

Warning for reckless mobility scooter users

Campaigners say offenders should be fined and face losing their vehicles as number of accidents rises

By Sophie Foster

ACCIDENTS involving riders of mobility scooters are on the rise, safety charities have warned, amid calls for persistent offenders to have their electric vehicles confiscated.

Road safety groups have called for laws to clarify scooter users' responsibilities while travelling on streets and pavements. Mobility vehicles do not require a licence, but high-powered versions must be registered with the DVLA before being driven on roads.

Those caught driving scooters while under the influence of alcohol or drugs are often free to continue using them after being given driving penalties.

IAM Roadsmart, a driver awareness group, suggested that repeat offenders should have their electric vehicles seized when other options are exhausted. "Anyone driving a mechanically propelled vehicle must be in full control of it," said Rebecca Ashton, from the charity. "Persistent offenders should be fined every time and banned if they have a licence."

There should be the offer of a "re-education course [to] help people to understand the dangers of using such a machine while unfit", she added.

"Education is paramount to helping people know what they can and can't do on their mobility scooters, and investment into helping people understand the rules would be welcomed."

However, "each case would need to be looked at on an individual basis", Ms Ashton added. "Removing the scooter should only be considered when all other options have failed."

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) said there had been a rise in the number of accidents and casualties since records began in 2013, and called for traffic laws to be updated.

“As with all forms of transport, mobility scooters create some risk for both the user and for other people,” an RoSPA spokesman said.

“It would help if it was made clear that road traffic laws governing careless and dangerous driving all apply to mobility scooter users.”

In the latest case, a drunk mobility scooter user was given a three-year driving ban even though he does not drive a car. Michael Heaven, 56, was disqualified from the roads after he pleaded guilty to driving a mechanically powered vehicle in Swindon, Wilts, last month.

He admitted the offence at Swindon magistrates’ court after tests showed he had been over one and a half times the drink drive limit while riding his burgundy-coloured scooter.

Heaven claimed he felt “victimised” by the disqualification, even though it was meaningless because he did not use a car.

“Even the solicitor said it’s something he’s never come across,” he said. “I didn’t drive anyway.”

Wiltshire Police defended the decision to prosecute, however. Sgt Tristian Winter said: “This man was over one-and-a-half times over the drink drive limit and was convicted under Section 4 of the Road Traffic Act, which essentially makes it an offence to drive or ride a mechanically propelled vehicle while impaired by drink or drugs. Members of the public should be aware that if they plan to use such a vehicle that they should not drink or take drugs as they are putting other people and themselves in danger, and they will be caught and put before the courts.”

Last year, a district judge in Northern Ireland found that he could not ban a 70-year-old repeat drink-driver from using his mobility scooter.

And in July 2017 John Hunt, who was 54 at the time, was endorsed with 10 penalty points but allowed to continue riding his scooter.

He had admitted being drunk while making his way home from a night out in Colchester, Essex.