

## ABOUT US

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# TOM TOM ENGLISH



## VOCABULARY

### **Pertinent =**

Relevant to a particular matter

### **Synonyms =**

A word having the same, or nearly the same, as another

### **Bear something**

#### **out =**

To support or confirm something

### **Ludicrous =**

Foolish, unreasonably, completely out of place

## **Read the article overleaf and discuss these questions:**

1. Do you think this is a serious problem, or are the recent incidents just coincidences?
2. Do you think there should be an upper age limit for driving? If so, what should the age be? If not, why not?
3. What do you think about Japan's laws on elderly driving? Would you recommend some changes? If so, what changes? If not, why not?
4. Do you think self-driving cars will help with this problem? If so, when do you think we will see self-driving cars on the roads?
5. Can you think of any other solutions to this problem? What?
6. Do you drive? If so, would you consider stopping as you become older? When?

## VOCABULARY

### **Cognitive functions =**

Brain activities including reasoning, memory, attention, language

### **Deterioration =**

The process of becoming progressively worse

### **Dementia =**

Chronic or persistent disorder of the mental processes caused by brain disease or injury

When a car driven by an 83-year-old woman struck and killed two people in a hospital parking lot in Tachikawa, Tokyo, on Nov 12, the inevitable reaction was, "Again?" Shukan Shincho (Nov 24) surveys the **pertinent** day-after headlines in six major newspapers. All contain the word "mata" (again).

The word has few **synonyms**. This is not ordinarily a problem but was – again – the very next day, Nov 13, when an out-of-control car driven by another motorist in his 80s caused another fatality, the victim a woman riding a bicycle in Koganei, Tokyo. Headline writers' skills are being stretched to the limit.

It just keeps happening. The episodes above are among six in the past month. On Oct 21, a 76-year-old man killed himself and two passengers of a truck he collided with while driving on the wrong side of an expressway in Akita Prefecture. The following week, an 87-year-old man drove his truck into a group of elementary school children, killing one and injuring six. Nov 10: one woman killed, two women injured by a car driven by an 84-year-old near a hospital in Tochigi Prefecture. Nov 11: two shoppers injured in Tokyo when an 84-year-old rammed his car into a convenience store.

In an aging society, drivers, too, are aging. There were 62 fatal traffic accidents involving drivers 80 or over in 1993, according to statistics quoted by Shukan Shincho. In 2014, there were 266 – two every three days, with no end in sight to the surge in the number of elderly drivers. As of the end of last year, 1.96 million people 80 or over were licensed drivers.

Maybe the most dangerous thing about them is that most of them think they're

okay. They may well not be, says Tokyo University medical school neuropathologist Takeshi Iwatsubo – even if they don't have dementia. Reflexes slow and vision dims with age, he says. An aged driver is more likely than a younger one to panic at the unexpected – and hit the accelerator instead of the brake, for example, which is what seems to have happened in the Tachikawa accident.

Statistics **bear that out**. Drivers 80 and over are involved in 3.75 times more fatal accidents than drivers 64 or under.

**Dementia** is suspected as a factor in two of the six accidents recapped above. Legal measures in place to keep potentially dangerous elderly drivers off the roads seem **ludicrously** inadequate. Drivers 70 and over, when renewing their licenses, must sit through lectures and submit to vision tests. At 75 a mandatory test of **cognitive functions** kicks in. Results are arranged in three categories: (1) no problem; (2) some **deterioration**; (3) likely **dementia**. As of now, shockingly enough, drivers found to be in category 3 don't have their licenses revoked; they are not even sent on for further medical testing – unless they are subsequently involved in an accident or violation. Next March an amendment to the Road Traffic Law will close that loophole. How many preventable accidents will occur between now and then?

And how effective will the new law be? Not very, Iwatsubo fears. **Dementia**, he tells Shukan Shincho, is expanding at the rate of roughly 50,000 patients a year. That's an enormous potential caseload, he says, for the 2000-odd medical experts competent to deal with them.