were met. He was generous with his time and available knowledge."

09/07/2012

"I felt that this company has a genuine concern for their customers and they made sure that I understood the operation of the vehicle and the relevant safety issues."

15/06/2012

“Very helpful sales staff who left you alone to try the vehicle and made you a decent “cuppa” too! Excellent service. I would use this company again.”

11/06/2012

“I couldn't have asked for better service, very nice, very helpful people, highly recommended.”

23/04/2012

“Very polite and not pushy. Would recommend. Good stock of cars and vans.”

06/03/2012

“This comments box is not big enough to express my appreciation of this company or to explain to others how professional they are.”

01/03/2012

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An introduction to wheelchair accessible vehicles

Although a wheelchair accessible vehicle may not be the vehicle you always dreamed of buying, it could well be the most influential purchase you ever make. Whether you're a chair user looking to regain your independence or a relative or partner searching for a way to improve the quality of life of your loved one, wheelchair accessible vehicles can offer the solution.

There are many negatives that come with being a wheelchair user, but difficulty of transportation need not be one of them. Unfortunately, however, too few people are aware not only of the enormous benefits that wheelchair accessible vehicles offer chair users and their families, but also of just how simple these vehicles are to use. This unique guide from Richard Sutton and Chris Leech of Wholesale Car Company aims to change that. Inside, they cover many topics, including...

- The extent of the impact on users' quality of life
- What details is it necessary to provide a dealer with?
- How chair users get in and out of the vehicle
- Will owners be exempt from paying road tax?
- Will insuring a vehicle be expensive?

With the best part of 70 years' experience in the motor trade between them, Richard and Chris have an extraordinary depth of knowledge when it comes to wheelchair accessible vehicles. Once you are finished, not only will you understand the types of vehicles available and the incredible impact that they have on the lives of the people who use them, you will also know exactly what to consider when looking for a vehicle yourself.



Richard Sutton



Chris Leech