INSIDER’S GUIDE:

19 ANSWERS THAT SAVE YOU TIME WHEN PURCHASING A WHEELCHAIR VAN
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Introduction

Often customers ask us at Ride Away®, "Why are you asking me all these questions? Nobody else did." The truth is we ask these questions because we care about you. We want to provide you with the perfect mobility solution and we cannot recommend a mobility product without knowing about your lifestyle, how you plan on using the product, and the nature of the user’s disability. We ask you questions so that we can help educate you about your options and find those that both meet your needs and exceed your expectations.

The purpose of this guide is to make sure you, as a customer, are well prepared when you decide to purchase your accessible vehicle and related products. Below, we present a number of detailed questions that you should ask yourself prior to visiting Ride Away, or any mobility dealer, to help prepare you for being asked these same questions by your Mobility Consultant. Additionally, we will outline details regarding driver evaluation, vehicle options, the fitting process, and various other aspects pertinent to the process of buying an accessible vehicle.

Chassis vs. Conversion

In the mobility industry, the chassis of the vehicle is separate from the conversion of the vehicle. Simply put, the chassis is the original vehicle, commonly provided by Chrysler, Dodge, Toyota, Ford, or Honda. When you speak about a converted wheelchair accessible vehicle, the options you would get at a traditional auto dealer apply to the chassis of a modified vehicle. Factory add-ons like blind spot detection, backup camera systems, and leather seating aid people with limited neck mobility and reduced torso range of motion or elimination problems and mobility device-to-vehicle transfer issues, respectively.

The conversion is the modification that occurs at one of a handful of vehicle modifiers throughout the United States. BraunAbility is the largest in the industry followed by VMI or Vantage Mobility. The conversion includes a new lowered floor, the ramp system, kneel system (if equipped), and the associated modifications to the electrical and other systems.

Knowing the difference between the conversion and the chassis is the first step in the process and is important when pricing vehicles. New and some used vans separate the price for the chassis and the conversion. Make sure when you are getting a price online you are getting the full price as well as a breakdown of the price of the chassis and the conversion, if available. You can also speak to a Mobility Consultant who will give you the full explanation of the pricing a mobility vehicle.
Questions to Consider

When you first begin speaking to a Mobility Consultant, make sure that he/she has all of your personal information correct, i.e. your name is spelled correctly, proper address, accurate phone number, email address, etc. Errors with these basic items can cause problems when titling your vehicle and submitting warranty information to your conversion provider.

**Question: Have you ever had a wheelchair accessible vehicle before?**

Mobility Consultants ask this question because it helps them determine what you like and don’t like about mobility vehicles. Your past vehicle choices can be used as an indicator of choices you might make in the future. If you intend to trade-in a used mobility vehicle, this will also provide the Consultant with information so he/she can determine what your trade is worth.

If this is your first vehicle, your Mobility Consultant will likely ask questions to determine how much research you have done and how familiar you are with the vehicles. A Consultant’s goal is to help you as much as they can and having detailed information is the best way to do so.

**Question: Who is the person in the wheelchair or scooter? Who will the vehicle primarily be used for?**

It is critical to form a positive working relationship with your Mobility Consultant. To help with that, provide some information about the individual using the wheelchair (if it is not yourself). Name, relationship, age, background, etc. are important.

Your Consultant also needs to know if the individual in the wheelchair will be driving or riding as a passenger. The more the consultant can get to know the wheelchair user, the better he/she can serve their needs.

**Question: What is the nature of the disability?**

If the individual with the disability is going to be a driver, it is essential that your Mobility Consultant understands the nature of the disability, the symptoms, side effects, and any other issues that might arise.

If the individual has a progressive disability, it is important to know how the disability could change in the future. Changes in wheelchair types, driving controls, and other options may be more costly to fix in the future if they are not considered in the present. Often, a Mobility Consultant can identify a solution that will work for the individual's current needs and can be adapted with ease for future use, if need be.
**Question: Is the person with the disability currently driving or is there a possibility of them driving in the future?**

This question is critical and is asked to determine if modifications on your vehicle may need to be altered or adjusted in the future. Determining this up front will allow your Mobility Consultant to identify a solution that can be easily adapted and won’t cost you a lot of money down the road when or if the driving situation changes.

**Question: What is the make and model of your wheelchair or scooter?**

Mobility Consultants need to know the exact make, model, and measurements of your wheelchair. This knowledge allows them to research your needs and determine which equipment will be best suited to secure your wheelchair inside your van.

Another important detail is ensuring that the customer and their chair fit comfortably inside the vehicle of their choice. Mobility Consultants will ask questions to determine this, such as:

- What is the distance from the floor to the top of the individual’s head (or headrest)?
- Is there a tilt system on the chair? If so can the individual recline partially, if needed, as they enter/exit the vehicle?
- What is the width of wheelchair? Outside wheel to outside wheel, at the widest point.
- Is there a tray system? If so, what is the width of the tray?
- What is the distance from the tip of the individual’s feet to the back of the wheelchair?

Even if a Mobility Consultant asks you all these questions over the phone, they may still need to meet you in person to take actual measurements. In the Mobility Industry, there is an old saying that “An inch is a mile.” This means that if the vehicle doesn’t fit you by even one inch, it might as well not fit by a mile. Getting the correct measurements is essential for every Mobility Consultant to ensure their customer’s safety.

**Question: Are you planning on getting a new chair or scooter in the near future?**

A new wheelchair can change which equipment you need to make it compatible with your vehicle. If you are considering buying an accessible vehicle and there is a chance you will get a new wheelchair soon, please notify your Mobility Consultant so that they can help you plan accordingly.

While this may seem like a lot of information to give out all at once, keep in mind that our goal is to make you as comfortable and happy with your purchase as possible. We ask questions to find out not only what you need, but want you really want in an accessible vehicle.
**Question: If interested in Driving Controls, have you had a driving evaluation or do you have a current license for driving with adaptive equipment?**

Ride Away requires that those with disabilities have a license to drive a modified vehicle or have a written equipment recommendation/prescription from a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist before we install any adaptive equipment, hand controls, or driving controls.

If you need to obtain a license, your Mobility Consultant will help walk you through the process. They will help you find a Driver Rehabilitation Specialist who will schedule an evaluation with you and take care of any paperwork. See the “Driver Evaluation” section below for more information.

**Question: What is your ideal vehicle? Minivan, full size van, truck, 4x4?**

Not everyone is aware of all the accessible vehicle options available. At Ride Away, we stock minivans, full sized vans, trucks, SUV’s, and more. Narrowing down the type of car you want lets your Mobility Consultant give you more detailed information and help educate you on the pros/cons of that of vehicle.

**Question: Would you like a New or Used Vehicle?**

This is a very standard question that Mobility Consultants will ask. The debate over New vs. Used is usually a decision made based on price and the nature of your individual needs. Wheelchair accessible vehicles hold their value well and you can expect to pay a premium for a gently used converted vehicle.

**Question: How many miles do you drive in a year?**

This question aids in resolving the new/used debate. If you find yourself driving a lot of miles each year, you may not want to buy a high mileage used vehicle and might be better off buying a new one. But, if you don’t rack up a lot of miles, an older, used, or high mileage vehicle may suit your needs just fine. There is also a Used Chassis/New Conversion option that gives customers many of the advantages of purchasing a new vehicle at a price more in line with used vehicles.

While the decision to buy new or used is ultimately up to you, it is your Mobility Consultant’s responsibility to learn about your transportation needs, and help you find a vehicle that makes the most out of your investment.
Question: Would you like a Side-Entry or Rear-Entry Vehicle?

Many individuals are not aware that there is a choice when it comes to ramp location inside the vehicle. Both side and rear entry offer different benefits that should be contrasted against the needs of the individual and the nature of their disability.

Side Entry

• An individual can load/unload themselves or others onto the curb and avoid loading/unloading into traffic.
• Wheelchair users can drive from their wheelchair.
• Wheelchair users can ride from the front passenger seat.
• The disadvantage is your ramp may get blocked by another vehicle

Rear Entry

• Your ramp cannot be blocked from the side
• Often works well for families with young children
• A child/adult in a wheelchair can ride between two other passengers
• Older vans with higher mileage can be converted to rear entry ramps
• Less maintenance, especially with a manual ramp
• Loading/unloading could be more dangerous in certain parking situations
• Individual in the wheelchair cannot drive from their wheelchair
• Individual in the wheelchair cannot ride up front in the passenger area

Question: How many members of your family are there? Or how many people would ride in the vehicle?

Providing this information will help your consultant to determine what type of vehicle you need. A large family or participation in certain types of activities may be better off with a full sized van instead of a minivan.

Question: What color vehicle would you like? Do you have a backup color?

We stock a large inventory with many different colors of cars available, however there is always the possibility that a particular car in a particular color may be out of stock. Many customers are flexible when it comes to color but if you have a strong preference, make sure to tell your Mobility Consultant up front. You should also be prepared with a backup color, in case your first choice does not pan out. So, if a vehicle in a certain color needs to be ordered, your Mobility Consultant can be prepared to do so.
**Question: What options would you like?**

Manufacturer options like rear backup cameras, blind spot assist, and automatic windshield wipers are very helpful to individuals with limited neck or arm mobility. Leather seats can ease the transfer from a wheelchair or scooter to the vehicle seating. Often, you are able to obtain options as aftermarket add-ons or by buying the OEM equipment and installing it after purchase. This is often easier than ordering a vehicle with the features already added.

One major feature to keep in mind is wheelchair docking devices. These are electronic systems that lock your wheelchair into place in your vehicle, eliminating the need for manual tie downs. Oftentimes, the location of the docking device can be changed, making it easily readjusted.

**Question: Do you have a trade-in vehicle? How much do you believe the trade-in is worth?**

Let your Mobility Consultant know if you have a vehicle you would like to use as a trade-in. A trade can be used to help boost your down payment and decrease the overall price of a new vehicle.

Vehicle trade-in appraisals can be one of the most important and challenging parts of the vehicle purchase process. Ride Away is one of the few companies that will accept all trades, pays off lien holders, and applies the trade-in’s fair market value to your deal. Some dealers take trades on consignment, and you only get paid when the vehicle sells, leaving you without payment for weeks or even months. We don’t play games with consignment or with trade-in values. We’ll make sure you get a fair market value for your trade when you purchase your mobility vehicle.

**Question: Do you have a loan on your trade-in?**

If you intend to trade in a vehicle, be prepared to answer a few questions on the financial aspects of that vehicle. Mobility Consultants need to know how much you owe, whom the lien holder is, and how much equity you have in your vehicle.

**Question: How do you plan on paying for the vehicle? Will you be getting any assistance in paying for the vehicle? Do you have any 3rd party funding?**

Be sure to know your options. Applying for grants and government assistance can be a huge help in affording your accessible vehicle. If you are connected to an organization such as the VA or Vocational Rehab, you may qualify for financial aid, so make sure to speak to your Mobility Consultant about applying for financial assistance.

**Question: Will you use a down payment for the vehicle? How much?**

This is a common question asked by Mobility Consultants to help them determine what kind of financing and payment schedule you will need to set up for your new vehicle.
Driver Evaluation

Many individuals purchase accessible vehicles, not only because they are looking for ease in transport, but also because they want to regain their independence and drive again. For many this means adding hand controls, pedal adjusters, and other forms of adaptive driving equipment.

The first step getting back on the road is to be evaluated by a licensed Driver Rehabilitation Specialist. Visit The Association of Driver Rehabilitation Specialists (ADED) website to locate ADED members in your state and identify the Certified Driver Rehabilitation Specialist nearest you.

The Driver Rehabilitation Specialist will assess if driving is a realistic goal by conducting a clinical assessment that covers visual, perceptual, cognitive and physical abilities, as well as a behind the wheel driving test. If driving is recommended, the Driver Rehabilitation Specialist will advise which driver training and adaptive driving equipment you will need in order to get started.

After training is complete and you have been certified to drive with adaptive equipment, the Driver Rehabilitation Specialist will send a recommendation to Ride Away. We then work with you to adapt your vehicle to your needs and get you back on the road.

Available Vehicle Options

Our inventory includes a wide variety of makes, models, and styles of accessible vehicles and products. In searching for your accessible vehicle, it is important to be aware of all the different options and features of each piece of equipment. Below is a basic summary of the most prominent features of our major products.

BraunAbility

Braun offers several different styles of vans to its customers. Their products include rear-entry, side-entry, full-size, and minivans modified from the top chassis providers in the country.

**BraunAbility Companion Van (SE and RE):** Braun’s Companion Van provides an affordable option to consumers on a budget. Both the Side-Entry (SE) and Rear-Entry (RE) models feature a manual door and a manual ramp with a lowered floor cut only in the passenger area of the vehicle. The manual features and “half cut” help keep the cost down while still incorporating the high quality engineering that BraunAbility is known for.
BraunAbility Paratransit Vans: These vans are ideal for individuals or groups that want to transport a group of people along with a wheelchair user. They can be built on a Dodge, Ford, or Chevy chassis and feature fold away seating to make more room if necessary.

BraunAbility Toyota Rampvan XT: This side-entry van is the cream of the crop. A modern, updated interior is complemented by a larger, 56” door height. The automatic door and ramp make it easy to use and the removable seating makes it ideal for carrying cargo.

BraunAbility Entervan: BraunAbility’s flagship vehicle has been around for over 20 years. The Entervan comes in a variety of models including Honda, Chrysler, and Dodge which all feature a 54-3/8” door height and automatic doors. There is also an XT version of the Entervan that boasts a full 56 1/2” door height, perfect for those who site taller in their chairs.

BraunAbility Toyota Rampvan Xi and XTi In-floor conversion: These side-entry vans have all of the features of the Toyota Rampvan, with a ramp that retracts automatically into the floor of the vehicle, giving the customer an unobstructed entryway.

BraunAbility Commercial Entervan: This van features ADA compliant manual driver and passenger sliding doors with 56 ¼” vertical opening. The 30” wide aluminum folding, swing-out ramp makes it easy to load and unload wheelchair users. The removable front driver and passenger seats can accommodate a driver or passenger wheelchair setup.

Full-Size Wheelchair Vans

Ideal for large groups or organizations that frequently transport ambulatory passengers, we carry full-sized vans adapted by Mobility Works as well as both vans and cutaway buses adapted by BraunAbility. All vans are equipped with high quality lifts and simple electrical controls for getting individuals in and out with ease.

Vantage Mobility (VMI)

VMI supplies conversions on Toyota, Honda, Dodge, and Chrysler minivans. The also do adaptations and conversions to full-sized vans and stock a number of different wheelchair lifts that can be added onto a vehicle.

Mobility SVM

Mobility SVM is the maker of the revolutionary, Wheelchair Accessible Truck. Available for purchase are GMC and Chevy trucks fitted with a conversion for either the driver or passenger side. These vehicles are as accessible as a van and provide individuals with a very different alternative to the traditional minivan style.
Other Available Vehicles

Aside from the standard manufacturers we are also able to work with Sprinter Vans, RV’s, School Buses, and just about any other vehicle. Depending on the vehicle, we can often add mobility seating, hand controls, lifts and more, all designed to make operation easier. If you have a vehicle you would like to have modified please give us a call at 877-659-9414, we will evaluate your vehicle and let you know what the best options are.

The Process of Fitting

Making sure a vehicle fits isn’t just about matching the features you want with the price you need, it’s also making sure that it is comfortable, safe, and set up to transport your wheelchair in the most ideal way possible.

The fitting process revolves around a few key questions. The first is: How tall does the wheelchair user sit in their chair? Keep in mind that we are not asking for the individuals standing height, but rather the measurement from the ground to the top of the person’s head, as they are sitting in their chair. This enables your Mobility Consultant to determine which vans have the optimal door height for you.

Next, your Mobility Consultant will need to know what the width of the wheelchair is. This is a measurement that should be taken from the outside edge of the wheel to the outside edge of the opposite wheel, at the widest points. This helps us ensure that the width of the van ramp is wide enough to comfortably and safely wheel the individual’s chair up and into the vehicle.

Your Mobility Consultant will also need to know if the user’s chair is powered or manual, and the exact make and model of the chair. Once your Mobility Consultant has the information they need they will look at all available options and select those that work best with your wheelchair. It is our goal to ensure that your new wheelchair accessible vehicle is the perfect fit for you, in every possible way.
Conclusion

The Ride Away Insider’s Guide aims to provide quality information in an easy to digest format that will take some of the stress out of the car buying process. We certainly hope that this has been useful and has helped to answer some of the many questions that arise when purchasing a wheelchair accessible van. If you have any further questions about the content, our vehicles, or are just looking for some general information, please feel free to give us a call at 877-659-9414 or Contact Us Through Our Website.