

## Soar Valley Leads the Way

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2015 was a landmark day in Nottinghamshire as Soar Valley U3A opened its first members' workshop entitled '**Driver Awareness for People in their Third Age**'.

Statistical analysis undertaken by Nottinghamshire County Council had shown that accidents during 2014 involving 65+ year olds have increased, which was worrying because trends over the previous years had shown a steady decrease. It is not surprising therefore that Zena Oliver, NCC Principle Highways Safety Officer showed particular interest when she was approached by SVU3A who were considering a new venture of workshops, the first featuring Driver Awareness.

A brief meeting soon cemented the two organisations into preparing a workshop, the first of its kind in Nottinghamshire, designed specifically for this particular category of road user, and with the specific task of prolonging the safe driving experience of 'Third Agers'. It was soon agreed that the problem was not age itself but the need to increase awareness of some of the issues that third agers may face and how they can be overcome.



There are many challenges for today's motorists, not least the growing distractions of a

modern car's cockpit; radio, DVDs, internal heating zones, high intensity lights, sat navs, and not forgetting the 'infernal' mobile phone- to mention but a few - all tending to draw the driver's eyes off the road. Add to this the ever changing Highway Code, the sprouting up of road signs, the prolific growth of traffic monitoring cameras, the confusion of road markings, and the general increase in road traffic. Put all these together and add the issues that age itself brings – deterioration of hearing and eyesight for example. I can't mention them



all, but we Third Agers know what they are! Well with this as a backdrop it was a big challenge to come up with a programme that would increase awareness without frightening the pants off everyone. BUT this is exactly what Zena and her team did.

We had an initial interactive presentation with questions and multi choice answers with instant charting of the audience selections. There was a personal awareness questionnaire, (which engendered food for thought), and the presenters provided an insight into some of the issues that they themselves had experienced. This was followed by a breakout session where the audience was invited to rotate round six information and activity stations designed to increase awareness of many



issues. One station for example, manned by a team from Kwik-Fit, featured tyre safety and illustrated the latest in tyre labelling. Another demonstrated the confusion caused by different shaped wine glasses with regard to 'how much is a unit?' Also included was a Highway Code quiz and, bless me, even a road user's bingo. On the practical side there were driving aids that could be used; a removable handle to help access and an egress with a 'spinning cushion' which served a similar purpose. And there were mirror attachments for reversing and wide angle viewing.

My final comment is with regard to the 'Blind Spot' indicator card that brought me down to earth as I always thought that a blind spot was the fault of the wing mirrors.



SVU3A has led the way. The workshop was enlightening, informative, thought provoking and above all enjoyable. My thanks go to Nottinghamshire County Council, to Zena and her team and to my own workshop planning team.

**Peter Hickling**