

# THE DRIVERS SEAT

## Information Fact Sheet



It was so simple back then. You climbed up into the old FJ Holden, and made one adjustment to the (bench) seat - forwards or backwards, depending on the length of your legs. The only consideration was to ensure that your left knee didn't whack the column gear shift. The seat back was fixed at an angle that Holden hoped would satisfy the majority of drivers and passengers. Around the land, chiropractors rubbed their hands in anticipation.

Today, we would find the old FJ pew unsupportive and uncomfortable. Most new cars have adjustability built into the seat/steering wheel relationship - knowing how to use it properly will give you the best comfort, maximum crash protection while providing the control you need to steer the car well.

### EXPERT ADVICE

Safety expert Dr Michael Henderson points out the minimum recommended distance from the centre of the chest to the centre of the steering wheel is 250mm or 10 inches. Dr Henderson advises 300mm. Any closer than this increases the risk of your face hitting the wheel due to seatbelt stretch.

Raising the driver's seat to a high position also has obvious advantages for vision around the car - the higher you sit, the better you see which is especially valuable in city traffic.

### BAD HABITS

Some drivers seem to be convinced that straight arms and finger-tip steering is the way to go. Others believe they can somehow steer a car with only the left hand on the wheel and the right arm resting on the window sill.

These techniques are dangerously flawed. In normal driving, neither offers the fine control required for smooth, accurate cornering. In an emergency especially where quick changes of direction are required, they simply don't allow you to turn the wheel enough.

### CORRECT POSITIONING

#### The seat

Ideally you should be seated so you are able to drape your hands fully over the top of the wheel, with your wrists resting on the rim, while keeping your shoulders planted firmly in the seat back. You steer a car with your hands, not your shoulders, which should remain against the seat back at all times.

#### The steering wheel

For holding the wheel, experts recommend the quarter-to-three grip. Bend your elbows in a gentle vee. If your arms are too straight, your seat cushion needs to be moved forward or the seat back brought to a more vertical position. If the steering wheel has a telescopic adjustment, this too can be used.

## THINGS TO BE AWARE OF

- The steering wheel should not be used as a brace. The FJ driver had to grip the wheel hard to avoid sliding around on the old bench seat, but most seats today have side bolsters which support your upper body when cornering.
- Where necessary, your legs can do the propping - the left leg against the console or driver's footrest and the right against the driver's door - leaving your hands free to steer.
- It's important to note, however, that you must not be able to completely straighten your left leg. Even when braced, the knee should remain bent.
- Severe upper leg and hip injuries are caused when a driver automatically braces for the impact by straightening the left leg. When the impact occurs, the leg is locked, so the force is transferred straight up the leg to the hip joint. If your left leg is bent, the knee will flex and absorb some of this energy.
- Your grip on the wheel will ideally be closer to a firm caress than a knuckle-whitening grasp. If your arms and hands are relaxed, they will be much smoother and more precise when manipulating the wheel.

## THE HEAD RESTRAINT

The head restraint is not a head rest, rather it has a vital role to play in safety. Unfortunately many cars provide restraints with insufficient adjustment to be of great value in preventing injuries. The head restraint is designed to stop your head snapping backwards in the event of another vehicle running into the back of your car. When correctly adjusted the head restraint height should be raised so the top of the restraint is no lower than eye level.

### Points to remember:

- Set the seat high with the backrest near vertical.
- Sit at least 300mm from the steering wheel.
- Keep your elbows and knees bent.
- Hold the wheel at a quarter to three with a slightly firm but relaxed grip.
- The top of the head restraint should reach to at least eye level.

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