

FARE INCREASES ALL ROUND?

STEVE McNAMARA **Page 5**

YOUR TAXIAPP QUESTIONS

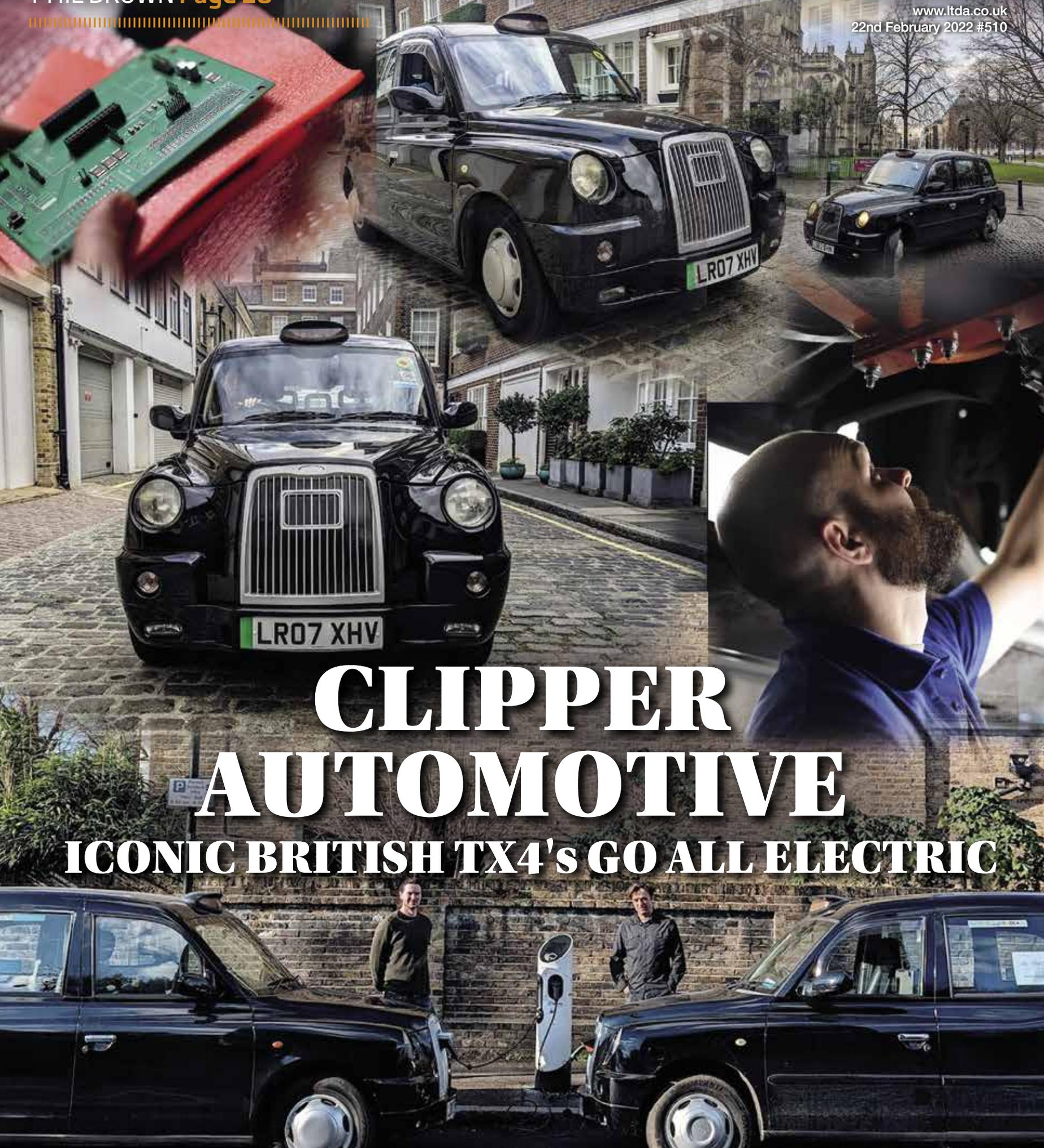
ANSWERED: PAUL BRENNAN Page 6

1666 THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON:

PHIL BROWN **Page 28**

TAXI

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Putting more work into Black Cabs

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CABBIES CONQUER KILIMANJARO

The fundraising London Cab drivers known as 'Cabbies Do Killi' have successfully completed their challenge to climb Mount Meru and Mount Kilimanjaro back-to-back to raise funds for the London Taxi Drivers' Charity for Children. Cab drivers and seasoned adventurers John Dillane and Daren Parr flew to Tanzania ahead of the rest of the team to climb 4,562 metre Mount Meru and were later joined by Lyndsey, Bob, Gary, Sarah, Stuart, and Stella who together climbed 5,895 metre Mount Kilimanjaro. John and Daren will be talking to TAXI in the next issue about experiencing both the worst conditions in living memory on Meru (which forced many others to abandon the attempt and turn back) as well as the exhilaration the team felt when they finally stood on the summit of Kilimanjaro.



DRIVER RECRUITMENT FOR POETRY PROJECT

Poet Dan Simpson – himself the son of a black cabbie – is looking for seven drivers from across London. One driver will be recruited from each compass point of the city (minus the SE), to be paired with one of London's poets from the same area. You and the poet will work together to create a piece of work. This is a paid opportunity courtesy of funding from Arts Council England. Contact Dan for more details at: dan@dansimpsonpoet.co.uk.



Supported using public funding by
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WITNESS APPEAL

On the 30th December 2021, on the taxi rank that serves the Winter Wonderland on Park Lane, there was an incident after 17:00 hours involving a female black cab driver who was driving a grey Mercedes Vito and was on point and had refused to take a passenger and their children on a journey. As a result of this, an incident happened which involved a second cab driver who was of West Indian origin driving a black TX4 model taxi. The second driver was behind the grey Mercedes Vito on point. We would be grateful if any drivers who witnessed this incident contact John Luckhurst on the number and address that appears below. In particular, we are interested in tracing a female cab driver who witnessed the incident whose badge number is: 76304. E: johnL@ltda.co.uk Tel: 0207 266 3607



GEORGE MANSFIELD

Green Badge 17919 (1970 – 2015)

My dad fell asleep at 05.35am on Sunday 6th February 2022, aged 85 in St. Joseph's Hospice with my mum and sister at his bedside, after losing his battle with prostate and associated cancers.

My dad was a devoted husband, dad, grandad and great grandad. He was born in Bow, lived in Bethnal Green and died in Hackney.

He was a big man with a big heart – a true son and gentleman of the East End, gone but never forgotten.

Dad will be missed by everyone who knew him

Forever in our hearts and memories.

Love always.

Lynne, Janet, Tony, Alan and all his family and friends.

Rest in Peace.

- Tony Mansfield



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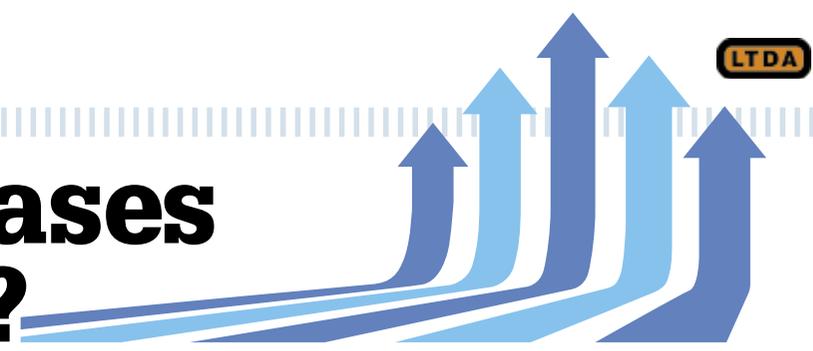
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Fare Increases All Round?



“The only advantage the minicab trade has ever had over us was their ability to charge ludicrously cheap fares courtesy of an unlimited, unskilled, cheap workforce, cheap vehicles and dodgy tax”

The recent online consultation on taxi fares was open to everyone – passengers, drivers and feasibly people who have never even been to London, let alone travelled in a taxi or have any interest in our fares. In theory, millions could have responded, there certainly should have been at least 20,000 responses from taxi drivers alone, but the actual number was less than 1000 people who could be bothered to log on.

Fares to increase for us?

Based on the consultation responses, there now has to be a recommendation to the TfL board finance committee. The consultation offered three options; nothing, circa 4% and circa 10% and without seeing the responses its anyone's guess as to how it could go, but the smart money is going on the middle figure of 4%. The reasoning behind this assumes that there was no massive support for any of the proposals, and that support was broadly split between the three, which is certainly the split of opinions amongst members I have spoken to.

If this is right, a recommendation for 'option one' will anger supporters of 10% and a recommendation for 'option three' will anger supporters of zero – whereas the middle figure will be seen as a compromise and acceptable to all. It's going to be very interesting to see what happens and we should know very shortly.



Massive fare increases for them!

On the subject of fares, our rivals in the private hire sector have bigger concerns following the judgment of the High Court that it was unlawful for a private hire operator (Uber) to act as an 'agent' and that they must contract directly with drivers and passengers. This made all private hire operators in London employers of drivers and, for tax reasons, the principle, rendering them liable to charge 20% VAT on every fare! Even though the judgement was only ten weeks ago, the clock is ticking and TfL have written to every single PH operator asking that they amend their Terms and Conditions to reflect that the customers contract is with the operator. This automatically confirms the status of the operator as the 'principle' and thus compelled to charge VAT on fares.

All the rumours and press reports indicate that Uber will be the first to start charging VAT from April, and it is presumed they will simply pass on the 20% charge to customers with a fares hike. This will make it very likely the other big operators will all do the same, increasing fares across the industry. Smaller operators with different business models, where the driver pays a weekly rent rather than a percentage commission, may be able to absorb some of the 20% VAT, but these would be very few and far between and the 20% fares hike will almost certainly be industry wide.

The only advantage the minicab trade has ever had over us was their ability to charge ludicrously cheap fares courtesy of an unlimited unskilled cheap workforce, cheap vehicles and dodgy tax arrangements. The pandemic, coupled with increased licensing standards (topographical and English language requirements) decimated their ability to quickly recruit drivers prepared to work long hours for low pay. The clean and green licensing requirements for all new private hire vehicles pushed up the price of their cars by at least a third, and the requirement for all drivers to be registered with HMRC (from April) will bring many of them into the welcoming arms of the tax man for the first time.

Already many more customers are now recognising that our premium, gold-plated, world-class service is real value for money, and we are becoming the first choice for many who previously reached for their phone instead of raising their arm when they wanted a cab. Another 20% additional cost on the price of a second class minicab ride squeezed into the back of a Prius can only help convince more people of the merits of using a proper taxi!





Your Taxiapp Questions

“There are a few things that split the trade like: having dress codes, expanding our choice of vehicle by scrapping the turning circle, and of late – apps are good, or apps are bad...”

Top rank

There are many things in this trade that we all, well almost, will universally agree on, for instance: TfL are useless as a regulator and the road schemes and closures currently being implemented are detrimental to our trade. Likewise, there are a few things that split the trade like: having dress codes, expanding our choice of vehicle by scrapping the turning circle, and of late – apps are good, or apps are bad.

Whether we like them or not, at this moment in time people want to use them and do use them. Drivers can either download them and use them in an attempt to maximise income or decide not to and go along with the tried and tested ranking at stations, hotels and shops or do that lucky circuit you’ve developed over the years where you always seem to get that hand flung into the air...

If you are an app person and let me be clear, I’m not saying you should or shouldn’t be, (I would not dream of telling you that, you’re all grown ups and you will and must do what’s best for you and your family), the next question is: “Which one do I download or do I do them all?” Some will swear blind that the only way to go is the one of the big two ‘corporate’ apps as they are often referred as. Others believe that we need and should only use a ‘trade’ app with Taxiapp usually referred to as the one that fits these criteria.

I’ve met and conducted Q&A sessions with both *Gett* and *FreeNow* in the past, and I thought as *Taxiapp* have recently announced their wish to change the way they operate and the questions this has inevitably raised, that this would be a good time to have one with them. Below are the most popular questions we were asked to put to them along with their answers...

LTDA What makes you different from all the other Apps?

taxiapp Taxiapp has four directors that are all working cab drivers. As working drivers, we know

exactly what is needed and what is best for drivers. Unlike the corporate apps that are working in our market, the drivers on Taxiapp will always have at least 42% ownership of Taxiapp with block shares that could and will hopefully in the very near future pay dividends on net profits back to the drivers. No other App offers this and unlike the other Apps, Drivers will have the added protection of vetoing voting rights, on not increasing the commission, not having private hire and not selling the company.

LTDA Q; We’ve been telling you for years to go commission based, why has it taken you so long?

taxiapp We are very much aware that fixed fee verses commission based system has divided opinion within our trade and some of the previous directors were somewhat blinkered in their insistence that we remain on a fixed fee system. The personnel on the Board of Directors has changed within the last year or so and those currently trying to take Taxiapp forward are now much more business orientated, and we’ve taken a good long hard look at what is fair and what is required to make Taxiapp the successful trade tool we need rather than sticking with an ideology that did not work. A commission-based system is probably a fairer system, and it will also give drivers the confidence to join or re-join us and this will also assist us with having and retaining the best asset required to make Taxiapp a success, you, the drivers. That’s why the new board members along with the two original founders have decided to make these required changes and why we intend to make a big push to recruit drivers both new and old.

LTDA Why should we believe what you say, we’ve heard it all before?

taxiapp As previously stated it is almost a completely new team now at Taxiapp, we became involved because we believed in the idea and principle of having a trade App but like many we were not content with the lack of progress being made. Taxiapp will become a partnership of drivers and investors, investors who incidentally have a proven track

record of growing small analog business into large technology companies. We are also in talks with somebody who hopefully will join the team as our Managing Director and help take us to the next level that is required to make us a success. Her skill set is in making businesses grow and prosper as quickly as possible.

LTDA I’ve been on Taxiapp before and got very few jobs, why should I risk it again?

taxiapp We know that drivers had previously put their money and faith in Taxiapp and didn’t always receive the rewards they deserved for doing so. This is the very reason why the new way forward mitigates the financial burden aspect of taking a punt with Taxiapp. The Taxiapp Partnership will not only offer a chance of a share in any profit but whilst you wait for that, you will benefit from the lowest commission rate in the business at just 10% +vat, and of course if you don’t do any rides, it will cost you absolutely nothing.

LTDA What steps are you taking to get the Taxiapp brand known?

taxiapp We just recently had a meeting with our branding company to work on new messaging. We will be hugely increasing our marketing budget to include both online and street level advertising. The most important element is suppling drivers with the correct marketing tools, as drivers are the best sales team to push the app forward to their passengers.

LTDA I see it will be 5% + VAT on business account jobs which is a good incentive but how do you propose to get business accounts and what size businesses are you going for?

taxiapp Firstly, we intend to build the most up to date business management system that will satisfy corporate account customers. At the moment, we have between 50-70 companies that are prepared to wait for us and going forward Taxiapp will have a dedicated business accounts department. Growing business accounts is a very competitive world and as any driver who’s previously been on one of

the old taxi circuits will know, all too often they seemed to just compete against each other for the same accounts which they eventually lost to private hire. We will be looking to win some of that back but also find and grow new accounts that may have never considered using London’s finest for their transport needs.

LTDA We’ve had a lot of false dawns and promises from Taxiapp before, what or who has changed to make me believe you this time?

taxiapp Taxiapp has never been in this position previously, taking on investment will be a complete game changer. Taxiapp will be hiring professional staff to work alongside our team that have built Taxiapp to this point. Someone compared what we are trying to achieve now with the Dragons Den concept, we have the idea, we have the prospects, we have the unique selling

ANSWERED...

point of the world's greatest Taxi service, but we need the expertise of a dragon or two. We feel we've taken the ride up in the lift, pitched to the dragons and they've said 'we're in'.

LTDA What will happen if to grow you need to increase the commission fee but drivers veto that rise, do you have other income streams?

taxiapp We are working on an in cab payment system with a very low commission and we are currently in talks with a sponsorship company, both will help raise an income stream.

LTDA Are the new investors involved in the London taxi trade?

taxiapp The investors have no connection with the taxi trade, other than being Taxiapp customers, along with their families. They are not large

corporate companies; they are passionate Londoners who like you and us care about the cab trade and wish to see it thrive.

LTDA What happens if Taxiapp stays as a Cooperative?

taxiapp To be quite blunt we would need to increase the subscriptions to a minimum of £60 or possibly even higher, of course if we did that drivers would leave on mass and Taxiapp would fold. Likewise, if we don't increase subscriptions and they remained at £20 per month Taxiapp would fold as the income generated won't pay the required running costs.

LTDA Do you have a quick statement for the trade?

taxiapp Firstly, we'd like to introduce ourselves, the Taxiapp team – four cab drivers with many years' experience of driving taxis. We, like you, want the licensed black taxi trade to go from strength to strength in a modern, tech world.

For those that have backed Taxiapp now and in the past, we would like to thank you for putting your trust into an idea of an app for the trade and its drivers. For those wanting to be a part of the future of Taxiapp, we welcome you to what we know will take Taxiapp to the next stage.

Taxiapp Partnership is the only licensed taxi app driven and owned by drivers and investors, working together. Drivers owning the largest portion with 42% ownership – setting us apart from all other corporate owned apps. We achieve this by understanding the trade, we are the trade. We know what our customers require – to pay what's on the meter with no surge pricing, and to do so in safety and with the best drivers in the world.

This is the next step, to take Taxiapp forward in challenging large corporate apps, resulting in reclaiming our work and putting drivers at the forefront with a driver first mentality. Again, welcome and enjoy the ride into the Taxiapp partnership and into our future.

LTDA



What is London to you, and how much of it has changed?

London is my home, my office and my future...

Scott Singleton,
Lover of London, Green Badge driver
and eternal optimist

London has changed almost beyond recognition. Hardly breaking news as it's been constantly reinventing itself for hundreds of years.

Take my cab for example. For a start it's not black! A couple of generations ago that would have been pretty radical. I actually sold my trusty old TX4 and took some time out when Covid first hit. Back on the road last year, I invested in a TX eCity and love it. Diesel will soon go as you won't be allowed to buy a new fossil-fuelled vehicle by 2030.

Even the roads have changed since I've been back. Not only have many runs been complicated by cycle lanes but, according to the latest edition of the Highway Code, it looks like roads are there for everyone and everything – except vehicles.

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Everything is contactless

If my experience is anything to go by, cash will become history before long. It already is on TfL buses. I can already go a whole shift in the cab without taking a single cash fare.



Even paying with a Chip & PIN card is pretty old school now. Everything is contactless, and increasingly 'mobile' these days.

Payment technology is built-in to phones and watches, and goodness knows what else in years to come.



Scott Singleton, having CurbLite installed at the new Curb Operations Centre

"Change is the only constant in life"

Change isn't a new phenomenon. 500 years before Jesus was born, Greek philosopher Heraclitus said "Change is the only constant in life". That old quote is just as relevant today as it was back then. I've certainly changed too! To be fair, I was encouraged to by Curb.

Curb supplied my card machine. They organise all my fare payments, and transfer the funds to my account every day of the week. I had a good Curb machine before which I was very happy with, but they offered me their latest **CurbLite** payment device recently so I took their advice and changed.

I know what you're thinking. If I was so happy with my old machine, why change? Well, there were a few very persuasive factors.

Best in the trade

The biggest deal is cost. **CurbLite** rates are probably the best in the trade for me (1.7% for most cards

with no extra charges per trip). Those transaction costs can soon mount up, so **CurbLite** was the best option for me.



The sleek CurbLite passenger unit

There's also the support - the 24-hour Curb Helpdesk - although I've never had to use it. Nice to know it's there if I need it though.

On a practical level, the **CurbLite** is less bulky, it's fitted to the door pillars so I can't even see it in the mirror. It's so user-friendly now, my passengers have been using it without any prompting from me! That means I can get them on their way with no fuss and find my next fare more quickly.

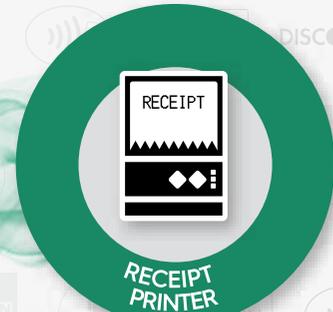
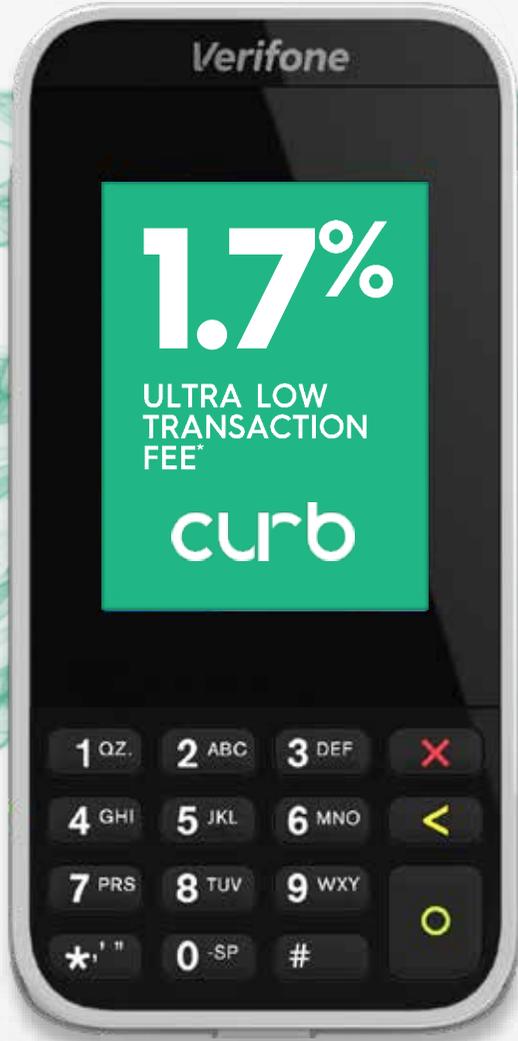
They're tipping me well too when paying on the **CurbLite** unit – although I like to think that says more about me than the device!

And my old system had started to show its age, especially the unit in the back. The latest Curb devices are so sleek and smooth now, especially the **CurbLite** unit which looks really modern. As my eCity cab is state-of-the-art, I was keen to make sure all the tech in it was too.

So **CurbLite** won me over, and I'm really appreciating the change.

For more information about the CurbLite card payment system, call Curb on 0333 666 1000 or visit gocurb.co.uk.

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Licensing Renewals: Get Streetwise

"I have always said to our members, 'your job is to drive a cab and the LTDA are here to help its members to do that without any stress'."

Streets ahead

As I'm sure you are aware, the LTDA takes hundreds of calls every week from our members on all issues they face relating to our working practices and rules set out by our regulator TfL: Medicals, licences, NSL tests... the list goes on. You might think with some drivers not working, the phones have gone quiet, but the problems we all have as drivers are still coming thick and fast into the LTDA via calls and emails. Many issues are still those we see as 'part of the course' of our daily work in Taxi House, but the virus and the lockdown have thrown up their own very unique problems and challenges – but then I do love a challenge...

10

PHV Parking on taxi charging points

The response to my last article about PHV drivers that have been parking on 'taxi only' charging ranks has been overwhelming. Thanks to all of those drivers taking the time out of their working day to take pictures of the offenders – it is having a positive response from TfL with them sending out warning letters reminding drivers of their responsibility in holding a PHV licence and if drivers reoffend their licence may be at risk and possibly revoked. So, keep sending your clear photos of VRM with the TfL licence (on the rank) with times, date and location to anthony@ltda.co.uk and I'll continue to send them on to TfL.

Medicals & renewals

Back in the prime of the pandemic, the lockdown restrictions set out by the government meant many drivers did not work – with some drivers surrendering their cab licence early until the tide started to turn and the work levels increased making it financially viable to return to work. What did not stand still was the licence renewal process. This included for some drivers having a medical or those drivers at

the age of 65 a yearly medical. TfL applied the commonsense approach and gave those drivers a 12-month exemption and a further 6 months if needed – we made sure we dealt with every member that needed this exemption and ensured they remained licensed.

Lockdown restrictions were then finally lifted with many drivers back at work though some were still experiencing problems when needing to book a medical appointment – TfL decided to deal with this on an individual case by case basis. We have found that there are many drivers which have changed their details – inclusive of email addresses and even moved to a new physical address and for whatever reason forgot to notify TfL. Subsequently, there are drivers that have not received letters from TfL regarding their medicals and also some drivers who have put the reminders in a drawer and forgotten to respond.

Since January 2022, I have had myself 30-40 drivers who have called me in a panic notifying me that their licence has been revoked due to information TfL required having not been received. Lots of drivers have therefore been experiencing licensing issues relating to their medicals that could have been dealt with without causing them unnecessary financial concern

and stress. I have always said to our members, *"your job is to drive a cab and the LTDA are here to help its members to do that without any stress."*

All our members issues were resolved by TfL within seven days or sooner and drivers were back at work. My advice to all LTDA members is not to ignore medical letters – they will not go away – just contact an LTDA team member and they will advise you what action you need to take, and this will stop drivers receiving nasty revocation letters dropping on their doorsteps!

The personal touch

Our cab is an expensive tool of the trade, and to have it just sitting on your drive and not being able to work because of a silly error by yourself or TfL is an all-too-common occurrence. As an example, a couple of weeks ago a member contacted the LTDA stating that TfL had rejected his Licence renewal application, explaining that his Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS) did not show all his 'known' names.

It transpired that his Driving Licence showed his first name as Dave and on his Passport, it showed his first name as David. His DBS was rejected, and this caused him unnecessary stress – so he did what any member can do, he contacted the LTDA

and instantly had an experienced member of the team assist him.

As time was of the essence, we got a new DBS application completed, his renewal application prioritised, and we got him re-licensed before his licence had ran out. He could not believe how making that one phone call to us meant the burden and stress was instantly removed from his shoulders in the knowledge it was an issue we could resolve and made a troubling time that bit easier. Please do not put your Licence renewal at risk – times are hard and stressful enough at the moment – we will guide you through the process from start to finish. As soon as you receive your licence renewal pack, get in touch and one of our licensing team experts can support with the documentation. Ignoring your licence renewal date is like playing Russian roulette with your livelihood! If you do not know when your licence expires, get it out and check it now. Put the date at least four months before it expires in your LTDA diary, or even better in your mobile phone calendar (if you don't know how, get someone in your family to do it for you), and set it to remind you with a text message. You could even tattoo it on your forehead so you can see it in the mirror in the morning, anything is better than forgetting it! ■ LTDA

Do not play Russian Roulette with your licence renewal!

Who has the Knowledge? Let's see who really has the knowledge. Answer the following six simple questions and see how good you are...



- How many months is your licence renewal pack printed prior to expiry date of licence?
A) 4 months, B) 2 months, C) 3 months.
- Once your licence renewal pack is issued, how long should it be before you receive it?
A) 10 days B) 1 day C) 20 days
- Who do you contact if you do not receive your licence renewal pack?
A) TFLTPH B) NHS C) Post Office

- What is the minimum amount of time you should start the DBS application process before your licence expires?
A) 3 months B) 4 months C) 2 months
- If you haven't received your licence renewal pack can you still start your DBS application three months before your licence expires?
A) Yes B) No C) Unsure
- How do you become eligible for a temporary licence?
A) If you have received your licence renewal pack and applied and completed your DBS 3 months

before your licence expiry date and your DBS has not been processed

B) If you have not received your renewal pack

C) If you have applied 2 months before your licence expiry date and your DBS has not been processed

How did you do?

You need to have answered 'A' to all six questions in order for you to be eligible for a temporary licence. To make it easy for you, once you have received your licence renewal pack and need some help to complete the application, call or email the LTDA.

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Private Parking Code of Practice Announcement

“The language they use in their letters is very aggressive and I think most people are intimidated by it and just pay up.”

On point

Here at the LTDA one of the most difficult conversations I have with members apart from health issues stopping them driving is Private Parking Tickets. The reason for this is that it's always hard to give concise advice. My problem is that I don't know how far the Private Parking company is prepared to go. A Private Parking PCN is basically an invoice. If you refuse to pay it the only way, they have of getting your money is by taking you to the small claims court. This costs the company money, and they have to weigh up



what their chances of winning are. Appealing these PCNs in my experience is a waste of time, although the companies involved claim otherwise. The

language they use in their letters is very aggressive and I think most people are intimidated by it and just pay up. Thankfully Government Minister Neil

O'Brien has published the below. Please have a read – I've highlighted a few areas which I believe will be of particular interest! ■ LTDA

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Private Parking Code of Practice Announcement

I am informing the House that the Government is today publishing the Private Parking Code of Practice. This is a key milestone which takes forward the implementation of the Parking (Code of Practice) Act 2019, which was introduced by Sir Greg Knight MP, and supported by the Government.

The Code sets out the requirements that parking operators must follow when enforcing parking restrictions in England, Scotland, and Wales. **These include a compulsory 10-minute grace period to prevent operators issuing charges for being just a few minutes late, higher standards for signage and surface markings, and a crackdown on the use of aggressive and pseudo-legal language.**

These changes will bring much-needed consistency to the private parking sector, benefitting millions of motorists. It will boost our high streets and town centres by making it easier for people to park near their shops without being unfairly fined.

Operators will need to make some changes to adhere to the new Code. The Code will come into force following an implementation period to give the industry time to adapt.

Parking operators will be expected to fully adhere to the Code before 2024, by which time we will have introduced a new single appeals service for motorists to challenge unfair private parking charges. The industry should update their processes and procedures as quickly as possible from today so that motorists can benefit from the new Code immediately.

The Code has been produced through extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including consumer and industry representatives, which took place through a Steering Group appointed by the British Standards Institution (BSI). We have published a fuller account of this process in our Private Parking Code of Practice explanatory document, which accompanies the Code. This document also explains the provisions of the new Code in an accessible manner and assesses the impact of the changes on motorists and the parking industry.

There were a number of issues relating to the Code which the Government consulted on separately, in parallel to the BSI process. This included proposals to bring private parking charges into closer alignment with Local Authority

Penalty Charge Notices.

Alongside the Code, the Government has now also published its response to this further technical consultation on private parking charges, discount rates, debt collection fees and appeals charter, which ran from July to August 2021.

After a careful consideration of respondents' views, the Government has decided to bring private parking charges into closer alignment with the system in local councils. This means that parking charges will be more proportionate to the level of harm caused.

We are also prohibiting parking operators and Debt Recovery Agencies from levying additional enforcement fees over and above the cost of parking charges.

We will review these arrangements as part of a more general review of the Code within two years of it coming into force.

The Code is part of a wider enforcement framework, which includes a new Certification Scheme for parking operators, the establishment of a Scrutiny and Oversight Board to monitor the new system and the creation of a single independent appeals service.

As per our commitment in the Government's response to

our previous Code Enforcement Framework consultation in March 2021, I can now update the House that we have begun a product Discovery to inform the design and delivery of the single appeals service. We will finalise the Certification Scheme for operators and establish the Scrutiny and Oversight Board this spring. In autumn of this year, the Conformity Assessment Bodies will have received their accreditation and will begin to certify parking operators against the Code's new requirements:

Spring 2022: Certification Scheme finalised, and Scrutiny and Oversight Board appointed.

Autumn 2022: Conformity Assessment Bodies (CABs) accredited by United Kingdom Accreditation Service.

From Autumn 2022: all new car parks will conform to the new Code.

End of 2023: Single appeals service appointed and transition period ends. Parking operators must now follow the requirements of the new Code of Practice.

We now welcome Parliamentary scrutiny of the Code of Practice. I will return to update the House in future on the further implementation of the Code, its wider framework and the single appeals service.

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All Along the Watchtower

“Within the 49 different additions and updates to the Highway Code, one would expect that a regulation be put into place requiring cyclists to use the purpose built, multi-million-pound segregated cycle lanes...”



A man in black

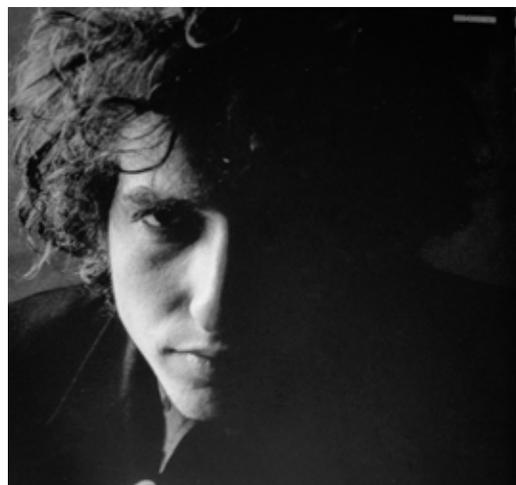
“**T**here must be some kind of way out of here” said the juggler to the thief... Now you may recognise this line as the opening to the Bob Dylan classic *All Along the Watchtower* – and you’d be right (incidentally Hendrix version was so much better), but for the purposes of this article, it isn’t.

The juggler and the thief

What this was in fact, was a middle-aged couple in fancy dress in the back of my taxi having a discussion with me regarding traffic levels and the underused cycle (not so) superhighway on Upper Thames Street. Now in my defence there is some artistic license being used here given that he was dressed as Hamburgerler, complete with stripey jumper, swag bag and eye mask and the lady in question was dressed as a Harlequin. However, since it is an irrefutable fact that women are better at multi-tasking than men, I’ve assumed she can juggle. Within the discussion our aforementioned heroine sagely asked me why there was an almost empty cycle lane all the way along the Embankment. I explained to her that it was the previous Mayor of London’s vanity project. I informed her that Boris had wanted to leave a lasting legacy, something in his own image, superfluous, empty and devoid of any redeeming features. Her partner, Hamburgerler then asked me why it isn’t a legal requirement for cyclists to use a cycle lane – quicker than a ninja with the trots, I said: “*self-entitlement*”. I told the king of burger thieves that the cycling lobby was exceedingly powerful and believe that the usual rules of the road did not apply to them. After this moment of risible repartee and levity we started discussing the Highway Code – and a thrilling conversation it was too.

There’s too much confusion

As you are all no doubt aware, the Highway Code was updated



from January 29. The government, however, won’t be publicising this update until the middle of February. (I would have thought that between Partygate and Savilegate they may have brought that forward to divert attention away from Bodger the Dodger’s faux pas.) There are in fact 49 changes or updates to the Highway Code, with the vast majority of them either reinforcement of existing edicts or common-sense improvements as to how we use the UK’s road network. The loophole to handheld mobile phone use has now been closed, meaning that there will be no more filming or changing music channels while driving with the phone not cradled – also, ‘*The Dutch Reach*’ (not a euphemism for scoring a joint in Amsterdam) has been incorporated into the code.

Now we come to the cycling community – and this is not a case of what’s been added, but what has been omitted. The Highway Code now dictates that cyclists are to be given the right to travel in the middle of a road, otherwise known as primary position. This action increases rider visibility and is an adoption of the road position required by motorcyclists. However, they are required to move over to the left if a faster vehicle comes up behind them, but only if it is safe to do so. Cyclists will also have to only move over at junctions if it would be unsafe for drivers to overtake them – and therein lies the first problem! While most cyclists will comply with that edict, there are a sizable minority who won’t

“...the lady in question was dressed as a Harlequin. However, since it is an irrefutable fact that women are better at multi-tasking than men, I’ve assumed she can juggle.”

– thus potentially creating safety issues for themselves.

The Highway Code also clarifies the rules that cyclists can be safer to travel in groups, especially when travelling with children or less experienced riders. However, when a car comes up behind them, they are advised to go back into single file to allow the driver to safely overtake. In other words, cyclists can ride two abreast but should move in to allow faster moving vehicles to pass them. This does present problems as you are relying on the good will and forbearance of the cyclist – and right now we are all having to deal with a ‘them and us’ culture.

Can’t get no relief

Within the 49 different additions and updates to the Highway Code, one would expect that a regulation be put into place requiring cyclists to use the purpose built, multi-million-pound segregated cycle lanes which traverse London’s streets, however this safety aspect was completely ignored.

Transport for London’s walking and cycling commissioner, Will Norman, tweeted on December 7, 2021: “*Let’s be absolutely clear – decades of credible research shows that cycling & public transport are key to reducing traffic & pollution in*

cities. That’s why we’re continuing to invest in a high-quality cycle network, enabling millions of green & clean journeys around the capital.” However, given the Highway Code updates, it does beg the question as to whether cycle lane funding should now end given that there is no compulsion to use those “*high quality*” cycle lanes. If cyclists do not wish to use those lanes and the Department for Transport won’t insert a caveat within the Highway Code stating that where a purpose built, segregated cycle lane exists, cyclists must use it rather than the roadway, should millions of pounds of taxpayer money be wasted on what is nothing more than a pointless act of hubris?

Ultimately road space is a shared entity, if the cycling community feel that there should be no compulsion to use the safety measures (cycle lanes) being afforded to them, then maybe it’s time to remove many of these cycle lanes and restore roads to their previous state, giving drivers more space to manoeuvre and cyclists a greater opportunity to adopt primary positioning on the road?

And on that note, I’m now off to murder, with the aid of my guitar, the Hendrix version of *All Along the Watchtower*.

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Clipper All Electric TX4s

TAXI last spoke with Clipper in summer 2020 and so we decided a catch-up was overdue – and they've been busy...



16

Feature

TAXI So, what have Clipper been up to during the past eighteen months?

Clipper: Well, the last 18 months have been a very busy time for us:

In September 2020, we won a government grant through the Niche Vehicle Network to develop our prototype into a market-ready product. We also succeeded in raising funds to match this grant by persuading friends and family and a few visionary angel investors to invest in us.

To develop the cabs, we moved into premises in Hackney, next door to Richmond Road Cab Centre. This enabled us to learn as much as possible from the mechanics next door about the ins and outs of taxis. We have kept our heads down through the pandemic and relentlessly pushed on engineering. We added another team member in March (EV Engineer Harris, Mech Eng M.Sc.).

Harris is an Electric Vehicle Engineer, specialising in the mechanical integration of the high voltage components. He leads the computer aided design (CAD) and structural analysis of battery boxes and other key components.

Harris' time is spent split between design software used to create parts from the charge ports to High Voltage junction boxes, to the assembly of the taxis themselves. He keeps the 3d printers going making key components, like charge port covers and junction boxes.

We have also built up a network of automotive engineers, electronics experts and other vehicle converters, as well as members of the taxi trade.

By August 2021, we delivered a road legal all-electric TX4 including bespoke drivetrain, battery boxes and vehicle controller.

In October 2021 we successfully demonstrated a cab at Cenex Low Carbon Vehicle event where we were on a stand with our funders and gave numerous delegates rides around the testing circuit at Millbrook.

By November 2021, we had

demonstrated our system is robust and repeatable by delivering two road legal all-electric cabs.

In December 2021 we started outreach, demos and test drives.

TAXI For those drivers who are unfamiliar with the rise of Clipper Automotive, can you tell us a bit about the cabs?

Clipper: We upgrade the iconic British TX4 to be 100% electric and emission-free. Reusing existing equipment means that Clipper Cabs have some of the lowest overall carbon footprints of any vehicles on the road. The 40kWh batteries will give up to 150 miles of range with rapid charging available to offer 80% charge in 40 minutes.

We start by removing the diesel engine, gearbox, exhaust system and fuel tank. In its place we put in a Nissan motor and gearbox, that with our bespoke shaft adapter, can attach to the existing Taxi differential.

We then plug in a split battery box, one in the front, one in the

rear to have an even weight ratio. There's the addition of a few auxiliary items, such as an electric brake and steering pump, and there are some changes to the instrumentation, the fuel gauge shows battery charge.

The cabs are slightly heavier than the diesels, but they feel light to drive and are very quiet.

TAXI What savings can be expected?

Clipper: With home charging and the right tariff, fully charging the taxi can be as little as £3-£5. As many cabs drive around 90-100 miles a day, costing around £30 in fuel, the savings can be as much as £25 a day. This can lead to savings of over £500 a month.

TAXI Why are you guys doing black cabs and not Ferraris?

Clipper: We purposely focussed entirely on electric taxis. Our goal is to create cabs that are low-cost yet provide the best solution for providing cleaner air to cities around the country.

We think there is a gap in the market, taxi drivers don't have

good enough options for going zero emissions, we wanted to do something about that.

There are over 12,000 diesel powered hackney carriages within London and many more around the UK, all of which combine to be large contributors to total UK emissions. By focussing on turning these cabs into zero emissions vehicles, we maximise the volume of electrically powered journeys, creating the biggest impact on reducing CO2 and having a real impact on air quality around the country.

The problem with classic cars and sports cars is that they spend most of their time in garages, while they make lovely electric conversions this will not help with air quality or carbon footprint as they do so few miles.

TAXI How are they to drive?

Clipper: The original TX4 is very easy to drive, with the famously tight turning circle, and automatic gearbox they are ideal for city driving. Our cabs keep these traits, with the additional benefits of a smoother drivetrain without the noisy/dirty diesel engine.

There is also the benefit of regenerative braking, which increases range and prolongs the lifetime of the original brakes. However, don't just take our word for the smooth drive, head to the news section of the Clipper Automotive website and see actual Cab drivers test drive our vehicles.

TAXI Are they as safe as the original?

Clipper: The TX4s will keep all their existing safety features which include ABS, brake system monitoring, Assisted Power Steering, motion locking and more. The vehicles are also engineered to a high level European standard (ECE Reg 100) and are inspected by the VCA to ensure all High Voltage cabling and components are safe.

Lastly the taxi's make their way to the DVSA centre in Yeading for an Individual Vehicle Approval (IVA). They check to see if the taxi's new electric assisted brakes, steering and overall weight are within its original design specification. The DVSA will also ensure that good engineering practices have taken place, such as cable routing, passenger safety and general quality of manufacture.

TAXI What about range?

Clipper: The cabs have 153mile range on paper (WLTP standard), but we are seeing real world range of 130 to 135 miles on them.

We have also won another NVN grant for 2022. It is an R&D Feasibility Study focussed on range extension technology. We know range is one of the biggest issues for drivers so it is vital we stay abreast of the latest in batteries, charging and other EV technology in order that Clipper Cabs remain

competitive. We are expecting to be able to produce a converted TX4 with a range of over 250 miles at some point soon.

TAXI When do you plan to launch in London?

Clipper: The approval process is managed by TfL and is time consuming and costly. It is firmly on our roadmap for 2022, but with our current resources, launching in a regional hub first is much less risky, and the quickest route to market.

TAXI What's next?

Clipper: The cabs may not yet be approved by TfL for use in London, however, many taxi licensing authorities outside London will license them on DVSA / IVA*. Oxford, for example, have said they will license the cabs. They are keen to eliminate emissions in the city and have removed the age limit on electric taxis and also confirmed that drivers qualify for a £5k grant to buy them.

**The cabs are inspected for high-voltage electrical safety to the UNECE R100.01 standard by the Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA). This*

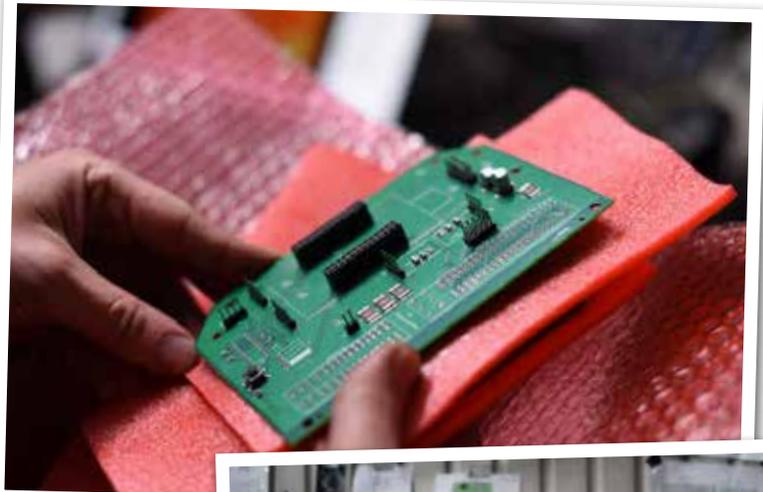
allows the DVSA to inspect them and issue an Individual Vehicle Approval certificate (IVA); sufficient certification for many councils in the UK to license them as working taxis.

We want real drivers collecting real fares and demonstrating that the vehicles are fit for purpose. We are confident drivers and passengers alike will love them.

So, we are looking for a home for the first two cabs. We are offering them for rent at competitive rates. If any of your readers operating outside London are interested, they should contact us. We are also looking for a fleet operator to work with us to get the first batches of cabs on the road. Again, if any of the readers is or knows a fleet operator who might like to work with us on this, please get in touch.

Meanwhile, spread the word, lobby your local council to allow them to be licensed, sign up to our mailing list on our website and we'll let you know as soon as they are approved in London, and we can start ramping up production.

For more information, visit the www.clipper.cab or get in touch via email, at contact@clipper.cab. ■ **TAXI**





Tax Checks: The New Rules for Taxi Licensing

Emma is on-hand with a four-stage guide on what you need to do...

Money matters

April 2022 will see a new set of rules for anyone applying for a licence to work as a taxi driver or private hire driver. This includes a check on tax registration in a bid to clampdown on tax evasion.

If you haven't completed a tax check, you won't be able to get a licence to drive a taxi. This will obviously impact your ability to work and earn money.

The new rules have been introduced under the Finance Act 2020-21 and become effective from 4 April 2022.

How to carry out a tax check and use the information – A four-step guide:

1 Get a Government Gateway user ID and password

Before you can carry out a tax check, you'll need to get a Government Gateway ID and password. The Government Gateway is a central place where you can register to use online government services.

You might already have a Government Gateway account. If not, you can set one up online via HMRC.

To do so, go to <https://www.gov.uk/log-in-register-hmrc-online-services> and click "Create sign in

details". Enter your email address where requested and you'll then be emailed a confirmation code. Use this code to confirm your email address.

Follow the online steps entering the appropriate information as prompted. This will include setting up a password and a 'recovery' word. You will then be issued with a user ID for your Government Gateway account. Keep this somewhere safe.



2 Setting up a Government Gateway account

Next, you'll need to choose which type of Government Gateway account you need – select 'individual'. You will then be invited to add a second layer of security. If you select the 'SMS' option, an access code will be sent to your mobile phone at each login.

Upon entering the access code on the website, you'll need to confirm your full name, National Insurance number, and date of birth.

You'll also have to provide third party security information from one of the following three options: photo driving licence,



passport, or 'multiple choice'.

Registration will then be complete, and your Government Gateway account will be set up and ready to use.



3 Carry out a tax check

Once you have a Government Gateway account, you can carry out a tax check. A tax check confirms that you're registered for tax, if necessary. It doesn't check if you have paid the right amount of tax.

HMRC will ask you for information about the most recent tax year that ended more than six months before you start your tax check.

For example, if you start your tax check on 1 May 2022, then HMRC should only ask you about the 2020/21 tax year. If you start your tax check in November 2022,

then HMRC should ask you about the 2021/22 year.

HMRC may ask you when you first got your licence, the length of your most recent licence, and how you pay tax on your income from being a taxi driver.

If you have already completed a tax return for the year HMRC is checking, you'll need to confirm that you have included your income from taxi driving on the return.

After you have completed the tax check you will be given a nine-character tax check code.



4 Apply for your licence

When applying for, or renewing, your taxi licence, you'll need to give the licencing body the tax check code.

The licencing body can't proceed with your licence application or renewal until the tax check is completed and it has received the code. Don't worry – your licencing body will

only receive confirmation from HMRC that you've completed the tax check, it won't have access to information about your tax affairs.

The tax check should only take a few minutes only needs to be done every few years. There'll be guidance on Gov.UK and anyone who needs extra support can phone HMRC's customer helpline.

'The Professionals'

- What sets those with 'The Knowledge' apart from the rest?

What does it mean to be a professional in 2022? When does an occupation or a job become professionalised? What makes those with 'The Knowledge' different from other "... suppliers of transportation services...?"

A brief background search produces suggestions as to what the make-up of a 'professional activity' might involve. Modern definitions include notions of 'accountability; integrity; competency; knowledge and qualifications' - deprive a Knowledge Boy or Girl of a 5G network and these skills would still exist, though some other 'suppliers of transportation services' might well struggle!

Some of the key ingredients of 'professionalism' involve:

'The deployment of formal certified learning'

Can other 'suppliers of transportation services' really claim to be engaged in doing this? Possibly, though that might depend on the depth and quality of learning involved in order to be accredited. In what world can those that pass 'The Knowledge' be compared to the learning involved to obtain other road-based transportation service operator licenses?

'A professional owns the power, skills and freedom to problem solve.'

It's pretty certain that an individual having the means to purchase and blindly follow a mobile device with a sat-nav app doesn't meet this threshold. 'Knowledge Boys & Girls' have in-built 'chips and processors' that deploy real knowledge, in real time. Out on the roads, real professionalism isn't dependent on the battery life of a mobile device or if that device knows that the football kicked off late or is going to penalties - which will impact on both journey time and route choice.

'A professional possesses the ability to make decisions in the best interests of others.'

We know that this level of responsibility is based on the use of specific, localised, operational expertise - rather than hoping a digital device can

provide an AA graded Knowledge rating of a route selection in line with traffic conditions, whilst ensuring a disabled passenger arrives at the entrance to their hotel which has suitable wheelchair access and porter assistance.

Those who possess 'The Knowledge' and have responded to the strength of the calling to the highest standards of the profession don't just know the optimum route within an ever-changing landscape, they know its history too. If the formation of a professional identity is also about '**providing a specialised service to society,**' those professionals with the ability to share that learning with their passengers are actually, inter-generational custodians of present-day and historical London knowledge. Black cab drivers are trusted 'old school influencers' in relation to the sites, attractions, facilities, services and cultural traditions of the capital - including being ambassadors of a historic trade, which is known as the best taxi service in the world.

All this, whilst transporting passengers in the most direct and safest manner, in accordance with codes, ethics and the standards of a professional community of operators.

Those with 'The Knowledge' have often picked up and are moving before a passenger has informed them of their destination - professionals are not sat around backing up traffic, typing postcodes into gadgets, in the hope a device can professionalise their practice and make them what they are not.

When people are lost - a professional finds them and gets them where they need to go. When they are too tired to go on - a professional takes the reins and when they are late for what's important to them, professional road craft and knowledge get them to their destination safely and quickly.

So how are those with 'The Knowledge' valued and whose responsibility should it be to promote the identities and activities of such professionals, in turn separating them from other "suppliers of transportation services...?"

You are professionals. We know it.

Let's ensure everybody else knows it and values it too.

■ **The LTDA are here to represent, protect and ensure recognition of the professional practice, identity and standards of our members.**





The Siege of Sidney Street – Part Two

Learn Rob's tales of London crime history to increase your tips!

Rob's history tips

Over the years, London has witnessed some truly shocking events. Here's part two about one such incident: The Siege of Sidney Street... The botched jewellery robbery on Houndsditch which had been attempted by a gang of Latvian Bolsheviks in December 1910 had left the nation stunned, for it resulted in three City of London Police Officers being shot dead. Although the group's leader, George Gardstein had also been killed and a number of his accomplices apprehended, several gang members were still on the run.

Bloodshed & informants

Further bloodshed, possibly related to the Houndsditch Murders, occurred on New Year's Day 1911, when the badly beaten body of a Russian Jewish immigrant named Leon Beron was discovered on Clapham Common. It's been speculated that Leon was murdered after threatening to inform on the Latvian gang, although this has never been proven. Later that same day, a member of the public who'd seen the wanted poster bearing the face of Gardstein's corpse contacted police to tell them he knew where at least two of the suspects were hiding...

100 Sidney Street

Under the direction of Superintendent Mulvaney and Chief Superintendent Stark, the Metropolitan Police approached Sidney Street with great caution. The operation began at noon on the 2nd of January, with 200 police – a number of who were armed – quietly descending on the area, whilst the building was put under surveillance. As with most East End properties at the time, 100 Sidney Street was divided into a number of cramped tenements in which several families lived. These innocent folk were discretely evacuated by plains-clothes officers, and in the early hours of the following morning, the surrounding streets were cordoned off by police, whilst those packing firearms assumed strategic positions.



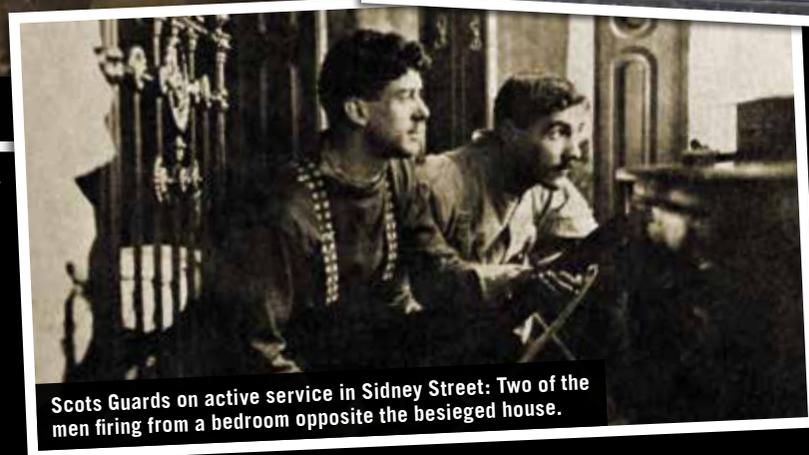
Winston Churchill (second from left), the then Home Secretary, at the siege

Goading tactics

By now, it was believed just two men remained in the building: Fritz Svaars and Joseph Sokoloff. Sokoloff's girlfriend, Betty Gershon, had also been laying low in Sidney Street, although she'd been arrested after being tricked into coming out. After studying the site, Mulvaney concluded that storming it wouldn't work; the stairs and passageway were too narrow and, as the criminals were on the upper floor, they had the advantage. To complicate matters further, procedure at the time dictated that the police were not permitted to open fire first. Bearing these points in mind, it was decided to goad the fugitives out. And so, just after 7.30am, Mulvaney ordered a brick to be thrown through one of the windows.

Superior firepower

The response was immediate. Svaars and Sokoloff appeared at the window and opened fire, striking Detective Sergeant Benjamin Lesson. The armed police responded in kind, but it soon became obvious they were outgunned – the weapons used by the two Latvians were far superior, and it was apparent they had a substantial amount of ammo. Sporadic shooting continued throughout the morning, and when the then Home Secretary Winston Churchill was informed about what was going on, he decided to head to the scene. At 12.50pm smoke was spotted coming from the second floor windows of 100 Sidney Street, and by 1.30pm flames were beginning to engulf the building. What started this fire (whether it be arson, or a spark created by a stray bullet) remains a mystery. Regardless of its cause, the



Scots Guards on active service in Sidney Street: Two of the men firing from a bedroom opposite the besieged house.

blaze rapidly put the two fugitives at a grave disadvantage, although they continued to shoot from the windows. At one point Sokoloff stuck his head right out, leading a member of the Scots Guards – who'd been drafted in as back up – to take aim. The soldier shot Sokoloff in the head, sending him tumbling back into the flames. Before long, a senior officer from the London Fire Brigade insisted his men be allowed to tackle the inferno. This request was refused both by the police and Churchill, who was quoted as saying, "Stand by, and don't approach the fire until you receive further orders."

Cinematic dramatisation

By 2.30pm all gunfire had ceased, and it was assumed both men were dead. When the Fire Brigade were finally allowed to enter, they discovered Sokoloff's charred remains immediately. However, the structure was now unstable and a wall collapsed, injuring five of the crew. Several hours were then spent shoring up the walls, and Svaars body was found later that evening. The events at Sidney Street – which have also come to be known as 'The Battle of Stepney' – were caught on camera in one of the earliest *Pathe News* reels, and in 1960 a historical dramatisation was released in cinemas.

Although Sokoloff and Svaars both perished, a number of the

gang were still on the run.

One of them – Jacob Peters – managed to escape to Russia, where he later rose to prominence in the Soviet Secret Police, although Stalin had him executed in a purge in 1938. Sara Trassjonksy meanwhile, who'd been arrested after being found destroying evidence beside George Gardstein's body, began to suffer mental health problems, and was sent to Colney Hatch Asylum. After that, her story goes cold and her fate remains unknown...

Memorial controversy

The most mysterious gang member was Peter Piaktow – aka Peter the Painter – who some believe was present at Sidney Street, yet somehow managed to make his getaway. This, combined with his evocative nickname, has made him something of an anti-hero, and in 2006, Tower Hamlets named a block of flats (Painter House) in his honour, along with a commemorative plaque. Unsurprisingly, this led to much controversy – Piaktow after all had been supposedly involved in a gang that were responsible for killing three police officers. Those three officers – Robert Bentley, Charles Tucker and Walter Choate – are also commemorated with a plaque which can be seen on Cutler Street. An inscription on their memorial states that their "Courage and sense of duty will not be forgotten." ■ **TAXI**

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Be Careful What You Wish For...

“January was a bit slow, sale wise with only 55 new TXe’s joining the ranks – although 13 new Dynamos is almost a record...”



22

Cab you drive

The taxi fleet continues to grow albeit very slowly and we are now approaching 14500, still 4000 down on the pre-pandemic numbers but going the right way. January was a bit slow, sale wise with only 55 new TXe’s joining the ranks –although 13 new Dynamos is almost a record. Most pundits put this down to uncertainty over the ending of the latest lockdown, or as Boris called it ‘Plan B’.

Donor list

The big news was that following Nissan’s announcement to stop manufacturing the NV200, the donor vehicle for the Dynamo taxi, that when the current stock of vehicles is sold there will be no more. Apparently, Dynamo are talking to other vehicle manufacturers to source an alternative donor vehicle, but even if they find one, the conversion approval process is

slow and cumbersome, and any new approved London taxi is a good way off.

Monopoly

This news has prompted debate in some cabbie circles and on social media with some cabbies being irate that we now have only one vehicle and that LEVC have a monopoly! Welcome to the world of taxi vehicles. In the many decades I have spent buying and selling cabs, for the vast majority of the time there has been a monopoly. In the 80’s and 90’s there were blips when the Metrocab was available but early reliability and spares problems scared off many buyers and even though it was a better cab than the Carbodies (LEVC’s name back then) FX4, it never sold in numbers. Various resurrections of the Metro came and went but it was always a very niche cab with a loyal but small following. The only real alternative was the Vito and during the early noughties sales were high, some months achieving up to 40% of cab sales but the arrival of the TXE coupled with the

“The big news was that following Nissan’s announcement to stop manufacturing the NV200, the donor vehicle for the Dynamo taxi, that when the current stock of vehicles is sold there will be no more.”

new ZEC requirement ended the Mercedes dream.

Great sentiments

I have even seen calls for the scrapping of the turning circle to “Give us more choice and a cheaper cab.” Great sentiments until you look at the available options. Even if TfL did away with the turning circle, the requirement for the cab to be wheelchair accessible would remain, as would the ZEC requirement (minimum of 50 miles on battery), and less than

50g CO2 per KM which would rule out the vast majority of contenders available elsewhere in the country.

Mercedes EQV

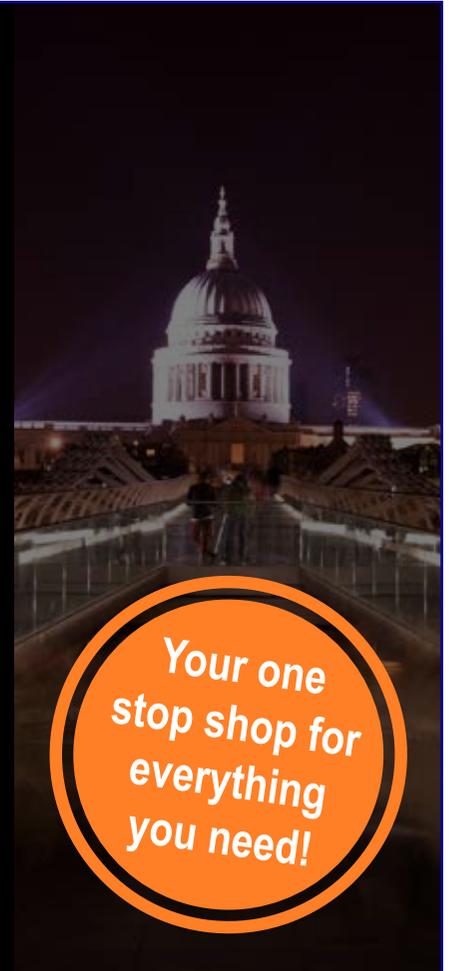
At the moment, the only vehicle on the market that might be a possibility is the Mercedes EQV, which has a range of over 200 miles – but the list price of this is just north of £70,000 and that’s before it has any wheelchair, partition or additional conversion work. The Vito that was used previously does come as electric but with a range of just over 100 miles, which would pretty much rule it out as a viable taxi.

Greener grass?

The grass is not always greener, the only real fault with the TXE is the price, but it’s clear that any alternatives would not be any cheaper, and to give up our turning circle and icon just as we are winning back so many customers with the first ever comfortable and reliable cab we have ever had, would be a mistake. As the saying goes “Be careful what you wish for, it may come true!” **TAXI**

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We've All Come from Somewhere Else...

"I wasn't an ideal fit as a cab driver as I'm not a people-person. I'm off the scale on introversion and I've spent most of my life avoiding other people."

On the road

Things have been tough in the cab trade over the last two years. When business slowed to a trickle, many drivers returned to their old jobs or took on new work. Quite a few cab drivers kept up their driving skills through delivery work, with mixed results. I've heard of drivers taking on jobs such as deep-cleaning ambulances at the height of Covid or working on construction sites carrying buckets of cement up ladders all day. I suspect those individuals have moved on to other things or returned to the cab trade – those who did return were rewarded with a busy period of work towards the end of 2021. Things are quiet at the start of any New Year, but the signs are that business could get good again once the kipper season is out of the way.

The grass is not always greener

Many drivers have discovered that working for someone else requires adjustments that they aren't prepared to make. It can be a shock to the system to just get out of bed to go to work. Cab drivers choose the hours they work using the twenty-four-hour clock. In a conventional job, some of those clocks come with an early morning alarm that needs to be obeyed. Even if you're working a standard 'nine till five' in Central London – unless you live in Berkerley Square, you're probably going to have to get up at an early hour to get to work. Commuting to work is a nasty business. It's all right as a facilitator – it's the cab driver's bread and butter – but as a participant, it's a nightmare. I know, I've done it.

Different mindset

You may find you have a different mindset to your co-workers and bosses. Conventional people are suspicious of the self-employed. I played down my individuality on job applications. Bosses are threatened by those who think for themselves and make their own decisions. Most cab drivers have been around a bit. Your line



manager is likely to be younger than you are. When I started work in the late-70s, the kids worked in the post room and the managers were middle-aged. Things are now the other way around. Chances are you'll be answering to an ambitious, power-mad, corporate-type a few decades your junior. These are the people who toe the corporate line and get promotion.

Lunchbreaks

In an office job, it might be a novelty to be able to complete your personal admin on company time: use of the internet, photocopier, and printer; but you might find your time monitored. I'm used to an hour lunch break – that's what I had when I first started work and that's what I took on the cab. When I became a Knowledge Examiner, I was dismayed to find I only got forty-five minutes for lunch (and that was seven years ago, it's probably down to thirty now).

Introverted

I wasn't an ideal fit as a cab driver as I'm not a people-person. I'm off the scale on introversion and

I've spent most of my life avoiding other people. I was always in a mild state of anxiety in the cab, but I knew that I'd only be with a person for twenty minutes, then they'd be gone. In many other jobs that contact is never completely gone. Previous customers can complain about you to your boss, they can bad-mouth you on net forums, and award you points on a very subjective league table of performance. Any adverse comments and you'll have to answer to a thirty-year old at a supervision meeting.

Feast and famine

Things are up and down in the cab trade – the feast and famine element has become particularly acute in the last few years. I used to plod along and not chase the money. I'd keep my head down and out of trouble. As a day man, I had few problems with passengers – certainly not as many I had in office jobs. If I ever had an unpleasant incident I could choose to go home or to the pub. I didn't always exercise that choice, as I invariably found that if I carried on working, I'd get a nice customer on my next job and I'd feel right again. Most customers are reasonable. They're not competing with you in the office for promotion or trying to get you the sack. Back in 1988 when I got my licence, I was amazed at how generous people were giving a tip on top of the metered fare!

Time out...

I haven't worked a cab for two years now – I've not ruled out a return – but I've been doing other things. Out here in Bedfordshire, I have little reason to go into London, apart from going to see West Ham lose at home (to Brentford and Leeds), so I'm less in the loop than I used to be. For this reason, I'm taking some time out from writing regular articles for the moment. The editor has kindly left the door open for me, so don't be surprised if I pop up again sometime in the future when I've got loads to say or I'm back in the game! I'm convinced that normality will return soon and that the trade will bounce back.

I hope the trade will be strengthened by more people doing the Knowledge. There are certainly worse jobs you could do. Nobody joins the cab trade straight from school; we've all come from somewhere else – somewhere restrictive, and unsatisfying. I'll be following the situation with interest. ■ TAXI



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Fowl Play



"The first green hut was built in St. John's Wood – and is still in use. Of the 60 huts that were originally erected, only 13 are still standing How many can you identify?"

Cabbie chronicles

We British are renowned for our love of animals. No expense is spared should a cat get stuck in a cat flap or a donkey caught in the grip of quicksand on a holiday beach – no end of services are mobilised. Top photographers and ace reporters are despatched to the location – choppers are launched, fire engines revved, and the local constabulary armed to the teeth with rolls of black and yellow 'traffic' tape. Anywhere else in the world, in the event of a creature in distress, they put another pot on the stove...

Keepy-Uppy...

Look at the (rightful) fuss the public made when Kurt Zouma, a French footballer, playing for West Ham, was filmed on Tik Tok roughing up a cat for fun. In the wake of the revelation, the country was in uproar; the FA fired their big guns at the club for allowing their man to play in a match on the day after the incident came to the public's attention (but as it occurred on private property, it appeared there was nothing the FA could sanction). The French RSPCA, however, are examining the media clip in the likelihood of prosecuting the player for cruelty – with a five-year maximum penalty in the offing. In addition, a number of big money sponsors have ripped up Zouma's contracts. Incidentally, there is a hilarious sequence in the Adam Sandler film *'Don't Mess with The Zohan'*, where The Zohan and his mates play 'keepy-uppy' with his land-lady's moggy around the lounge, where, with a deft flick, the animal lands on top of a curtain rail, non-the-worse for wear. Bad taste, but it's in line with the zany film. In his defence, perhaps Mr Zouma had been inspired by the movie?

Cabbie cruelty

As recently as 1947, when the last horse-drawn cab trundled around the streets of London, cab drivers could be, and were often, prosecuted for mistreating the 'hacks' pulling their Growlers and handsome cabs. No excuses, but long days and inclement weather played havoc with the lives of cabbies. Bundled up as they were against the elements,



one of the ways the old cabbies could keep warm, apart from the swathes of clothing they swaddled themselves in, was sipping a swig (or two) of brandy, or other 'heart-warming' tippie. Victorian cabbing involved a lot of waiting around for fares to materialise. The wealthy, in need of transportation (if they didn't have their own carriage), would send their servants out to the nearest rank to hire the services of a waiting cabman.

Consequently, towards the end of a long-day shift, the cabmen, having to constantly warm themselves up, would eventually get so inebriated, that they were unable to control their cabs and when roused by a servant, were known to fall off their seats; and they might, in their sozzled state, give the poor nag an enthusiastic flick too many with the whip – incurring not only the wrath of the local populace, but the eager constabulary as well. Many cab men would sober up to find themselves languishing in a cell. The Victorian justice system was on a daily basis, awash with cab drivers, shrouded in any number of mufflers and overcoats, their huge enamel badges displayed, conspicuously on their chests, shuffling in and out of court houses across the city, whilst their hard done by nags took a well-earned breather in the stables.

There was a great deal of interest shown in the comportment of The Victorian Capital's cabmen, with a daily newspaper, *The Pall Mall Gazette*, regularly publishing stories of cab drivers' misdemeanours. Talking of Pall Mall, one inebriated cab driver who tried to drive his carriage down Duke of York's Steps

into The Mall, was not seriously injured when he ended up pinned beneath his overturned vehicle.

One good thing that came out of this continuing 'comedy of errors' was the construction of what became the famous Green Cabmen's Shelters. The idea was first conceived in the late 19th Century, when a group of like-minded philanthropists 'linked-in' to find a way of keeping cab drivers on the road and out of the pubs, especially in bad weather. Hence, *The Cabman's Shelter Fund* was born in 1875. The first green hut was built in St. John's Wood – and is still in use. Of the 60 huts that were originally erected, only 13 are still standing How many can you identify?

Lucky dip

Incidentally, one nice story about a cab shelter, involves the hut in Northumberland Avenue. When the National Lottery was in its infancy, like today, the winning ticket was drawn on a Saturday evening – which prompted the Sunday papers to pull out all the stops to try and identify the winner for their front pages. It was about 1am when my phone rang. I was sound asleep but managed to answer the phone as coherently as possible. The cheeky, cheery voice at the other end of the line, made no apologies for intruding into our bedroom at such an unearthly hour. "Allo, Al," said the unannounced voice, "one of your mates has just won the lottery. Gotta name for us?" I put the phone down. Some bright spark, looking for clues, must have had my number as editor of *The Cab Driver*, *Steering Wheel*, *Taxi Trade Times*, or some-such trade publication and had a hopeful punt.

As it transpired, the

seventeen-man syndicate at the Northumberland Shelter had won a share of £1.7 million, but the icing on the cake went to one driver who, apart from his 17th share, had bought his own ticket and had individually won £1.7m, too. Did he retire? Unfortunately, I believe, his wife was seriously ill, and he himself later contracted a life-threatening illness. Hopefully, the Lottery money became a life-saver.

Fowl play!

Without trying to make light of a serious subject, re: Jimmy Carr's recent uber-offensive joke, whenever I hear about someone having an illness, I think about 'chicken soup!' Does that put me up there with insensitive Jimmy? Like Chinese medicine and its exotic ingredients sold in great quantities to cure all manner of ailments, chicken soup is the 'kosher panacea' for all ills. Did you know, that across the world, it's estimated that 50 billion chickens are slaughtered annually?

Ideal cabbie pets...

On the subject of chickens – what a segue! I noticed, just before Christmas 'lockdown', a whole tranche of articles related to keeping pets, reiterating the oft quoted aphorism 'A dog is for life, not just for Christmas.' The article featured a white, chubby chicken, wearing a pink bib, preening itself on a kitchen table. And there wasn't a knife and fork in sight! Before buying chickens as pets, say the RSPCA, "it's important you consider if you have the time, resources, commitment, facilities and knowledge." ■ TAXI

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ELIZABETH STREET SW1

CITY OF WESTMINSTER



Subject: Please can you help find my cabbie Guardian Angel?

Dear Editor,

Can you please help me find the amazingly kind gentleman cab driver who gave me a lift in about May 2009 in central London and dropped me in Elizabeth Street SW1 at about 5.45pm?

I have to find out who he was and thank him personally, the following explains why:

He helped me understand the need to go on and that no matter how great my grief was and how low I was feeling, there was always someone else who was worse off than me and I had to go on, for others.

I can never forget his kindness and it seems these days I think about him more and more, so I need to find him again and thank him personally for his kindness which I have never forgotten.

My father died in May 2009. I was 40 and he didn't quite make 70. I was completely gob smacked and totally grief stricken, he died suddenly and unexpectedly of a heart attack, I never had time to say goodbye. I spent weeks and months imagining he was still alive and dreaming of him most nights. It didn't seem real that dad was no longer there anymore. My mum was at home at the time that dad died and seemed to be in denial that he had passed away. I understood later that she was in shock. This became a form of depression. She had more recurrent & aggressive MS attacks triggered by losing her beloved husband.

My brother and sister were in Australia where they lived at the time and still do. To have to receive a phone call in the middle of the night from their sibling that dad had died must have seemed like a bad dream.

Soon after dad died and before his funeral, I hailed a cab in central London to meet my best friend Simon for a beer after work somewhere near Elizabeth St SW1.

I jumped in the first cab that stopped, muttered my destination to the driver and looked at my blackberry, scrolling through pointless messages to pass the time for most of the journey.

After a while, I took notice that we were within ten minutes of my destination in SW1. I looked at the cab driver's eyes in his rear-view mirror and stared silently for a while longer. I looked around his cab and saw there was a tired and tatty photo of what looked like a young man, maybe my age at the time, attached to his dashboard.

I didn't say anything.

Within minutes we were pulling up at my destination. The cab driver asked me if I was ok, I think I replied, mentioning my father had just passed as I was showing signs of being upset.

He immediately said it would be ok.

I looked at him as I handed him the fare and asked who that picture was of.

He said it was of his son, I immediately remarked how lovely it was that he had a photo of him in his cab.

He looked at me and said that is how he remembered him, to which I said do you mean he has passed away? He said yes and told me calmly his son had committed suicide.

We both cried at that point.

I said I can't imagine anything worse, a father / parent losing a son / child.

I asked him how old they both were, to which he replied his son was 40 and he was nearly 70.

I thanked him for the ride and we parted company, I was feeling a little relieved.

As I was walking the next few minutes to meet my best friend at the pub, I realised that the gentleman and his late son were exactly the same age as me and my dad.

It was as if the amazing cab driver was sent to me that day as a Guardian Angel to help me put my grief into context and teach me that there is always someone who is worse off and that you must go on, for the sake of others.

I won't ever forget what happened that day in 2009 and to this day I can't help thinking about this kind Guardian Angel who appeared on a day of intense grief when I was at my lowest but picked me up and gave me the strength to go on, despite his own terrible situation.

Please help me find him again.

I'd be most grateful if you could publish this letter in your newspaper.

He was certainly a black cab driver, and it was an old cab which picked me up in central London but in May 2009 and dropped me near Baker & Spice in Elizabeth Street SW1 around 5.45pm.

Please contact the LTDA on the number below if you think you can help.

Best
Ken Wesson
020 7286 1046



A Passage Through Time:

Phil's 'London heritage' knowledge journey is designed to hopefully make your driving day and workplace surroundings, a little more interesting...

Footprints & foundations

In this series of articles, I have chronicled a timeline of London's foremost events and as I have written in previous commentaries – there is always a cause and effect to unfolding incidents. The ancient city of London has one date that has always captured the public's imagination. The year of 1666 brought a catastrophic conflagration that would change the ancient quarter forever. The Great Fire of London was, for its citizens, a life changing experience. The visual impact of observing their homes going up in flames, must have triggered an emotional outpouring of loss. It is unimaginable that a capital city could be burnt to the ground. However, this is exactly what happened to old London town. The main protagonist in this narrative was Samuel Pepys – a flamboyant character who played a central role in this defining moment of history. Pepys diarised the proceedings of the fire, recording this cataclysmic event for future posterity.

Igniting the flames

On the night of the 2nd September 1666, a workman in Thomas Farriner's baking house in Pudding Lane smelt smoke and aroused the household. The baker, his wife and child hastily gathered some belongings and hurried over the rooftops to safety. Their maid was too timid to follow and alas became the first fatality of the fire. It was a warm humid night with strong winds and the city's houses were mostly built of timber, which helped the flames

to spread rapidly. The parish constable arrived at the scene and immediately sent a messenger to instruct Lord Mayor Bludworth of the happenings. When Bludworth arrived at the site of the fire, the baking house and most of Pudding Lane was by now in flames. These graphic spectacles were common place across the landscape of the city. Mayor Bludworth was unimpressed, saying, "A woman might pish it out!" and returned to his residence and went back to bed.

Later that morning, Samuel Pepys the renowned diarist and messenger to the King found that 300 houses, half of London Bridge and several churches had been burnt to the ground. Along the riverside by the Thames, the warehouses containing combustibles including wine, tallow, wood and rope were engulfed in a wall of flames, reaching 100 feet into the smoke ridden atmosphere. People were in a state of hysteria and were gathering possessions from their burning houses – the heat having an intensity likened to an oven. Even the pigeons in their familiar perches high up on church steeples were not safe – refusing to leave until their wings were burned and then falling to the ground.

Messenger of bad news

Pepys, knowing of the inactivity of Mayor Bludworth, took it upon himself to hire a carriage and was speedily conveyed to Whitehall to inform King Charles II. The King was extremely concerned with the distraught news that was confirmed upon him and in their conversations, Pepys conveyed the severity of the fire. King Charles was prompted into action and advised Pepys to return to the city to tell the Lord Mayor to pull

down houses in the path of the fire. The Kings messenger found the Lord Mayor in Canning Street. On receiving the king's message, he cried, "Lord what can I do? I am spent. I have been pulling down houses but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it."

The next morning, Pepys in his night shirt took a carriage with his valuables to Sir William Rider's house in Bethnal Green. The rest of his household contents from Seething Lane were loaded onto a boat and shipped downstream to Woolwich – the boat also had enough space for his wife, Elizabeth. Later that day Pepys had returned to his house with haste as he had forgotten his most treasured possessions, his wine and parmesan cheese, which he buried in his front garden. The Kings brother the Duke of York was put in charge of fire-fighting operations. The duke with his team of constables and soldiers fought hard to contain the fire, however there was little they could do. Strong winds had now caused the fire to spread rapidly to the central and western parts of the city. The city's most prestigious buildings: the Royal Exchange, the Guildhall and St Pauls Cathedral had all become casualties. The intensity of the heat caused a complete evacuation of the city's populations and huge tents were erected on open ground in Moorfields for the terrified city dwellers.

The desolate city

Pepys, who had spent a day in Woolwich, returned to the city and walked gingerly between the debris to his house in Seething Lane. To his great surprise, his habitat had survived the flames. Standing alone he looked around his neighbourhood and contemplated

the events of the last few days.

The saddest sight of his beloved city consumed his thoughts with heartfelt grief. He then made his way to the church of All Hallows by the Tower of London, on route exchanging sombre glances with the blackened faces of the soldiers who had tried to put out the fire out. On arrival at the church, Pepys climbed the steeple and gazed out at the vivid images. 'Everywhere great fires, oil cellars and brimstone and other things burning' The wind had dropped but still there was a blaze at the Temple, Holborn and Cripplegate, where the King himself was seen helping the soldiers.

Evaluating the fire

After five days, the worst was over. Nearly 400 acres were destroyed within the city walls and 63 acres outside – 87 churches had been ruined, together with 44 livery companies and 13,200 houses. Remarkably only nine people had died in the fire. Londoners were looking for a scapegoat. Many believed it was a foreign plot, with many nationalities living in the city, suspicion was firmly cast against them. Many were forced into hiding from the baying crowd. The King rode out to speak the marauding mob, advising the populace that the foreign plot was a falsehood.

1666 The Great Fire of London

He promised food for sustenance and that new houses would be built as quickly as possible. Londoners were still deliberating over who had started the fire. Unexpectedly a deranged Frenchman, named Robert Hubert came forward and said that he had started the fire and the next day was taken on a waggon to the execution site at Tyburn (Marble Arch) and duly hanged. A few days later, the family of Hubert confronted the city authorities over concerns for their missing son and were told of his confession of starting the fire and that he had been executed. To the family's dismay, they explained that their arrival was three days after the fire had started. Religious fever had also gripped the citizens of the London. It was said that God's fury had ignited the flames. The fire had started in Pudding Lane and ended at Pie Corner in Smithfield. The reasoning of the God-fearing population was that gluttony was a sinful punishment.

Rebuilding

The enormity of the task of rebuilding the city would prove a difficult process. Owners of property had to establish their claim to the land they had once owned. A committee was set up

and considered redevelopment plans put forward by renowned architects Christopher Wren and John Evelyn. Both had wanted wide boulevards with piazzas and a quay along the river. This was not going to be a city replicating Haussmann's Paris. Their plans were dismissed as impractical for a commercial city. New building regulations were enforced, brick-built houses with encased windows, new churches, improved drainage and water supplies throughout the city. To finance these grand projects a coal tax was levied to raise revenue. The city rose slowly from the ashes and recovered its former glory as a leading commercial centre. Rising above the skyline of London Bridge, The Monument built by Christopher Wren commemorates this symbolic event. ■ TAXI

"Nearly 400 acres were destroyed within the city walls and 63 acres outside – 87 churches had been ruined, together with 44 livery companies and 13,200 houses."

"Lord what can I do? I am spent. I have been pulling down houses but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it."

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The Direct Debit Guarantee



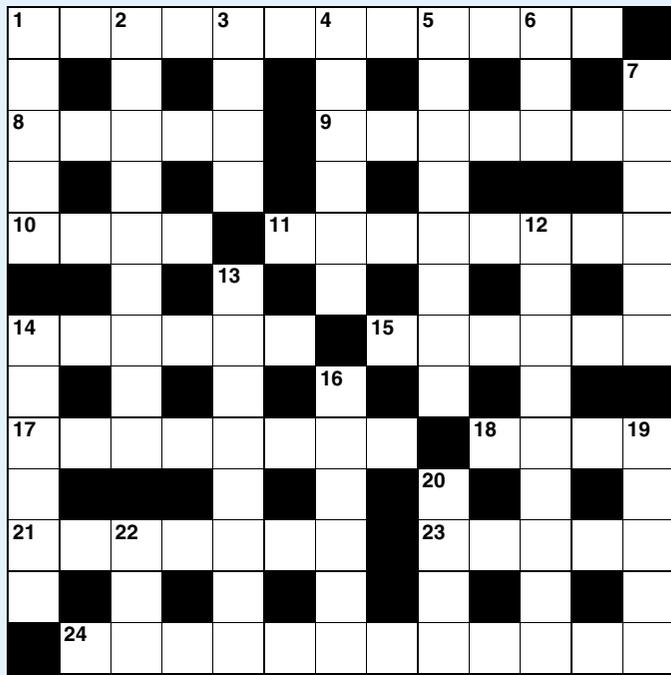
- This Guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that accept instructions to pay Direct Debits.
- If there are any changes to the amount, date or frequency of your Direct Debit LTDA will notify you (10 working days) in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request LTDA to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request.
- If an error is made in the payment of your Direct Debit, by LTDA, or your bank or building society, you are entitled to a full and immediate refund of the amount paid from your bank or building society.
 - If you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when LTDA asks you to.
- You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your bank or building society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify us.



Puzzler page

So you know every street and every run between two points in London? Let's now see how your knowledge stands up to these brain twisters...

Crossword



ACROSS

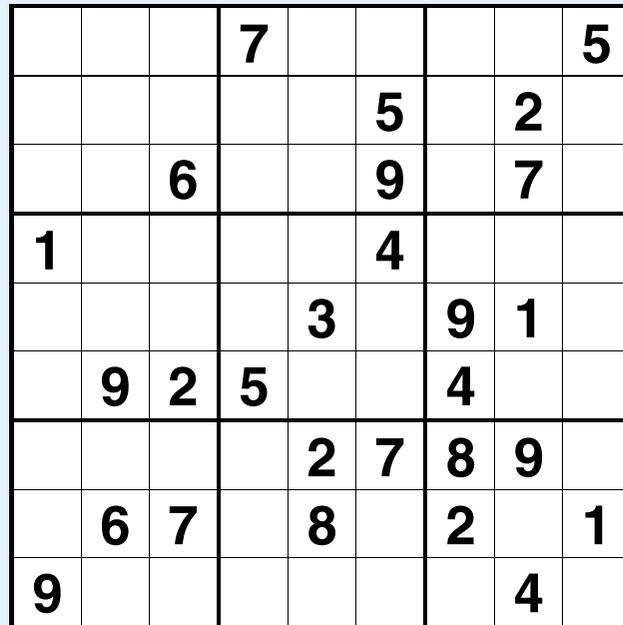
- 1 Relative by marriage (7-2-3)
- 8 Having unexpectedly good fortune (5)
- 9 Extract (juice from a fruit) (7)
- 10 Cry, sob (4)
- 11 Jason ____, *Ted Lasso* star (8)
- 14 Have in mind, mean (to) (6)
- 15 Foreign nanny (2,4)
- 17 Finish a race exactly level (4-4)
- 18 Talent, aptitude (4)
- 21 Weird, strange (7)
- 23 On the ocean (2,3)
- 24 Shocking, outraging (12)

DOWN

- 1 Under (5)
- 2 Conductor's group of musicians (9)
- 3 David ____, British boxer (4)
- 4 Save from danger (6)
- 5 Feeling sick (8)
- 6 Old name for beer (3)
- 7 Natural hot water spring (6)
- 12 John ____, *A Quiet Place* actor and director (9)
- 13 Fleeing (from the police) (2,3,3)
- 14 Owing money (2,4)
- 16 Film-maker's machine (6)
- 19 Sound of elastic breaking (5)
- 20 Indian woman's dress (4)
- 22 ____, Efron, *High School Musical* star (3)

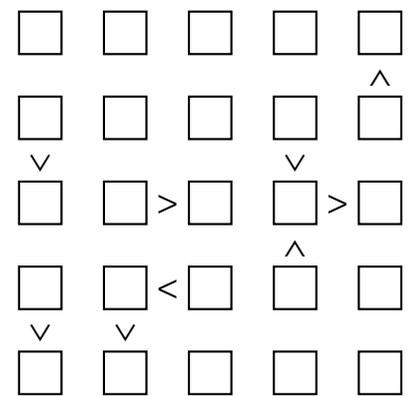
Sudoku

Have a go at this medium level Sudoku puzzle. Fill the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 just once.



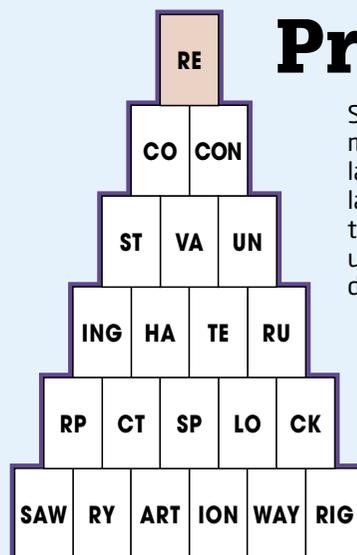
Futoshiki

Fill in the blank squares so that each row and column contains all the numbers 1 - 5. Use any given numbers and the symbols that tell you if the number in the square is larger (>) or smaller (<) than the number next to it.



Predictive text

Starting with the highlighted box, try to make a word adding one word part from each layer as you go. Then return to the second layer and use the letters in the unused box to start another word and so on, until you've used all the boxes and created six words of decreasing length.



All answers to puzzler on p34

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TAXI

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LINAGE

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● All cabs wanted. Tx4, euro 4, 5 & 6 also TXE wanted We come to you, any condition, very quick decision. cash paid instantly. 07702 554934

● All de-commissioned good quality TX4s wanted. Instant decision, cash paid. We come to you. Also white TX4 elegance wanted 07973 335739 or 01253 407500

● De-commissioned your tx4's and Euro 5's? Earn more by selling outside London. We pay cash, collect, and drive away. Definitely still buying. John 07702 554934

● We want your taxi! We come to you. Any condition, quick decision. Instant cash paid 07763 699767

DRIVERS WANTED

● Driver wanted part time or night time 66 reg TXE elegance change over in Hertfordshire area – 07970915778 – no payment

● TX4 elegance, nightman wanted fitted comcab change over in woodford area

CABS FOR SALE

● Cabs for sale. Main Dealer service history. Non-fleet cabs. New stock daily. Cabs also wanted. Finance Paid 07957 465423

CABS FOR RENT

● New TXE for rent looking for long term drivers, must pay week in advanced weekly direct into bank account – phone Rob 07887696872

● TX4s TO RENT! Essex based full back up garage facilities - 07824630247

● 71 & 22 plate TXEs for long term hire no ads RAC and full backup. Pay weekly directly into bank account – 07980288333

● All Mercedes vitos for rent, full backup, prices starting from £220 please call – 07956211478

● Vito rentals. Based in East London. AA breakdown. 13 plates available. Call Jaco 07788 866700

● VNK Motors -Electric cabs LEVCs & TX4s for rent, from £195 upwards per week. Full back up, Caledonia Road, North London area, breakdown service, overhauls, running repairs & body work. Also Looking for a taxi mechanic 0207 700 1045 or 07951 661430 – Nick.

BEREAVMENT

● In memory of Frankie Coyle passed away 2nd January used to terminate at Terminus Snack Bar Victoria

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 e16-taxirentals.co.uk

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- Ascott's maintained.
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Cab Driver Trains as Army Reservist



TAXI talks to London Cab Driver and Taxi Charity Volunteer Seb Philp



TAXI Last time we spoke you told us about completing the Three Peaks challenge, so what have you been up to recently?

Seb: The Three Peaks challenge was great fun but both mentally and physically very tiring and I knew that I wanted a new, bigger and better test to shift me out of my comfort zone again. I have found that new challenge becoming an Army Reservist.

TAXI Wow! What made you apply to become an Army Reservist?

Seb: I was on a Taxi Charity trip and one of the carers who was supporting a veteran mentioned that he was going to apply to become an Army Reservist and after chatting about it I did some more research online and I decided that this was just what I needed to do. The upper age limit to join is 42 and a half and as I am 41 it was now or never.

TAXI What's the process like?

Seb: I applied online, had a medical over the phone and then a doctor's medical and after this my application was progressed to the next stage. At an assessment centre we were given a bleep running test, had to lift weights, our hearing was checked, and we were given a full medical and sat an English test. Fortunately, I passed the assessment and joined the London Regiment A Company and began my training.

TAXI What was the training like – did they break you in gently or throw you straight in?

Seb: My first weekend away was in Pirbright where we had a general introduction to the army. This was followed by a week's intensive training where we learnt how to handle a weapon and had to pass various tests including running 2k under 9.45 minutes, lifting weights and throwing a medicine ball over three metres from a sitting position. Towards the end of the week, you had to pass a weapons handling test, or you were returned to unit. Fortunately, I passed and took my SA80 rifle on to the 25-metre shooting range for the first time.

TAXI So I have to ask... what was your 2k time?

Seb: I was delighted with 7.54 especially as I am at the upper age limit for entry to the reservists.

TAXI What were the next stages?

Seb: We then had eight weeks basic training which included the inevitable 'about turn', 'stand at ease', and 'stand to attention.' We also had to complete online courses on subjects including navigation, battle drills and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear warfare, and how to use gas masks. After the eight weeks, I went to Grantham for two weeks where the tests and the training got harder. The previous timed 2k run had been on a running track, this time we had no track, and it was more difficult to pace yourself, but I was only 7 seconds slower than my earlier timed run. Later in the course we had to run 4k

with 25kg on our backs in under 45 minutes and then remove 10kg and immediately run another 2k in under 12 minutes. We also did battle drills, first aid training to show us how to save lives in the field, spent four nights in a muddy field in tents, learnt how to clean our weapons, completed patrols and vehicle checks.

TAXI What did your family and friends think?

Seb: Actually I didn't tell anyone what I was doing, so it was a huge surprise when my family came up to Grantham for my passing out parade. During the parade we were introduced to the Colonel and Brigadier and had to stand to attention for about an hour waiting for our turn.

TAXI How much time do you commit each year?

Seb: The commitment is 27 days a year and as an Army Reservist you may be required to serve full time when needed.

TAXI What do you think to life as an army reservist?

Seb: I love it – it's very sociable and I am enjoying learning more about my trade. At my age, I originally thought that I might train as a chef

but when I discovered during the tests that I was fitter than many of the reservists who were years younger than me, I opted instead for the infantry which hopefully might allow me to go to Kenya or the Falklands.

TAXI Would you recommend it?

Seb: Definitely, it fits in perfectly with being a cab driver and I wish I had joined years ago.

To find out more about the Taxi Charity visit www.taxicharity.org

About the Army Reserve

The Army Reserve is the largest of the Reserve Forces. The Army Reserve provides support to the Regular Army at home and overseas, and throughout its history almost every major operation has seen reservists operate alongside their Regular counterparts.

Army Reserve Soldiers come from all walks of life and work part-time as soldiers for the British Army alongside full-time Regular soldiers.

Regular Reservists are soldiers who have left the Regular army but are recalled in times of need to come back and join operations alongside Regular soldiers.

www.army.mod.uk/who-we-are/the-army-reserve ■ TAXI



Muffin Impossible



When muffin day comes round, Meg attempts Muffin Impossible – to selflessly prevent her resident Labrador from harm...



A woman of words

Has anyone seen Countdown since Anne Robinson took over? Lordy, that woman could freeze water with a short stare. Her regular insults and talkdowns to contestants are compulsive viewing. Oh, and there are letter and number games, too. In the afternoons, when I am not out working, I like to curl up on the sofa for Countdown with a giant mug of frothy coffee and, on high days and holidays, a caramel and chocolate muffin from M&S...

Labrador style

I buy two when I am in the treat yourself zone for these scrumptious little luxuries. In case you think I am a greedy gut that is one for me, and one for Mr Meg. The trouble is that Mr Meg tosses his muffin into his mouth and swallows as soon as it comes out of my shopping bag. He eats cakes and sweets Labrador style – one gulp and it's gone. Then he's after mine, so I must make it Muffin Impossible for him to find it. Best not to put temptation in his way.

Emergency scooping

Yesterday was a muffin day. As usual Mr Meg speed swallowed his and because I didn't want mine until later in the day, I secreted it in the newspaper basket. Until Mr Meg asked if I had seen his Wickes Catalogue, the 2011 one. I knew he would soon start rummaging in the

paper basket, so I whipped it out and I popped it into the wood burning stove, unlit OBVIOUSLY, instead.

Until Mr Meg told me he planned to give the wood burner's grate a good old clean out. So I emergency scooped it out of there and hid it in among the many vitamin tablets that I keep in a box under the sink.

More cod than liver?

Vitamin D because I am a cabbie and spend all day looking out at the sunlight instead of being out in it. B12 to boost my memory. Is that why I take B12? I can't remember now. Turmeric because someone on daytime TV said it would make me feel 20 years younger. So far so bad with that. Oh, and cod liver oil of course. I don't know a cabbie who doesn't take cod liver oil to keep the joints moving even when the London traffic isn't.

After half an hour queuing in Holborn my knees sound like firecrackers when I bend and stretch them, and that's with the cod liver oil. Maybe it's more cod than liver?

Oh, the romance...

Mr Meg is not a believer in supplements. He recommends a cold bath and a self-delivered punch to the side of the head for all aches and pains so I was sure my muffin would *never* be discovered in the vitamin box. He never goes there.

Only he did. He was looking for an empty canister in which to store his 'micro diddly dingdong wotsits' in the shed. Did he eat it? No, Mr Meg had taken just one small bite out of my muffin, like a tease, and left it by the kettle with a post-it-note on which he'd drawn a smiley face and a heart. Oh, the romance. ■ TAXI

LTDA A selection of our numerous Distribution Points

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- ◆ Abacus Accounts, Southbrook Road, Lee, SE12
- ◆ Astral Café, Regency Place, SW1
- ◆ Bubbles Car Wash, E2
- ◆ C & S Taxis, Dunbridge Street, E2
- ◆ Cabsurance, Seven Kings
- ◆ Camberfield Taxi Services
- ◆ Computer Cab, Mitre Way, W12
- ◆ Coney Allen, Dunbridge Street, E1
- ◆ CP Beehive Service Station, Beehive Lane, Gants Hill
- ◆ Cricklewood Carriers, Cricklewood
- ◆ Dial A Cab, City Road, N1
- ◆ Edgware Station Rank
- ◆ Euston Station Rank
- ◆ G & L Taxis, Crayford Road, N7
- ◆ Globe Transmissions, Cudworth Street, E1
- ◆ The Ham, Brentford
- ◆ Heathrow Airport Canteen
- ◆ Hexagon Garage, Lukin Street, E1
- ◆ Jet Garage, Clipstone Street, W1
- ◆ Knowledge Centre, Caledonian Road
- ◆ KPM, Hemming Street, E1
- ◆ London City Airport Canteen
- ◆ LP Motors, Dunbridge Street, E2
- ◆ Martin Cordell, Thomas Road, E14
- ◆ Paddington Station Rank
- ◆ Putney Bridge Taxis, The Arches, Putney Bridge Station, SW6
- ◆ Richmond Road Taxi Centre, E8
- ◆ Safewise Supermarket, Harrow
- ◆ South Bank Service Station, Great Suffolk Street, SE1
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- ◆ Taxi & Private Hire, Blackfriars Rd, SE1
- ◆ Temple Place Shelter
- ◆ Turbo Accessories, Three Colts Lane, E2
- ◆ Ubiquitous Ltd, E1
- ◆ Waterloo Station
- ◆ Wimbledon Station Rank
- ◆ WizAnn Knowledge School, Watts Grove, E3

PUZZLER ANSWERS



Crossword

B	R	O	T	H	E	R	I	N	L	A	W	
E	R	A		E	A	L	G					
L	U	C	K		S	Q	U	E	E	Z	E	
O	H	E		C	S						Y	
W	E	E	P		S	U	E	I	K	I	S	
			S		O	E	O	R	E			
I	N	T	E	N	D		A	U	P	A	I	R
N	R	T		C	S		S					
D	E	A	D	H	E	A	T		G	I	F	T
E				E				M	S		N	W
B	I	Z	A	R	R	E			A	T	S	E
T		A			U	R			R		K	N
		S	C	A	N	D	A	L	I	S	I	N

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SUDOKU

3	1	9	7	4	2	6	8	5
8	7	4	3	6	5	1	2	9
2	5	6	8	1	9	3	7	4
1	8	3	2	9	4	5	6	7
7	4	5	6	3	8	9	1	2
6	9	2	5	7	1	4	3	8
5	3	1	4	2	7	8	9	6
4	6	7	9	8	3	2	5	1
9	2	8	1	5	6	7	4	3

Futoshiki

5	4	2	1	3		
				^		
2	3	1	4	5		
				v		
1	5	>	4	3	>	2
4	2	<	3	5	1	
3	1	5	2	4		

Predictive text

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