

## Questions And Answers Proposed About Driving With A Visual Impairment: A Literature of Controversy

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### Abstract

June 10, 2004 marks the 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the first and only automobile race that Henry Ford ever participated in. Although he won that race (his only two competitors dropped out due to mechanical problems) the event so terrified him that he stated “once is enough” and gave up racing. Ford’s race car developed 26 horsepower. Automobile driving has always been treated with a mix of fear, exhilaration and controversy. This is true whether the topic is racing or driving by individuals with visual impairments. As early as the 1930s concerns were being raised over one-eyed drivers [1] and optometrists had begun to realize that while low vision devices were helpful they had limits and required the visually impaired individual to learn to see with them [2]. By the mid 1950s the concern began to focus on driving safety and the extent of the driver’s visual field [3] and in the 1960s the focus was extended to considerations of vision and illumination [4] and general considerations of vision, ocular pathology, and driving performance [5, 6]. Still, it wasn’t until the 1970s that serious attention was given to how to prepare visually impaired individuals to operate an automobile [7] and visually impaired individuals began to advocate for the right to be tested for a driver’s license [8]. It was also the 1970s that marked the beginning of what has become a thirty-year controversy. In those thirty years respected professionals have advocated against driving [9], discussed the issues [10], devised training strategies [11], debated the fairness of existing driver licensing procedures [12], assessed the driving behavior of visually impaired drivers [13], and examined their safety records [14]. Nearly 300 learned papers have been produced since Henry Ford gave up racing due to his fear yet we sometimes appear to be no closer to a resolution to the controversy surrounding driving with a visual impairment. In this paper I will use the history of our literature to examine the questions that have been asked and the answers proposed to see if there are any answers or merely more questions.

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