SIGN OF THE TIMES

LTDA IN DIALOGUE WITH MAYOR, TFL & CITY OVER PROPOSED RESTRICTIONS
Uber to be Bitten by Guide Dog Refusals?

**NEWS**

Uber are set for more court dates later this year as Chris Fry, Senior Partner at Fry Law prepares his case on behalf of businessman and guide dog owner, Dan Williamson, under the 2010 Equality Act.

**Over 100 Refusals**

Dan, who’s owned a guide dog for two years, states he has evidence of over 100 occasions where he has been refused transportation services from Uber. Dan remarked that he has been made to feel ‘like a second-class citizen’ and becomes ‘anxious when booking’ – Commenting on BBC Radio, Dan also said, “Uber is a service provider and has a responsibility not to discriminate against people for using a guide dog”

**Supreme Court Outcome**

Solicitor, Chris Fry explained during the interview that he is awaiting the ruling of the Supreme Court (where Uber is scheduled to appear this summer). Should the Court decide like the two previous courts, that Uber is a provider of transportation services, and workers are employees rather than self-employed drivers, then Uber are responsible as a service provider and in turn for the acts of their employees – who are their agents. Chris, a specialist in disability law, commented that the differences with this challenge is that there is film footage and witness evidence to support the prosecution case.

Uber have also bitten the dust in the German court recently – see our International update on page 21 and are also one of several private hire companies, scrambling to install partitions into a range of non-purpose-built vehicles. Uber’s reported approach is to pay the AA to install partitions in 400 cars in Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham as part of an initial pilot.

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**Transport Union Warns of “Turbo Charged COVID-19 Breeding Ground”**

Crowded train and bus services are ‘categorically less safe’ and should not run unless two-meter social distancing can be enforced, says RMT.

**Contradictory and Potentially Lethal Approach**

The union has said that unless the government took urgent action to enforce two-meter social distancing, public transport would become a “turbo charged COVID-19 breeding ground” driving a new wave of infections. The warning has come as the Government begins it’s ‘back to work drive’, with a surge in passenger numbers expected. RMT General Secretary Mick Cash said: “We have a contradictory and potentially lethal approach from government which says on the one hand when we go outside our homes into open spaces two meter social distancing must be maintained at all times but then on the other hand the government is not lifting a finger to prevent the cramming of passengers into confined spaces on bus, train and tube services. We have seen the consequences of the government’s contradictory response in the pictures of rammed out buses and tube carriages.”

“The union is saying categorically that public transport is less safe if passengers cannot practice two-metre social distancing. The government must take action to enforce its own public health policies otherwise public transport will become a turbo charged COVID-19 breeding ground driving a second spike of infections.”

**Premature Lockdown Relaxation a Class Divide Issue**

RMT’s Mick Cash added: “With the premature relaxation of the lockdown, many people feel they have no choice but to go back to work for purely economic reasons. They do not have the cushion of savings and the option of working from home. This is now clearly a class issue with a dividing line between those who have to work or provide essential services and those able to make the choice to stay at home.”

The union stated its advice in line with Public Health England in that two-metre social distancing be observed at all times.
“There are endless possibilities for cabs to move more people - but only if we have access”

TRADE CAN BE PART OF STREETSPACE SOLUTION

Steve McNamara is the LTDA’s General Secretary

No one could have predicted how this year has panned out, but there are plenty of people trying to influence what is going to happen next – and some of them see this crisis as a massive opportunity for them and their vision of the future. I, of course, refer to the cycling lobbying contingent, who under the guise of ‘emergency measures’ are attempting to seize control of the streets, effectively banning everyone other than cyclists.

At the time of writing, I have seen lots of news reports and press releases – many are contradictory and all of them lacking in detail about how individual proposals will affect us. Will we be allowed to ply our trade freely in all of them? in some of them? Is it all taxis or just electric cabs?

What we do know is that two separate schemes are proposed, one by the City and one by TfL, and we are trying very hard to secure universal access to both.

Our argument is simple, the same rules should apply to these schemes as apply to the Congestion Charge - buses, taxis and wheelchair accessible private hire vehicles should be given access to them all.

We are positioning ourselves as ‘ready to help’ and have suggested a variety of ways we could assist a vastly restricted bus and tube network to move large numbers of Londoners, many of whom cannot walk or cycle. Fixed fares from the train stations to key destinations are a possibility if we are given access to the restricted streets and can dodge the traffic. With the raising of the congestion charge fee to £15 and the extension of operations to 7 days (and up until 10pm), there are endless possibilities for us to move more people - but only if we are allowed access. Excluding us from key parts of the Metropolis simply means we become part of the problem rather than the solution we should be.

Steve McNamara is the LTDA’s General Secretary

Dear Heidi,

London Streetspace programme – impact on taxi trade

The Mayor’s announcement last week of his new London Streetspace programme has caused grave concern across London’s taxi trade. The plans to exclude taxis and to create bus only zones across large parts of the road network will devastate our business and wreak havoc on black cabs, who offer both London’s only 100% accessible form of public transport and the only form of public transport that is built to enable social distancing, with partitions between driver and passenger, easily cleanable interiors and contactless card payments.

We recognise the pressure that coronavirus has put on City Hall and on Transport for London, and the importance of supporting cleaner, greener transport. As cabbies and as Londoners, we want to be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem. Hundreds of thousands of Londoners rely on taxis to get around, and nearly 24,000 taxi drivers in London are in dire financial straits owing to the recent lockdown. Excluding black cabs from parts of the city is bad for the trade and bad for London.

I want to work with you and your officials to find a solution that delivers the Mayor’s objectives of increasing cycling and walking without destroying the cab trade. I have two proposals that I would like you and TfL to consider:

1. Introducing fixed fares for specific journeys within central London, from the main rail termini to the City, West End and other key destinations. This would enable us to help TfL move tens of thousands of people, many of whom, are unable to walk or cycle and would otherwise be trying to access the tube or buses.

2. Exempting taxis and wheelchair accessible PH vehicles from the proposed car-free zones, on the grounds that taxis provide a valuable form of socially-distanced public transport. This would mirror the existing exemptions from the Congestion Charge reflecting our role in providing essential disability accessible public transport.

I am requesting a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss further our ideas for how the taxi trade can help keep London moving during the pandemic.

Yours sincerely,

Steve McNamara
General Secretary, The Licensed Taxi Drivers’ Association (LTDA)

cc. Mike Brown, Commissioner, Transport for London

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“Easy to See Why FreeNow is Changing Tack”

TRADE

“If you look at the origins of FreeNow it’s easy to see why they’re changing tack,” says Vinny Kearns, CEO of Xpert Taxis and NXT Taxis and former Vice President of the National Taxi Drivers Union. “In Ireland we first experienced the arrival of Hailo and this model was attractive for drivers as they only paid if they worked with the app and it was only 10% commission. It was a fully automated app, so the drivers got nothing extra to compare with the services of a traditional company - such as advice on legal matters, insurance, taxation and often just a friendly person to help with health or personal matters.”

Kearns explains how they bought market share with vouchers and discounts but Hailo ended up failing and were bought out of receivership by MyTaxi. “We should at this point look at who lost out, such as the state coffers, investors and local communities…” says Kearns. “In a similar manner, MyTaxi with new investors and the same business model, blitzed the market with advertising…” adds Kearns. “They slightly altered the model, as drivers commission increased to 12%. MyTaxi then sought further investment and rebranded as FreeNow and raised the costs to drivers to 15% commission. They spent more on advertising in one year than the rest of the taxi companies together spent over a decade. But if you continue to do the same things again and again you get the same results as Hailo.”

“As the motor industry (who continue to fund these loss making apps, are in crisis during Covid-19 and may never recoup lost sales), review their investments, you can see what is happening with the imposed merger of Kapten and FreeNow in an effort to stem further losses. Kapten, which is not in Ireland yet, have fared reasonably well as they are concentrating on the private hire market but FreeNow have not. They’re trying to flood the market with their discounts and their in-your-face-advertising.”

Kearns adds that "In Ireland we do not have the private hire market that exists throughout the UK, and our National Transport Authority has stated clearly that Taxi Public Hire licenses are freely available - so there is no requirement for private hire other than for the top end executive car chauffeur market. If and when the motor industry ever reviews their policy of investment in taxi apps and seek to exit, they can only exit with substantial losses. If they acted similarly to other major investors, they would have cashed in their chips long ago.”

- Wim Faber
“Gradually, just a step at a time, there is the prospect of people coming back into central London.”

FIRST STEPS OUT OF THE WILDERNESS

THE MASSETT FILE

I am writing this immediately after the Prime Minister has delivered his address to the nation, presenting the Government blueprint of how we will move forward and out of Lockdown. So, the first tentative steps have been announced but what we all want to know is how all this is going to impact the Taxi trade, and will the very limited easing of restrictions lead to us being able to take our first steps out of the wilderness?

What Next?

I think that Boris’s announcement probably raised more questions than it answered for many people. First of all, we were told that if we couldn’t work from home then we should go back to work - but conditions in the workplace have to be safe for everybody with social distancing principals applied. We were also told not to take public transport and that we should either use the car, walk or cycle to work. Confusing to say the least - if you decided to drive, where would you park, especially assuming that lots of other people would try to do the same thing? Walking and cycling, without using public transport, would only be viable if you lived within close range of your place of work.

Equally Confusing

We have been told that the number of trains and buses will be increased but the principles of social distancing shall also be applied. As someone who often commutes by train, I am left wondering how I would get to work from my home in Essex. I normally travel from a station that is about mid-way along the line, so it is usually full when it pulls into my station in the morning. Does that then mean that I am never going to be able to get onto it because of the social distancing rules? And how therefore do I actually get to work? It seems that driving is not really going to be a viable option for me and the numerous other commuters who will be facing the same sort of problems…

Cab About Town

For those people that do manage somehow to get into Town, what does everybody do then? Once again, the Underground can’t be considered to be a safe option and the vast majority (who have spent the past weeks faithfully following the advice to stay at home) are not going to want to risk their health. Apart from walking or cycling the last mile or so, then no doubt many that can afford it will choose a Taxi to do so. But hang on - that’s assuming that the local authority or TfL hasn’t taken away the road space that taxis need to get around or that the same entries haven’t put in restrictions on vehicles stopping, preventing passengers being able to get to their destinations and being able to board or alight where they need to. It gets even more complicated for our many less abled passengers, including those that are confined to wheelchairs - how are these passengers going to be picked up or set down if the authorities have narrowed the carriageways to such an extent that they have also prohibited vehicles from stopping?

The Better Choice

The Government has rightly stated that its blueprint for getting us all back to work does absolutely depend on whether this coronavirus is kept at bay - then gradually, just a step at a time, there is the prospect of people coming back into central London. Taxis are clearly the better choice for moving people around, so there’s the prospect that the trade can start to rebuild itself again. The process will be arduous, and while daytime activities may slowly start to rebuild, the prospect for the night men is even more difficult as the hospitality industries still seem to be a very long way off from re-establishing themselves. Indeed, the Prime Minister said that allowing some of those activities to take place again will not even be contemplated until July at the absolute earliest.

City of London Emergency Measures Announced

I have now received (shortly before this editions print deadline), information from the City of London regarding transport measures that it intends to implement in relation to Covid-19, based on an increase in the numbers of people that are expected to return to work in the City. The key message is to continue to work at home but if you have to come into the City to please avoid using public transport and to walk or cycle instead. The measures will largely prohibit the use of private cars and other motorised transport. This makes it incredibly difficult for Taxis to operate in the City and in other parts of central London where The Mayor and TfL are implementing similar plans. The LTDA is in talks with both the City and TfL and will bring you further updates as and when available through all our media platforms. In the meantime, below are the details of phase 1 of the City’s plans that have now been passed by its Planning and Transportation Committee.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Proposed Changes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannon Street between Queen Victoria Street and Monument junction</td>
<td>Introduce one-way working eastbound (with contra-flow cycling). Reallocate remaining carriageway to space for walking. Review loading arrangements. Westbound buses diverted via King William Street and Queen Victoria Street.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheapside and Poultry</td>
<td>Closure of Cheapside to through traffic (except cycles), this effectively retains the closure already in place for the gas works. Retain existing bus diversion via New Change and Cannon Street. Reallocate carriageway to space for walking and identify opportunities for seating areas. Bank on Safety restrictions remain in place.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Old Jewry and Coleman Street</td>
<td>Old Jewry: Signed informal pedestrian priority. Review parking, waiting and loading and reallocate carriageway to space for walking as required. Retain and improve cycle contraflow. Coleman Street: Introduce 7am – 7pm no access except to off-street premises and for cycles. Retain and improve cycle contraflow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lombard Street</td>
<td>Introduce 7am – 7pm no access except to off-street premises and for cycles. Retain and improve cycle contraflow.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leadenhall Street and St Mary Axe</td>
<td>Leadenhall: 24/7 no through route except for buses and cycles only. Reallocate carriageway to space for walking. Review loading arrangements. St Mary Axe: 7am – 7pm closure except for access to off-street premises and for cycles. Signed informal pedestrian priority on St Mary Axe. Reallocation carriageway and motorcycle parking to space for walking as required. Retain and improve cycle contraflow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threadneedle Street and Old Broad Street</td>
<td>Threadneedle Street between Bank junction &amp; Bartholomew Lane: Introduce one way working (westbound) with cycle contraflow. Reallocate carriageway space to walking, Bank on Safety restrictions remain in place. Threadneedle Street between Bartholomew Lane and Old Broad Street: Retain two way working. Reallocate carriageway to space for walking. Threadneedle Street between Old Broad Street and Bishopsgate: Introduce one way working (westbound) with cycle contraflow. Reallocate carriageway to space to walking. Divert buses via Cornhill and Bishopsgate. Old Broad Street (north): Introduce a 7am – 7pm no access (except buses and cycles) loading. Reallocate carriageway space for walking as required. Old Broad Street (south): Introduce one way working (northbound) with contra flow cycling. Vehicular access will be available from Threadneedle Street east. Reallocate carriageway to space for walking as required. Review loading arrangements. Divert buses via Wormwood Street, Bishopsgate &amp; Cornhill.</td>
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April was a sad month for the cab trade as we learnt of the loss of one of our true characters and gentlemen, Clive Pamment. Clive had been a proud London Taxi driver since 1984 and could always be found in the old Royal Oak restaurant and, latterly, in the Great Suffolk St Taxi cafe, where Clive was a popular member of the community.

Clive was born in Hackney Hospital on 6th November 1934 and went on to have a rich and varied life. In 1954, Clive served his country as part of the Parachute Regiment in Egypt. On leaving the army, Clive had a variety of jobs, including being a traveling salesman, before joining the ranks of the finest cab drivers in the world in 1984. He was President of the London Curry Club in 1993. Clive was also a talented singer, who could often be found at the Palms in Bow on a Friday night and at their regular Monday Club. Christmas parties at the old Royal Oak wouldn’t have been the same without Clive giving us ‘some proper tunes’.

But Cabs, Curries or crooning were not Clive’s first love. That honour belonged to Arsenal Football Club. Clive was a season ticket holder at the old Highbury and new Emirates stadiums for over 40 years. Clive was a loyal fan and was never happier than when moaning about the Gunners - and that was when they won.

The final whistle blew for Clive on 14th April 2020. Clive Pamment died peacefully at home surrounded by his loving family. He leaves behind his daughters Kay, Kerry and Keely, as well as his friends at Great Suffolk Street who will miss him greatly.

Rest in Peace Clive.

Lillian was better known in the cab trade as Maureen or ‘Mo’ and spent a lifetime serving up fry-ups and hot drinks to cab drivers. She was greatly missed. Mo sadly passed away on the 11th April from Coronavirus at the care home in Ascham Street, having been discharged there following a seven month stay in hospital.

Mo’s career in our trade spanned over 40 years, serving the taxi drivers at licensed ranks, which included:

- Granby Grill Terrace
- King Cross - the old rank
- Royal Oak
- King Cross - Camley St
- Russell Square Green Shelter
- Charing Cross Green Shelter

Mo was renowned for her banter - she was able to ‘give as good as she got’ - a loveable rogue with a kind heart. Over the years she dedicated time to the taxi charity, supporting disadvantaged and vulnerable children and often went on the annual trips to Southend. Mo would always notice those that were less fortunate than her and always had time for the homeless, who she would provide with tea and an ear to lend.

Many will remember Mo working with her sister, June, who continues to work in our ‘Cabbie Café’. Mo made many good friends through her work; but sadly lost contact with some of the drivers following her illness. Mo was part of Camden’s fixtures and fittings. Mo leaves behind her sister June; three brothers, Derick, Jimmy and Charlie; sons Anthony and John; and four grandchildren.

In memory of Mo, her son Anthony is raising money for the homeless. If you’d like to donate, please go to justgiving.com and type into the search field ‘Anthony Butt’ which will bring up Mo’s page.

Clive Pamment 1934 - 2020

Lillian ‘Mo’ Butt 1952 - 2020
STREETS AHEAD

I hope you and your families are all safe & well. Here at the LTDA, we are still receiving calls from members who are experiencing a variety of issues when applying for their ‘ENHANCED DBS/CRB’ online. There are many reasons for this, so for this edition, I’ve put together this support article…

Enhanced DBS Support

One thing is for sure, TfL will not issue you with a temporary licence if you have failed to apply within the required time frame. This would bring a shudder to anyone, being told, “Sorry, you are not licenced and so you cannot work.” Obviously, this will result in financial hardship and stress for both you and your family at a time when you certainly don’t need it.

This however can be simply avoided by following TfL’s guidelines when your licence is due to be renewed. In order to receive a temporary licence, you must apply for your DBS/CRB, ninety days before your current licence expires. I know some drivers will say, “I didn’t receive my licence renewal pack from TfL to complete the DBS process within the required time”, but you don’t actually need to have received any correspondence from TfL. You can go online and complete the online application before the required ninety days - and by doing so, you will receive a temporary licence and can continue to work.

One of our members recently contacted the LTDA in a panic, as his licence was due to run out in just 4 weeks. He explained that TfL had rejected his DBS certificate which had been completed as he had not entered the correct information on his DBS application form.

A Simple but Surprisingly Common Mistake

He had submitted his first name as Terence on his DBS application form, his passport showed his first name was also spelt Terence but on his driving licence, his first name was spelt Terence.

He had been driving for the past 15 years with that name on his driving licence and had never realised the different spelling - his actual given birth name is Terence. We immediately asked him to attend Taxi House and helped him correctly fill in a new DBS application form, showing that his real name is Terence, but he is also known as Terance. He submitted the new DBS application which sailed through the police record checks (police searched both first names of Terence and Terance), and his new DBS certificate was accepted by TfL, with just two days to go before his licence expiry date.

LTDA Can Remove the Stress

We have an experienced team at the LTDA that have dealt with many complicated scenarios which drivers have faced when applying for a DBS/CRB - MHC203R application for licence renewal. Why should you have all the stress and worry, wondering ‘Have I done this, or that right?’ - just give us a call and we will be happy to advise or even complete the licensing process with you. We are here to help take all this unnecessary stress and worry away - so you can continue to work to provide for your family.

During these unusual times caused by the COVID-19 lockdown, there are many drivers that have received letters from the government advising them they are in that vulnerable category and should not leave the house. This group of drivers cannot get to the post office to verify the online DBS application. There is though, another way you can complete your DBS/CRB application.

An alternative would be for the driver to request and submit a postal DBS application. When applying for a DBS check by post, a driver should send their supporting ID documents to be verified, along with the DBS application, to our DBS Service Provider, GB Group.

GB Group then process the DBS application, verify the ID documents provided and then return the ID documentation back to the driver. It is recommended that any ID documentation sent to GB Group is sent by Royal Mail Special Delivery. I appreciate that this would mean someone still needing to go to the post office to post the forms, but it will be far quicker than taking the documents to be verified. It also means drivers do not have to attend the Post Office themselves to post the DBS application/ID documents to GB Group. Someone could do that for them, perhaps a family member or a neighbour.

To obtain a postal DBS application, the driver can contact GB Group directly to ask for one to be sent to them. Contact details for GB Group can be located on the insert that accompanies the driver renewal application pack that explains the DBS check process. Alternatively, if you can provide me your details, I can look to arrange for a postal DBS application to be sent to you by GB Group.

Step by Step Guide

We are still getting members completing their DBS/CRB application online and not completing the right application. Please see my step by step guide (left) on this page for you to follow in order to select the correct website to register and complete your ENHANCED DBS/CRB!

Private Hire Partitions

I’m simply unable to finish writing this article without mentioning the private hire trade scrambling to install partitions in their vehicles under the guise it’ll make their passengers safer! Surely, even if minibaws did install partitions using approved materials, doing so in a vehicle not built for that purpose might risk serious injury to a passenger in the event of an accident? Plus, have you ever sat as a passenger in a saloon car with a full partition? Not without cramping your knees up against it I’d bet!”

“Plus, have you ever sat as a passenger in a saloon car with a full partition? Not without cramping your knees up against it I’d bet!”

Anthony Street is an LTDA Executive Support Officer

LTDA Executive, Anthony Street offers members straightforward DBS guidance and personal support
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If You Build It - They Won’t Come.’ Local Authorities have been watching too many Kevin Costner movies…

THE DEPARTMENT OF IMAGINARY CYCLING

TOP RANK

Historically, when we have seen things like pandemics being reported on the news, it’s usually in a far-off part of the globe or has been extremely unlikely to actually touch our lives. This pandemic however has well & truly hit home for many of us within in the Taxi trade - with too many of our own losing their lives. I suppose we shouldn’t be too surprised when you consider that London has been the worst affected area in the UK and that men of a certain age are much more susceptible to the virus that we have lost some of our kin, but I have been both surprised and deeply saddened that I’m seeing message after message that we have lost another driver.

Sincere Condolences

We can’t be sure of the actual numbers and we might never know the true number as many in our family choose to work in solitude or have a more ‘ad hoc’ approach to pushing a cab around town. So, whilst we continue to hear sad news about cabbies that frequented certain watering holes or those who worked particular ranks (through the messages of sympathy which are being sent to their loved ones via our own social circles), I note that the losses of some – are unfortunately going unheard. Every loss our trade suffers is a blow and some – are unfortunately going unheard.

Imaginary Cyclists

It would seem my hopes of only a few weeks ago that the ‘vested interests’ would stop using our roads as a political football have already been dashed. The news is full of reports that the Mayor and local councils want to turn the arteries of London in to one large cycle path. What has to be one of the most disgraceful things that’s happening during this pandemic is that the vested interests are using it to push their own agendas - like the cycling lobby pushing for bigger, wider cycleways because they claim the pandemic has been worse in places where we find higher levels of pollution.

Whilst that isn’t strictly true it’s not really a surprise, as areas with a higher population level will also likely be an area that has a higher population density. So even if everyone in London started cycling, a new pandemic would still spread easier and with more damage because the denser the population the worse the infection rate - that after all, is why we have social distancing.

We only have to look at London compared to the rest of the UK to see that it’s population density and things like not shutting the Underground down (so allowing Londoners to continue to be packed like sardines into a confined metal tube) that saw infection rates soar - not because there were too many cars on the streets above. That said, the cowardly decision to not stop private hire vehicles that see driver & passenger sit well within the recommended 2 metre distance is the exception - and should be stopped immediately.

TfL tell us that their modelling shows it’s possible or that its highly likely there will be a tenfold increase in walking and cycling! Who are the people at TfL that came up with this ridiculous crap? Rumours are flying around that TfL’s modelling team is in fact just one person - Ms G Lee in a previous job was in fact fortune teller, Gypsy Lee and could be found on Clacton Pier sitting in a darkened room with a crystal ball hoodwinking the gullible (nothing new there). Rumour also has it that the crystal ball, despite being damaged and not once ever managing to correctly predict the future, is still her go to modelling method for TfL & other local authorities – I’m thinking this may be where TfL’s ‘Re-imagine Your Journey’ slogan came from?

Let’s not forget this is the same modelling team that produce the fantastic utopian pictures of the wonderful world we will see after their plans are carried out - you know the pictures, it’s the ones that look absolutely nothing like the reality of the ridiculous, ill thought out plans they actually implement. It’s not TfL, Mayor Khan or local borough modelling, it’s just cycling groups or those with vested interests using propaganda. It’s the cycling & green extremists using a very frightening situation to further their own selfish cause and to do so in my opinion the lowest of the low.

No one knows what will happen after lockdown, nobody has asked Londoners if they plan to cycle everywhere from now on and the public of London don’t know if they will have jobs to go to, let alone how they will get to work. As I write this it’s the day after the prime ministers’ big announcement where he told people that can’t work from home that they should look at going back to work. I’m now sat here watching the news of people doing just that - are they cycling? No, they are in their cars & getting on the tube. The absolute vast majority of the hundreds of thousands of commuters in London will NOT be cycling, I doubt we will see a twofold increase let alone tenfold. Undoubtedly mistakes were made delaying lockdown and during lockdown, I can forgive most of them, this is after all an unprecedented situation - what I can’t & won’t forgive is needless selfish mistakes to appease the few as we come out of the lockdown.

Did You Know?

Milton Keynes & Stevenage both invested highly on segregated cycleways in the belief, ‘if you build it - they will come.’ But they didn’t. Both towns have seen below UK average cycle usage. Also, did you know the above is a common mis-quote? It was actually, ‘If you build it - he will come.’
Stories about CO’s outside your house in the middle of the night, inspecting your cab, are not fiction.

SOME THINGS ARE BETTER. SOME WORSE.

ON POINT

I had a call last week from a member who had received his relicensing pack and had called to ask if he could come into Taxi House for me to do his relicensing application.

After giving him a list of documents which we needed to complete the forms, he commented on how it was a lot easier when all we had to do was to go up the yard (Penton Street). He described how it was just a case of going up to the second floor, waiting in line and then handing in your expired bill - and there and then you were given a temporary licence and within a couple of weeks your new licence was delivered. I of course agreed with this, it was without doubt easier. There were no DBS checks, as the Police had all our records in a filing cabinet somewhere within Penton Street. There were very rarely any problems if you hadn’t been in trouble.

The New Versus the Old

This led to a discussion about whether we were better off generally under the Carriage Office or Transport for London. We agreed on the fact that although relicensing every 3 years was a lot easier, getting a new plate on your cab every year was most certainly not. Today, we have TfL Compliance Officers, but back then we had Carriage Officers and they were not to be messed. If they approached you on a rank and requested, you produce your Bill and Badge, there was no questioning, “Why?” or “Who are you?”, it was a case of, “Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir.” If you were the slightest bit off with them, it could cost you a few hundred quid, within the blink of an eye. Nearly always after the checks on your licence had been made, they would then check your cab. I personally remember one morning, sitting on the Radio Rack at Paddington in my 8-month Old Fairway 95 waiting for a radio job, and whilst I had my head buried in the newspaper, I heard a rather loud knock on my passenger window. I looked up to see a very angry looking man telling me to get out of the cab. I had a name board in the window, so I pointed to it and asked is that you? I had only been out 9 months, and this was my first experience of being pulled by a CO. He again told me to get out and flashed a little blue warrant card at me. After getting out the cab and realising who he was, I was of course very polite and gave him what he wanted. It was obvious from his general grumpiness that I had somehow insulted him by not knowing who he was straight away. His check led to me being off the road for 2 days whilst my 8-month-old cab had to have a list of supposed defects fixed. Luckily for me, the cab was under warranty. It then had to be taken back to Penton Street to be checked again. Stories about CO’s coming around your house in the middle of the night and getting under your cab with a torch are not fiction. I spoke with a mate, who was awoken by his wife to be told, “Someone is breaking into your cab” – he jumped out of bed and looked out of the bedroom window and after grabbing a ‘five iron’, ran out the front door in his pants to find it was a CO! He told me that the CO made no apology for waking him up in the middle of the night. You always had to make sure to keep your cab clean inside and out and you certainly didn’t let your tyres get to within anywhere near being low on tread. If you were found with what the particular CO viewed as having ‘low tread’ on your tyres, it would most certainly not just cost you the price of a new replacement tyre. Overhauls were very expensive back then and a £1500 plus bill from your garage was the norm for any cab that was over three years old. It seemed that every year we all needed rear springs, new front discs and pads, rear drums and shoes along with numerous ball joints… I was always advised to let the garage present the cab as the CO’s didn’t like the driver taking it and that cost as well. Accusations in later years were that the garages put new parts on cabs that were not needed because they knew they could get away with it. In truth, who knows - but what I do know is since we went to two MOT’s a year, my overhauls have cost a lot less. This has led to suggestions of a general drop in standards with our cabs and although I disagree with this as I see lots and lots of clean, well maintained cabs, though I do smile to myself when sitting on a rank or in traffic and see a cab in a poor state and wonder what a CO back then would have done if he’d came across it. Does anyone remember the £2000 exhaust system we were made to have by the Carriage Office? It was rubbish and made hardly any difference to the emissions and although the trade organisations raised concerns, the Carriage Office response was that it was not open to discussion! The truth is that we had respect through fear, for the Carriage Office.

So maybe some things are better, and some things are worse!

On Yer Bike!

I really thought my head was going to blow up last week when I saw a disgraceful report that mini cab drivers want to fit protective screens in their cheap skate cars in a desperate attempt look more like REAL Taxis. The bare faced cheek of it. How dare they? I have a very simple message for them. If you want to be a proper cabbie and not some cheap imitation, go and get on a moped, and do four years on the Knowledge, like we did.

Lloyd Baldwin is an LTDA Executive Support Officer
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“As a nurse who has just worked 65 hours this week a ride home in a black cab with a fantastic driver has been such a wonderful treat. Thank you to all the cabbies doing this for NHS workers. I actually don’t have words enough to thank you all. You are amazing!”

Clara, London
W hile on the Knowledge, I became fascinated by the hidden stories associated with London's countless streets and points. I've been passionate about the city's history ever since- and have discovered that sharing these tales with the public often results in a nice tip!

Despite its dark nature, true crime is a subject which many people find fascinating. London has a wealth of such tales. Here are some runs based upon a select few which, when things return to normal, you may wish to regale passengers with...

Let's start outside the Central Criminal Court- aka the Old Bailey- where many of Britain's most notorious criminals have stood trial. Until 1902, the Old Bailey was the site of the dreaded Newgate prison.

One of the last felons to be publicly executed outside Newgate was Franz Muller, who in 1864, had murdered businessman Thomas Briggs on a train near Hackney Wick - the first recorded 'railway murder'.

Thousands of Londoners came to witness Muller's dance with the noose, many of who travelled via the newly opened Underground railway. There's a train theme going on here, so go from the Old Bailey to Belgravia's Star Tavern where, in 1963, much of the Great Train Robbery was planned.

One figure associated with the Great Train Robbery was Buster Edwards who, as many older cabbies will recall, ended up working as a florist outside Waterloo Station. Buster took his own life in 1994 by hanging himself inside a Leake Street garage. Run it from Waterloo station to Dalyell Road, Stockwell where Buster's fellow train robber, Ronnie Biggs was born in 1929.

In 1965, Biggs famously broke out of Wandsworth prison using a ladder which had been hurled into the exercise yard. How would you get from Wandsworth prison to Wormwood Scrubs where, the following year, notorious spy George Blake also bust out - in this case with a ladder cobbled together from knitting needles? Blake, who betrayed many British agents to the Soviets, escaped to Russia where he remains to this day, now aged 97.

Another daring breakout took place at Brixton prison in 1980. The fugitive this time was Jimmy Moody- a hitman who, in his day, was widely considered to be one of the toughest men in London. Moody's escape was made possible by tunnelling through a wall and he took his cellmate - IRA member, Gerrard Tuite along for the ride.

Moody remained on the run for 13 years, living for much of that time at a flat in Hackney without raising any suspicion. Let's take the run from Brixton prison to Moody's favourite boozer- the Royal Inn on the Park- where, on the evening of 1st June 1993, he met a violent end - gunned down at the bar by a mysterious long-haired assailant who has been never been identified.

Although rare, London has unfortunately had its fair share of serial killers over the years. Jack the Ripper aside, perhaps the most notorious of these monstrous figures is John Christie who, in the 1940's and 50's killed at least 8 women - including his wife, Ethel. The address at which Christie carried out his crimes, 10 Rillington Place - became a household name.

Due to its notoriety, the street was swept away in the 1970’s and has since been replaced with Bartle Road and St. Andrews Square. How would you get from Bartle Road to Putney Embankment, where on 10th March 1953, Christie was finally apprehended after being recognised by a patrolling Bobby?

Another serial killer active in the 1940's was John Haigh, who came to be nicknamed the 'Acid Bath Murderer' thanks to the gruesome way he disposed of bodies. Haigh is believed to have killed up to 9 people - all for greed. He met his first victim, William McSwan at The Goat pub, Kensington. Run it from The Goat to the former Chelsea police station on Petyward where, after being caught, Haigh admitted to the killings - but claimed he couldn't be tried as the bodies had all been dissolved. He was wrong.

A more recent famous crime was the Hatton Garden heist, in which a gang of old-school crooks, tunneled their way into the Hatton Garden Safe Deposit Company, netting an estimated £200 million. Take it from there to the northern end of Baker Street where, in September 1971, a similar caper took place. In this case, the criminals rented a bag shop called Le Sac and tunneled beneath the neighbouring building (a chicken restaurant which is now a branch of Pizza Hut) into the vault of Lloyds bank on the corner of Marylebone Road.

Curiously, reporting on this incident was quickly silenced at the time with a government 'D' notice, leading to rumours that the gang had discovered compromising material - possibly including photographs of Princess Margaret cavorting with gangster turned actor, John Bindon...◆
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picture the scene… you’re in your taxi, it’s an unseasonably warm November evening, the warmth of the air prompts you to open both of your front windows. Led Zeppelin is blaring out of deafening 40-watt speakers, whilst you imagine that you are in the front row at Hammersmith Odeon, listening to John Bonham clobber the life out of his drumkit as though he was demolishing a tower block with his bare hands.

The temperate air flows through your bald patch like a hair dryer as you hurtle along at a breakneck 34mph - and then it hits you. Like a dual lighting bolt from Satan’s instamatic camera, the Gatso gets you.

For the next fortnight you then suffer with cold sweats, worrying if the speed camera of doom has been parity to the issuing of a hefty fine and more importantly 3 precious points on your license. You know the sweat are irrational (as, just like Norway in the Eurovision Song Contest, you have “nil point” on your driving license), but yet you panic.

Then the fateful day arrives, “Dear Sir/ Madam, congratulations, we are delighted to inform you that we will be relieving you of some of your hard-earned wonga. We hope that you will also feel suitably chuffed that we will also be issuing points on your license due to you committing the heinous crime of travelling 4mph over the legal speed limit. However, it’s your lucky day. As a gesture of good will we will be delighted to send you on a speed awareness course.” The first thing that enters your head is, “YESSSSSS, no points” then you think back to when and where you committed the offence and start wracking your brains, “I’m sure that was a 40mph road”, but the overwhelming euphoria quells your uncertainty and you accept the speed awareness course like a child accepting a ‘hand me down’ knitted jumper as a Christmas gift.

And as you’ve by now guessed, the offender in the scenario was of course, me. Guilty as charged m’lad.

**Drat & Double Drat**

Now the first thing to bear in mind is that my speed awareness course was due to take place on 25 March, I was in Spain until 20 March so I would have been back to face the music in plenty of time. Like everything which I seem to undertake, matters are swiftly removed from my grubby palms and Spain goes into lockdown on Sunday 15 March. The first thing that enters my head is to call the speed awareness organisations and inform them of my plight. After explaining the situation I was informed that because my booking is so close to the end of the latest period where I can actually do the course they can only grant me a 2 week extension, I doffed my cap and was grateful for the grace which they had bestowed upon me.

My initial intent was to ride out the Spanish lock-down by staying put on the Costa Del Sol, piling on the weight via the previously mentioned (in the last 2 issues of Taxi) Doritos and beer - alas I had to return to blighty.

Here comes the bit that made me spit my Ryanair baguette back up all over the aircraft floor. Upon landing, I received a text from the speed awareness organisers saying: “Your driver training course is postponed due to Covid-19. Next steps will be communicated with you asap, please do not call.” DRAT and DOUBLE DRAT - to quote the words of Dick Dastardy. I cannot repeat what I said after that as it is a fact that taxi drivers are gentle, delicate creatures who would never endorse foul language.

**Facing the Music**

Ok, we’ve moved forward in Marty McFly's DeLorean to 14 April, due to Covid-19 (I keep wanting to say Harlequins 24) the speed awareness course was to be taken online. With a glass of Rioja in one hand and ‘iPads’ on my desk, I joined 7 other miscreants who had committed unspeakable offenses against the Highways Act. I was immediately perturbed by the sight of one of these hardened criminals sporting the fluffiest “mutton chops” I had ever seen (think Amos Brearly from Emmerdale Farm for reference).

The tutor presiding over the course asked me why I had put my toe down. Quick as a flash I responded, “Well sometimes I feel the need, the need for speed!” He laughed, but did not appear impressed (note to self, must try harder). Monsieur Mutton Chops retorted, “Speed limits are just a man-made folly, and this is nothing more than a revenue raising exercise…” Yup, we were going to be a tight pair - I liked him.

Now, people scoff at these courses BUT they are genuinely highly educational. During the Q and A session regarding speed limits and dual carriageways, even me, with my genius IQ (and devilish good looks) got a question wrong.

We went through various aspects regarding speeding, observation and general driving habits and the first thing that you start to realise is that despite being a professional driver, you aren’t as good as you think you are and that you routinely foul-up every single day that you work.

Don’t get me wrong myself and others challenged our host – especially on the issue of 20mph speed limits. His response was fairly straightforward: “If you hit a pedestrian, they have a much greater chance of surviving if your speed is lower.

**If you Hit a Pedestrian:**

◆ at 40 mph there is a 90 percent chance they will be killed.
◆ at 55 mph there is a 90 percent chance they will be killed.
◆ at 30 mph there is a 20 percent chance they will be killed.
◆ at 20 mph there is a 2.5 percent chance they will be killed.

He wasn’t really going to budge on the above - which is fair enough, though I felt he had a pang of sympathy with the notion that 20mph limits should really be able to be activated when required rather than be operational all day and all night.

**Persistent Offender**

This wasn’t the first speed awareness course that I have been on, I am in fact a recidivist and have appeared before the tutor on 2 other occasions in 34 years of driving a vehicle. What was startlingly apparent to me was how different the 3 courses were. The first course which I attended was really focused on how you drive and how inappropriate speed occurs, this was in the early 2000’s and was by far the most informative of the three as it concentrated on the technical side of driving. The second course was much more pedestrian focused and a little repetitive. This one seemed to be solely focused on getting from the start of the course to the finish, I felt that it lacked detail. This is not a criticism of the tutor, I felt that because the course time was reduced and it was done in a “virtual” classroom, it was a little experimental.

What must be remembered when doing these courses is that we are offenders. Whilst we don’t exactly fall into the category of John McVicar or Dennis Nilson, we have still technically committed a crime. As such we would have been foolish not to take heed of the tutor, invigilator, instructor or whatever it is he should be known as.

To be honest, what we were taught really wasn’t anything that we didn’t already know, but the reality is that speeding isn’t about lack of education or roadcraft, it’s about the tiresome act of having to trundle along a clear road at 3am at a paltry 20mph, it’s about taking a chance and wanting to get from A to B ASAP, it’s about sticking two fingers up to authority (not in my case because I’m a good boy) and it’s about a misguided belief that you are free to do whatever you please behind the wheel.

Anyway, I’ve got to go, I’m about to interview a chap. His role will be to walk in front of my taxi waving a flag to warn passers-by that I may be travelling almost as fast as a shopping trolley with square wheels. ■

Steve Kenton is a Licensed Taxi driver of 30 years
It was the two highlights of the week. I was looking forward to my bi-weekly visit to Morrison’s. I’d make endless mugs of coffee and look out of the window, I often found myself staring into space and doing nothing. It gave me time to think about what to do next, I often found myself staring into space and doing nothing. I decided to try drawing up a timetable of activities I wanted to accomplish, and a long list of things I wanted to do with my time. I was studying for a diploma in health and safety and writing newspaper articles. I wanted to use my time at my disposal and a long list of things I wanted to do with my time. I was studying for a diploma in health and safety and writing newspaper articles. I had applied for off and I’m taking a sabbatical. I’m having some ‘Me’ time.”
Who’s got your back?

3pts £175 fine
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NOT GUILTY
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Charged with jumping a red light
Charged with careless driving
Acquitted on all charges
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Charged with road rage assault

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Will car manufacturers mounting losses mean the end of their apps?

UBER BITES DUST IN GERMAN COURT - AGAIN

INTERNATIONAL

In the last of a string of convictions (at the federal level for UberBlack in Berlin, and at the regional level in Munich, Frankfurt and Cologne), the Düsseldorf Regional Court recently ordered Uber to stop using ‘Mietwagen’ (private hire) as ‘taxis’ in their UberX app. At the same time, German taxi operators notice how their erstwhile ‘friend’ McTaxi (in July 2019 renamed FreeNow; recently merged with French app Kapten) is behaving more and more like Uber, now preferring private hire to taxis. Some German taxi operators have even started to form private hire companies to profit from FreeNow’s expansion drive. MORE WORK FOR PRIVATE HIRE, BUT A PRIVATE HIRE COMPANIES TO PROFIT FROM FREENOW’S EXPANSION DRIVE.

Many taxi operators have cancelled their FreeNow-accounts, saying FreeNow is an Uber clone and no longer a friend of the taxi trade. Uber and FreeNow and their influential political supporters are expecting a deregulated passenger transport market in Germany. They already started operating as if this new market already exists. That perhaps explains why no politician dares to uphold the existing laws. Did Uber and FreeNow quietly get the nod?

Furious Taxi Trade Urges Politicians to Act

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Are Car Manufacturers Giving up Apps?

For the German trade Daimler (Mercedes-Benz), which finances quite a few of the ‘taxi’-apps from its Moovel stable, has turned from a staunch supporter of the taxi trade into a fierce competitor. The same goes for Volkswagen, which also runs mobility apps. The question now is, whether the car producers, with mounting ‘corona debts’, can just make fun of the authorities, must come to an end! said Taxi Düsseldorf CEO Dennis Klusmeier.

Sick and Tired of Being Played

How does that system work? I’m sure it sounds familiar: FreeNow needs coverage and starts offering trips well below cost. If there are not enough PHV’s, taxis carry their soon-to-be -previous customers (now FreeNow-clients) for a fraction of the normal fare. The customer is happy with the quality of the (taxi) service and the taxi driver receives the correct fare for the trip, but never sees his customer – now used to rock-bottom fares again. And FreeNow reinforces this customer loyalty by providing very attractive FreeNow-fares and often (very) inflated taxi fares in its app. FreeNow also has a variant of Uber’s unpleasant surge-pricing.

Meanwhile the German taxi trade is sick and tired of being played by Uber and politicians alike. Michael Oppermann, the managing director of the Federal Association of Taxis and Private Hire (BTM) said after the verdict: ‘All the German courts up to the Federal Court have confirmed that the Uber services are illegal. We now expect regulators and legislators to finally act in the face of this renewed judgment. It cannot be that courts order their cab through FreeNow get the friendly advice to use FreeNow’s ‘Ride’-service next time. Still, many cabs advertise FreeNow, like ‘Cattle advertising the services of a butcher,’ and taxi representatives into standing shoulder to shoulder with their competitors - to show a supposedly united front.

“Still, many cabs advertise FreeNow, like cattle advertising the services of a butcher”

The Bavarian Transport Ministry tricked taxi representatives into standing shoulder to shoulder with their competitors - to show a supposedly united front.

A German taxi still displaying FreeNow logo

The Düsseldorf court ordered Uber to stop using the UberX app to book PHV’s whilst they were still booked. German private hire can only be booked via the company seat and only when the vehicle is not occupied and has returned from an earlier trip. The verdict carries a fine up to 250.000 (£ 219.000) or imprisonment for up to six months for each (new) offence. After every court case in which Uber loses, Uber tweaks the system slightly and claims it is different, whereupon the whole legal procedure starts again, keeping the taxi trade – which has to prove Uber’s wrongdoing time and time again – busy. Taxi Düsseldorf, the radio-circuit which brought the last case, is demanding effective steps from the authorities. ‘The time when Uber can just make fun of the authorities, must come to an end!’ said Taxi Düsseldorf CEO Dennis Klusmeier.

Shoulder to Shoulder or Sold Out?

A recent meeting at the Bavarian transport ministry, to promote the ‘corona-readiness’ of the taxi trade, was the ultimate slap in the face. Invited to promote the (free) services for health workers (which Munich taxi drivers, have provided for free from the start of the corona crisis), representatives of the Bavarian taxi association and both Munich radio circuits found themselves next to representatives of Uber and FreeNow. Their logos were also all over the press release. The taxi representatives felt sold out by the ministry.

Taxi colleagues immediately accused them of working with Uber & Co. Social media – probably inspired by the Bavarian authorities - quickly stated: ‘The taxi and private hire trade is standing shoulder to shoulder.’ Taxi people were not amused and demanded an explanation from the Bavarian authorities. They were told – shamelessly - that the ministry “wanted to promote the unity in the transportation industry in the face of the corona crisis.”

The German taxi trade is very tightly regulated. Taxis have to adhere to strict (minimum) operating times, have a set (local or regional) fare structure, every punter must be picked up (no refusals) and in most areas, taxis must have a prescribed colour: ivory. For the German trade Daimler (Mercedes-Benz), which finances quite a few of the ‘taxi’-apps from its Moovel stable, has turned from a staunch supporter of the taxi trade into a fierce competitor.
Q. How long have you been a London Taxi driver, and did you enjoy doing the Knowledge?
A. I got my (green) badge in September 1989. The Knowledge was, of course, a huge undertaking, but having lived and worked in London for most of my life, it wasn’t quite as daunting as it was for some. What helped tremendously was going to Knowledge school early on. I spent about eighteen months of my life calling runs and running points inside a small room at Stewarts Garage, Farm Lane. Alan Chapel, who ran the school was a Knowledge genius, and a fantastic help. So yes, I did enjoy the challenge – and apart from a couple of hiccups, I got a buzz out of the appearances too.

Q. When did you first get involved with Taxi related charities?
A. In 1992. A group of cabbies at the Ealing Broadway rank needed volunteer drivers for a children’s day trip to Chessington World of Adventures. It went well, so we did it again the following year. Then in 1994, I heard that an organisation had organised a trip to the Netherlands for World War Two and other veterans to attend Dutch Liberation celebrations which are held every year in the town of Wageningen.

Q. How did the early Disney trips go?
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Q. How did you end up joining the committee?
A. I vividly recall the heated debate as everyone tried coming up with suggestions for a new name to replace the long-winded London Taxi Benevolent Association for War Disabled. Imagine extreme cab drivers round a table trying to agree on something! The following month we did – the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans.

Q. What are the funny stories associated with doing this role which never get told or printed?
A. It’s a great honour to work with some of the veterans that are supported by the charity. We have had many funny moments, but I won’t go into details here.

Q. Tell us more?
A. Well oddly, I hadn’t been allocated a particular veteran. I was just told to go to the Royal Hospital. About ten cabs turned up, and Chelsea Pensioners started getting in – Bert and Trevor in my case. Talk about chalk and cheese. Trevor was quiet and introspective and Bert... wasn’t. A lady from the Hospital was helping him with his final check. “Passport, suitcase, overnight bag, medication. All there. Have a great trip.” As she walked away, 88-year old Bert opened the door and shouted, “Hold on, you’ve forgotten to pack my Viagra! Where’s my Viagra?” Bert was what you normally expect the Dutch people to have for the veterans is unmatched. They lined the streets to wave and cheer as our convoy passed by. They brought their children to meet the veterans. Often there were three generations from the same family wanting to meet and thank them. Amazing experience. A revelation, and very moving.

Q. Did you enjoy doing the Knowledge?
A. It wasn’t quite as daunting as it was for some. What helped tremendously was going to Knowledge school early on. I spent about eighteen months of my life calling runs and running points inside a small room at Stewarts Garage, Farm Lane. Alan Chapel, who ran the school was a Knowledge genius, and a fantastic help. So yes, I did enjoy the challenge – and apart from a couple of hiccups, I got a buzz out of the appearances too.

Q. How did you end up joining the committee?
A. I vividly recall the heated debate as everyone tried coming up with suggestions for a new name to replace the long-winded London Taxi Benevolent Association for War Disabled. Imagine extreme cab drivers round a table trying to agree on something! The following month we did – the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans.

Q. What are the funny stories associated with doing this role which never get told or printed?
A. It’s a great honour to work with some of the veterans that are supported by the charity. We have had many funny moments, but I won’t go into details here.

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Q. How did the early Disney trips go?
A. I got my (green) badge in September 1989. The Knowledge was, of course, a huge undertaking, but having lived and worked in London for most of my life, it wasn’t quite as daunting as it was for some. What helped tremendously was going to Knowledge school early on. I spent about eighteen months of my life calling runs and running points inside a small room at Stewarts Garage, Farm Lane. Alan Chapel, who ran the school was a Knowledge genius, and a fantastic help. So yes, I did enjoy the challenge – and apart from a couple of hiccups, I got a buzz out of the appearances too.

Q. When did you first get involved with Taxi related charities?
A. In 1992. A group of cabbies at the Ealing Broadway rank needed volunteer drivers for a children’s day trip to Chessington World of Adventures. It went well, so we did it again the following year. Then in 1994, I heard that an organisation had organised a trip to the Netherlands for World War Two and other veterans to attend Dutch Liberation celebrations which are held every year in the town of Wageningen.

Q. How did you end up joining the committee?
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drink had been laid on, as had passport control to help speed up embarkation on to the ferry. One veteran had forgotten his passport; so they requested a copy of something with his photo ID – in this case his bus pass. The manager had a photocopier in his office, but as he led the way I could see there was a problem. He was walking with difficulty and incoherent. He pointed to the copier then slumped into his chair behind his desk and began crying. It’s not unusual for people to become emotional when they meet these great men. It was their actions and bravery that helped liberate Europe from Nazi tyranny. But the manager wasn’t overcome by the presence of the veterans. Two hours earlier his favourite football team had won promotion, and he was completely drunk. With bus pass copy in hand, I left him in his chair to reflect on his team’s big day. A few minutes later, I was told another two veterans had also left their passports at home.

With many veterans in the nineties, it’s always a worry something serious could happen. So, we were very concerned when one Royal Navy veteran collapsed in the hotel lobby near the bar area. An ambulance rushed him to the local hospital where he spent the night. The following morning, we received the prognosis. Too many rains.

Q. When did you become chairman? A. On 14th May last year, just under three weeks before we travelled to Normandy to commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-Day. That was a huge responsibility for me. As chairman, I was required to make several speeches in front of local politicians and other dignitaries and, of course, our veterans. So, I absolutely had to find the right words. I re-wrote each speech several times before I was happy. Anne proof-reads everything I write and gave my words her usual polish. I was pleased, and very relieved the speeches went well. I must say, I couldn’t have done what I have without the amazing support I’ve received from Anne. She does an incredible amount of work behind the scenes for the Taxi Charity. She’s even done a fundraising tandem parachute jump with the Red Devils. From a height of 13,000 feet, freefalling for 7,000 feet at 120mph – now that’s what I call commitment!?
Being in lockdown with Mr Meg here at Meg Towers has highlighted how different our personalities are. He’s an introverted introvert, and I am an extroverted extrovert. Plus plus. In other words, I talk a lot (a lot) and he doesn’t.

Mr Meg is a big devotee of the saying “Talking is over-rated” and I like to explain to him, at length, why he is wrong in his thinking. This, he tells me, proves his point.

Mr Meg is especially brief on chat when he responds to my many and varied suggestions and ideas. His word of choice when I suggest extending the house or building a walk-in closet just for my clothes or landscaping the front garden (to include some mood lighting) is…. “No”. But that’s fine because I hear ‘No’ as “Sounds wonderful, my darling girl. Let’s do it and hang the expense!”

Mr Meg is a man of few words - but always the same words when I ask his opinion on a new outfit. One for going ‘out’ (remember that?) say for a wedding or a party. I model it for him using the front hall as my fashion runway. There is always a long silence before he speaks. What my husband is thinking, of course, is that I look sensational and who needs Jennifer Lopez. The words he chooses to convey this thought to me are, “How much?”

I give him my best Mona Lisa smile and head back to the bedroom to change in the certain knowledge that he likes my new outfit. It’s our lingo and we both speak it fluently.

Now, there is a whole new language in town that we must understand. It’s called Coronachat and, because I am caring and sharing, I am going to teach you some essential vocabulary.

Tandemic – that’s the golden glow I’m getting sat out in my garden whilst wishing I was back behind the wheel and earning a living again.

Goutbreak – that’s the pain in my big toe that I am worried is from gout because I am eating too much cheese and drinking too much wine instead of being out in my cab. Add to that Covid-10, the 10lbs in weight I have currently gained from said cheese and wine. Recognised by statisticians as ‘fattening the curve’.

Cabernet-Tedium – that’s the wine headache I get after one glass too many. It’s the price I pay for that one more for the ‘no road’ tipple. Can also be caused by Quarantinis.

Doughverkill – it’s like I am living in a never-ending episode of MasterChef. Bog off with your bakes, would you? That’s what I am too polite to say to my friends and family who want to bore me senseless with their photos of bread and cakes. NOBODY CARES – although I did get a laugh yesterday when one of my cousins sent me a pic of his sourdough loaf that was all crust and no dough. No dough -there’s a sign of the times.

Claphazard – I am a bonafide sufferer of this. Sore wrists and palms from clapping enthusiastically for all healthcare and other essential workers in these dangerous times. I have a high-fiving injury from last Thursday at 8pm when Mr Meg and I got too vigorous in our appreciation.

I hope you will now be more confident to parlez-vous pandemic, and that we can get back to talking Cabology very soon.

In the meantime, while life is still a Coronacoaster, take care and be well.

Meg and Mr. Meg have their own language which at least one of them speaks fluently...
PUZZLER

CROSSWORD

ACROSS:
1  Perform with metal toe and heel pieces (3-5)
5  Incursion (4)
9  Geological or historical age (5)
10 Diamond shape in geometry (7)
11 Middlesbrough’s river (4)
12 Wide straw hat (8)
14 Minister of religion (6)
15 Put money into shares etc (6)
18 Computer’s data storage device (4,4)
20 Old Russian emperor (4)
23 Immature (7)
24 Small bottle (5)
25 Minister (to) (4)
26 Far from dangerous (8)

DOWN:
1  Larceny (5)
2  Ward, charge (7)
3  Pain (in the head) (4)
4  Computer screen marker (6)
6  Gentle walk (5)
7  Bend, buckle (7)
8  Young male vocal group (3,4)
9  Geologic or historical age (5)
10 Diamond shape in geometry (7)
11 Middlesbrough’s river (4)
12 Wide straw hat (8)
13 Superficialness (7)
14 Dwell together (7)
16 With a bathroom attached (2,5)
17 Respiratory complaint (6)
19 Batman’s sidekick (5)
21 Moves like a ball (5)
22 Junk electronic mail (4)

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.

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.

PREDICTIVE TEXT

Starting in 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 P30

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Ever since I first started writing this column - God knows how many years ago, I had always intended it to be a light-hearted, cab-related and humorous ‘Gossip Column’. I’ve always had a reputation for writing what I think, but with this column over the years, I’ve had to bite my tongue after receiving solicitor’s letters like confetti - plus threats of violence from ‘The Heavy Mob’!

Many moons ago, I was waiting my turn on a Kings Cross cab-wash and recognised the guy washing the cab in front. I couldn’t believe it because he had been my hero, a local lad who had started for Arsenal many times. So, I wrote a piece about him sympathising his plight. A few days after the piece was published, I received a letter from his solicitor saying that their client actually owned the cab-wash and was just helping out because it was so busy. I think it was a ‘porkie’ because I knew the guy’nor quite well, but I apologised! I had learned the hard way - never mention names and if someone is accused of a crime, always say ‘allegedly’ to be safe.

I nearly got into big trouble some years later. ‘The Heavy Mob’ had opened an all-night gambling club for cabbies just a stone’s throw from the West End. But a few weeks later I started getting complaints from cabbies saying that the gambling club was getting full every night with mini-cabs drivers. They said they were nice enough guys, but they were taking away their living after having worked hard on the KOL. So, I wrote that the cabbies should stop using the club until they introduced a rule that you needed to show your badge to gain entry! Apparently, it worked, and many cabbies refused to use the club. Not long afterwards I got a phone call from my late brother-in-law who was a member of the notorious Italian mafia family in Clerkenwell, who basically controlled all the gambling at racetracks during the decade after the war. He told me that he’d been speaking to one of ‘The Heavy Mob’ who ran the cabbie’s gambling club and that they were going to ‘break the legs of the guy who had been writing the stuff in TAXI!’ My brother-in-law said, ‘He’s family, I’ll have a word.’

Now-a-days I always double-check my Taxi-Talk copy ‘cos my old legs break easily!

‘British Stubbornness & Generosity!’

Self-isolating during this Virus Pandemic can be a bit of a pain - especially when you live alone. But I’ve noticed a stubbornness starting to show on both the local and national population. It’s not unlike the wartime stubbornness of the Brits. I remember when they simply refused to believe that they were beaten, even after being battered with bombs and ‘doddlebugs’ and having no food!

My son Nick and my neighbours are a prime example. Nick, like many others, is dying a death on the cab, but still manages to cook me two delicious meals of chicken drumsticks and salad at his home, then does my shopping once a week! My neighbours in our big house, one Italian, one French and two English, supply me with five dinners every week from spaghetti Bolognese, assorted curry dishes and delicious deburgers!

Then I had another problem occur to aggravate my self-isolation - the cold water tap in the kitchen clapped out. This unit is known by the pros as a ‘mono-block kitchen mixer’. So straight on to the phone to a contact I know who supplies all different trade pro’s and he gave me the number of a plumber who had been recommended to him. His name was Dustin - apparently his Mum was a fan of the film ‘The Graduate’. Dustin sounded very friendly on the phone and kept calling me ‘mate’. He quoted the price of a ‘mono-block’, then quoted some silly money – plus VAT for a call out. I interrupted him by saying ‘You’re talking to the wrong person matey, I might have a posh address, but I’m an 85 year-old pensioner and widower living on his own with no dough!’ His reply really amazed me because he said, ‘Sorry mate, I didn’t know. Maybe I’ll come over and just charge you £20 for fitting it and maybe I might do it for nothing!’

Dustin duly turned up, he was friendly and cheerful and said he was forty years old this month so, ‘Happy Birthday Dustin!’ He turned the water off and after opening the cupboard door under the sink, he half disappeared with a torch and started unscrewing things. Then suddenly my ancient, plastic mono-block popped up and he removed it. Dustin quickly installed my posh new stainless-steel mono-block and the job was done. I asked him how much he required, and he amazed me by saying, ‘I don’t want anything because I enjoy helping people who have got problems - and I’ve got plenty of money!’ I was absolutely gob-smacked at his generosity because the mono-block must have cost about £40, but he wouldn’t even take a ‘drink’. He was interested in my published books, so I was able to give him two signed copies of two different titles!

I’ve been around the block a few times during my 85 years, but I’ve never ever met a person who was so genuinely kind and generous. Thank you, Dustin.

‘Fond Memories of The London Marathon’

My long-term mate, Terry Austin (we’ve been friends for over fifty years), phoned me on April 21st and asked if I realised that it was 35 years since we did The London Marathon? I remember it well because I was 50 years and ten days old!

It all began when the popular TV boxing commentator, the late Harry Carpenter, who was organising a London Marathon Team for The Muscular Dystrophy Group, sponsored by The Daily Mirror, turned up at our jogger’s dressing room. Terry and I immediately put our names down and duly signed on at County Hall the following day. We planned our training schedule and were jogging about 60 miles every week over Hampstead Heath. We even ran the Reading Half Marathon a month before the big one!

Come the big day and we turned up at Blackheath Park. I was very impressed with the organising; the front section was for the famous and top club runners. A sign on the next section said, ‘UP TO THREE HOURS’, so we went for the next section that said, ‘UP TO FOUR HOURS’. The final section was for the disabled and walkers.

The starting pistol finally went off and it must have been around 20 minutes before we started jogging out of the park. The first few miles down to Tower Bridge were quite easy because there was a downward gradient. But after crossing Tower Bridge and turning right, the route through The Isle of Dogs and Canary Wharf was very boring because there were no spectators, and everything had been demolished ready for a massive re-build. We finally made it back to where people were lining the pavement cheering on the faces they recognised.

I had a little walk under the Blackfriars Underpass because I was knackered, but I soon picked up my steady jog. By this time, my mate Terry had spotted me in front of me. Suddenly I was jogging up The Mall and back down Birdcage Walk, which was originally the finish line. But not in 1985, you had another hill to climb on Westminster Bridge to the finish! It didn’t bother me that there were over 13,000 runners who had finished in front of me. As an ageing jogger I didn’t look at it as a race, more of an endurance test that I had achieved! Mind you, there were still a few thousand still behind me – including the late, non-lamented Jimmy Saville! Truly an experience I’ll never forget!
Name _______________________________________________________________
Address _______________________________________________________________
________________________________________ Postcode ________________________
Telephone __________________________________________ Mobile ________________
Email ________________________________________________________________
________________________________________ Twitter ___________________________
Date of Birth ___________________________ Badge No. ______________________
Badge colour (Please state whether green or yellow) __________________________ Year badge obtained __________
Suburban badge sector numbers __________________________________________

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Do you currently have points on your DVLA driving license? (please tick) Yes [ ] No [ ]
If Yes how many points do you have? ______________________________________
Please tick if you DO NOT wish to receive information from the LTDA and other related organisations in the future? [ ]

I understand that my application for membership of the Association must be approved by the Council of Management and that until
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DRIVERS WANTED

Full/Part time, £150pw, full 24-hour backup, Enfield area, please call 07931 386065
I’ve been driving a London taxi for close to 54 years, so I guess I must have made one or two mistakes...

CABBIE CHRONICLES

The week before lockdown, a passenger asked me, “What has been the biggest mistake you’ve ever made whilst driving a cab?” It got me thinking. Then it got me writing...

I’ve been driving a London taxi for close to 54 years, so I guess I must have made one or two mistakes (not that I’m going to admit many more), during that time. So, where should I start?

My venture into catering might make a suitable candidate…how I was asked to deliver a woman’s ‘pre-prepared’ dinner party, the contents…neatly prepared poached salmon, delicately arranged around the rim of a fine, hand-painted china plate; creamy lemon butter sauce, served in a matching china sauce boat; vegetables, breads, cheeses - all nesting in plastic trays, one layer on another, covered in cling film - to be delivered to a ‘block of bars,’ in Prince of Wales Drive, Battersea. Everything was going swimmingly as I climbed into the ancient lift floor, the ornate mirrors and, out – and voila! dinner is served - all over the floor and I shifted my grip. My clenched fist caught the side of the bronze lift gate – ‘that we were driving in completely the wrong direction.’ Apparently, they’d been puzzled by my assertion that, “it’s not far,” and the fact that their intended destination never once appeared on ANY of the motorway information boards - that only ‘bigged-up’ places like - Ilford, Romford, Chelmsford and all ‘fords’ to Norwich. We reached a sensible compromise and at the first opportunity came off the motorway and, in due course, negotiated our way to Harrow Bus Station. Now all I had to do, was negotiate a fare. I’d been figuring in my mind all sorts of compensatory offers - short of not charging anything and shaking hands - but my passengers wouldn’t hear of it. These four guys were brilliant. They paid in full, smiles all round, whatever it was by that point on the meter.

Oh, yes…and then there was the time when I accidentally reversed into the front garden wall of my mate Roger, then, through the rear-view mirror watching Roger’s face as his wall toppled over in dusty slow-mo.

It wasn’t until we reached the sweeping junction of the A102 and the A12 did one of my passengers politely point out - ‘that we were driving in completely the wrong direction.’ Apparently, they’d been puzzled by my assertion that, “it’s not far,” and the fact that their intended destination never once appeared on ANY of the motorway information boards - that only ‘bigged-up’ places like - Ilford, Romford, Chelmsford and all ‘fords’ to Norwich. We reached a sensible compromise and at the first opportunity came off the motorway and, in due course, negotiated our way to Harrow Bus Station. Now all I had to do, was negotiate a fare. I’d been figuring in my mind all sorts of compensatory offers - short of not charging anything and shaking hands - but my passengers wouldn’t hear of it. These four guys were brilliant. They paid in full, smiles all round, whatever it was by that point on the meter.

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“...and then there was the time when I accidentally reversed into the front garden wall of my mate Roger; then, through the rear-view mirror watching Roger’s face as his wall toppled over in dusty slow-mo”

Unblemished (ish)

Lastly, (I’m realising now there’s been more than one or two of these ‘mistakes’…), I used to drive a fibreglass bodied Beardmore. Every now and then the screws on the leather strap topping the passenger door from swinging out too far - would come adrift and when the passenger threw the door open to get out, the strapless door would slam into the side of the cab, making the passengers jump out of their skins with the noise of the impact. It didn’t do the paintwork much good either.

Fortunately, my mistakes have not been drastically enough to involve the PCO (Public Carriage Office) that’s Transport for London to you, and my cab license remains remarkably - unblemished.

AL FRESCO

CABBIE MISTAKES
“25 Nissans are now plying the streets, with, I am reliably informed, very happy drivers.”

THREE METROS STILL ON THE RANKS!

THE CAB YOU DRIVE

A selection of our numerous Sales and another recession killed it off the TX1 and not the Fairway - poor product because it was up against very few drivers had any confidence in we ever had until the arrival of the TTT, was in my opinion the best cab time around. Interestingly, the 6-seater second demise and the same the third their first demise, the second launch, remember when they first launched, 3 Metros! one in a very long time), there are still TXII’s and (even though I have not seen but surprisingly, there are plenty of TX4 is still king of the cab ranks TXE’s than there are Vito’s and the it breaks down. There are now more at the current fleet statistics and how

WORD ON THE STREET

Here we are, still mostly locked down - but on the bright side, I have had plenty of time to look at the current fleet statistics and how it breaks down. There are now more TXE’s than there are Vito’s and the TX4 is still king of the cab ranks but surprisingly, there are plenty of TXII’s and (even though I have not seen one in a very long time), there are still 3 Metros! I have been around long enough to remember when they first launched, their first demise, the second launch, second demise and the same the third time around. Interestingly, the 6-seater TTT, was in my opinion the best cab we ever had until the arrival of the TXE. The trouble was by this time, very few drivers had any confidence in the product because it was up against the TX1 and not the Fairway - poor sales and another recession killed it off for good. Funnily enough, 3 years after the factory closed, I was offered and bought, two brand new unregistered TTT’s. I very nearly came unstuck with them as at one point it looked like I wouldn’t be able to get them registered or licensed. Fortunately, I got lucky with a contract at a DVLA local office, as they then existed, and got them inspected and licensed - that was a very close call!

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PUBLISHERS ANSWERS

SUDOKU

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Valid entry: Yes

FUTOSHIKI

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Valid entry: Yes

CROSSWORD

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CONTRADICTORY

Valid entry: Yes

PREDICTIVE TEXT

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Valid entry: Yes

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Meet the LTDA legal team

Driving a taxi for many hours of the day in one of the world’s most congested cities is a challenging task. Cabbies often fall victim to complaints and false accusations from police, passengers and other road users (especially cyclists and PHV drivers). When these events arise it’s comforting for LTDA members to know that they have the immediate support of the best specialist in-house legal team in the business. The success rate of the LTDA Legal Team is second to none. In fact, according to Criminal Justice Statistics, LTDA members defended by our team are FOUR times more likely than the national average to be acquitted of allegations made against them.

“FOUR times more likely than the NATIONAL average to get an acquittal”

Ken Jackson
The LTDA’s solicitors and support team, could not have been more helpful when I first informed them that an allegation had been made against me. The LTDA was quick to check all the CCTV cameras in the area and arrange for plans of the location to be drawn up. Witness statements were also obtained and Mr Demidecki was successful in getting the Crown Prosecution Service to drop the case against me. Thanks LTDA – an all-round brilliant service!

Paul Baxter
I was filed with confidence the very first time I contacted the LTDA’s legal team and as it turned out, I certainly wasn’t disappointed. They did a great job in sorting out my problem with TfL. They’ve got to be the best in the business!

Farouk Merdjane
I was involved in an accident whilst driving my cab in Shepherd’s Bush. I wasn’t too worried about it because I was confident that it wasn’t my fault and the insurance would sort it out. A short while later I received a summons for driving without due care and attention. I had no witnesses to help me, but the other driver had produced “independent” witnesses out of thin air! I quickly contacted the LTDA’s legal department and they immediately visited the scene of the incident and arranged for professional photographs to be recorded. I later appeared before magistrates at Lavender Hill Court, where the LTDA barrister tied the witnesses up in knots and demonstrated they could not have seen what they said they had. Thank you, LTDA legal department; you gave me an excellent service.

“LTDA subscriptions cost less than four quid a week”

Tom Poulson
I joined the LTDA when I first got my badge and it turned out to be the best thing I ever did. Due to an unfortunate set of circumstances I ended up getting my licence revoked by TfL. I turned to John Luckhurst, one of the LTDA’s legal eagles, for assistance. John went to great lengths to prepare a detailed appeal against TfL’s decision and briefed a brilliant barrister to represent me in court. The appeal was successful and saved my livelihood. LTDA subscriptions are only four quid a week, which is less than a pint, and three pounds can be claimed against tax. I can’t believe that every cabbie in town is not a member.

Paul Baxter
I was filed with confidence the very first time I contacted the LTDA’s legal team and as it turned out, I certainly wasn’t disappointed. They did a great job in sorting out my problem with TfL. They’ve got to be the best in the business!
HELP IS HERE

We now have a number of insurance schemes available that offer social, domestic and pleasure with an option to upgrade to taxi insurance at a later date.

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