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30th January 2024 #557

STOPPING THE DECLINE OF LONDON'S ICONIC BLACK CAB

TRANSPORT COMMITTEE SESSION HIGHLIGHTS URGENT NEED TO SUPPORT OUR TRADE



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LTDA
Taxi House 133 Great Suffolk Street,
SE1 1PP
T: 020 7286 1046 | www.ltda.co.uk
@TheLTDA

Editor
Katie Combes
E: editor@ltda.co.uk

Commissioning Editor
Mike Williams
E: taxieditor@centuryone.uk

Produced By
CPL One
Alban Row, 27-31 Verulam Road,
St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 4DG
T: 01727 893 894
E: info@cplone.co.uk
www.cplone.co.uk

Advertising Sales Executive
Paul Heitzman T: 01727 739196
E: paul.heitzman@cplone.co.uk

Creative Director
Peter Davies

Designer
Daniel Swainsbury

Printed by
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GLA TRANSPORT COMMITTEE DISCUSSES FUTURE OF CAB TRADE

The London Assembly Transport Committee met last week to look at the decline in taxi driver and vehicle numbers and consider the future of the industry. Guests invited by the Committee included Helen Chapman, Director of Licensing, Regulation and Charging, Transport for London (TfL), Christina Calderato, Director of Transport Strategy and Policy, TfL, Steve McNamara, General Secretary, Licensed Taxi Drivers Association, Mariusz Zabrocki, General Manager, FREENOW, Steve Wright MBE, Chair, Licensed Private Hire Car Association (LPHCA) Association and Asher Moses, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Sherbet Electric Taxis.

In a three-hour session, Assembly Members including Committee Chair, Keith Prince AM and Deputy Chair, Caroline Pidgeon MBE AM, asked the panel about the challenges and opportunities facing the sector and held TfL to account.

During the session, it was noted that it had been five years since the last hearing dedicated to the industry. It was clear from the topics raised, including the impact of Uber's entry into the market and the growth of ride-hailing more generally that it was long overdue, and things had moved on. One of the issues discussed was the much-needed "new vision" for the sector to replace the now defunct 2016 Mayor's Taxi and PHV Action Plan, which is almost eight years old. There was also extensive discussion of the challenges presented by the cost of the cab and the fact that there is only one available. Steve McNamara, General Secretary of the LTDA also outlined the "devastating" impact of TfL's rollout of 20mph zones and TfL's new six points and you're out policy, leading Caroline Pidgeon AM to suggest that TfL needed to look at this and rethink the tone of its communications with drivers.

GETT & OCTOPUS ENERGY TO CUT COST OF CHARGING FOR CABBIES

Black cab app, *Gett*, has joined forces with *Octopus Energy* to provide convenient electric vehicle charging for more than 4,000 London black cabs. This partnership will provide charging discounts, credits and reduced prices on home charging equipment for cab drivers who are on *Gett*. They will also receive exclusive discounts when using Source London and MFG EV Power charge points in London. *Octopus* will also install chargers at cab drivers' homes giving them access to the Intelligent *Octopus Go* EV smart tariff offering more affordable charging and an additional eight per cent discount on all public charging costs via *Octopus Energy's* EV charging platform, *Octopus Electroverse*. *Octopus Energy's* Director, Matt Davies, said: "The partnership will provide access to nearly 9,000 public charge points in London alone and will help to reduce downtime for black cab drivers."

SOPWITH WAY

The LTDA has been advised that drivers should not currently enter Sopwith Way under any circumstances by management



company Rendall and Rittner. This comes as the property owners, Berkeley Homes, which administers the cameras and leads on enforcement, has said it will take action against anyone entering the area for any period of time. Drivers had previously been receiving PCNs for staying longer than 15 minutes. Until further notice, drivers are advised to drop off any fares on Queenstown Road and arrange to meet an app job elsewhere. The LTDA is trying to resolve this matter and will keep drivers updated.



GOVERNMENT COMMITTED TO NATIONAL MINIMUM LICENSING STANDARDS

In response to a written question from Dan Carden, Labour MP for Liverpool, Walton, regarding the timetable for legislating on national minimum standards for taxi and private hire vehicle licensing, Minister for Roads and Local Transport, Guy Opperman MP, said the government remains "committed" to bringing forward legislation. The Minister said there had not been sufficient time during this Parliament to allow for this but noted that the government remains committed to doing so "in due course".

41% OF BRITS WOULDN'T REPORT MINOR CAR BUMP

A recent survey commissioned by *Zego Van Insurance* has shed light on the state of British honesty when it comes to minor car bumps. 41% of Brits admitted they wouldn't leave a note if they accidentally bumped into someone's vehicle and no one was around to witness the incident. Respondents suggested that one significant factor in their reluctance to own up, is the fear of insurance repercussions. Many fear that admitting to a minor bump will lead to huge hikes in their insurance premiums and are deterred from doing so.



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Stopping the Decline of London's Black Cab

TfL and the Mayor seem to be making it harder for cabbies to do their jobs and provide the world-renowned service that our regulator and politicians so love to celebrate, but rarely seem to support.

Steve's comment

It might be kipper season, but January has been a busy month for us at the LTDA. We are still seeing more and more drivers having to fight for their licence or being sent threatening letters by TfL, for the very minor offence of receiving just three DVLA penalty points on their licence, for a single speeding conviction. Supporting these drivers is taking up a lot of our time and we continue pressuring TfL to change their approach.

Irony in the extreme

Like most of the trade, I was shocked, but also not surprised by the fanfare around the decision to "pause" enforcement for private hire drivers, who have failed to meet the deadline to pass the Safety, Equality and Regulatory Understanding (SERU) test and the English Language requirement.

The irony of this situation is not lost on me or anyone else in trade. On the one hand, our members are being threatened with licence suspension or worse for minor offences, which have no bearing on their ability to drive a taxi and safely transport passengers from a to b. On the other hand, minicab drivers, who can't pass a basic speaking test and/or a multiple-choice exam to demonstrate that they understand their responsibilities as licensees and their duty of care to passengers (without having their driver handbook open next to them), are allowed to continue working for the foreseeable future, putting passengers at risk.

Huge discrepancy

The Mayor was so eager to support the decision that he jumped straight on social media to praise it. His post on X made it clear he has been championing drivers concerns and raising the matter with TfL. We keep hearing about how worried drivers were and how they can now rest easy. In contrast, we've been telling TfL and City Hall for two years now, that our members



are being put under enormous stress as a result of the six points (increasingly three points) and you're out driver policy, as well as the changes to the TfL appeals process, which drivers and the LTDA on their behalf must go through to challenge poor decisions. Have they done anything to address our worries and concerns? Of course they haven't. We are meeting senior policy staff at TfL, yet again in a few weeks to discuss our growing concerns about the driver policy. I will be pointing out the huge discrepancy in the way the two trades are handled.

Interesting timing

What I also find interesting is the fact that just two months ago, TfL was emphasising the importance of the English language requirement in its response to the consultation on *Improving Safety in Taxi and PHVs*, having previously described it as "essential for public safety". The consultation even set out how they were keeping under

review whether cabbies should have a similar requirement (even though the Knowledge is more than sufficient to prove a driver's English language skills). So, what's changed in the last two months? I think many people will be able to answer that one for themselves...In the meantime, I have put in some freedom of information (FOI) requests to try to see what conversations might have been going on between City Hall and TfL on this topic.

This decision does at least give us some ammunition. Next time TfL or the Deputy Mayor tell me how they have to follow the government's statutory standards to justify their new driver policy, I will be pointing out that the English language requirement and SERU are both key parts of those very same standards, and how they seem willing to abandon those at the first sign of trouble.

Speaking up for LTDA members

I welcomed the opportunity to raise this and a number of other issues

at the London Assembly Transport Committee session on Taxi and Private Hire last week. I was one of six guests invited by the Committee to give them insights on the challenges facing the trade. It was a pretty random group of people if you ask me, but for the LTDA it was an important opportunity to highlight what needs to be done to support our members. As well as, all the ways TfL and the Mayor seem to be making it harder for cabbies to do their jobs and provide the world renowned service that our regulator and politicians so love to celebrate, but rarely seem to support.

This session was long overdue – a fact which was acknowledged by the Committee. Some of the topics the Assembly Members asked about were out of date and no longer relevant, because their line of questioning was based on commitments made in the Mayor's 2016 *Taxi and Private Hire Action Plan*. That is now a relic, from a time when Uber was still our biggest challenge – which other than its currently failing attempt to recruit cabbies, just isn't even on our radar.

There was also a lack of understanding on some issues like cross-border hiring, which I will be following up with them on in writing. For us, it was an important opportunity to talk about the key issues behind what they described as 'the decline of the London's iconic black cab', road access, financial support for drivers to meet the costs of the cab, licensing and enforcement issues with the six points and you're out policy and the impact of 20mph zones. You can watch the key bits from the session on our website or by scanning the QR code below. The Committee were receptive to these points. We will be sending them more evidence to make sure pressure is put on the Mayor and TfL to actually act in support of the licensed taxi trade and the vital service we provide.

The LTDA will keep pushing on all fronts. Be lucky. **LTDA**



Watch key parts of the Transport Committee Session here.



Is It Really All About Safety?



Is depriving someone of their livelihood for three months and giving them all the worry, financial stress and mental burden that comes with that, really a fit punishment?



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Top rank

More and more drivers are losing their licences, and we are told it's in the interest of safety. These drivers have usually been caught doing 24mph in a 20mph zone, on a road that was previously 30mph or 40mph, which had absolutely no history of having any problem with accidents resulting in people being killed or seriously injured (KSI) because they were safe for vehicles to actually travel at 30, 40 or even 50mph.

The mass rollout of these 20mph zones is driven by an ideology held by some in power, who apparently can't come up with anything better than a blanket, one size fits all solution. It's a scheme of the outright inept, bringing London to a standstill and proving devastating for taxi drivers.

Licences under threat

That of course is not the only way you can lose your licence these days. You could be in stationary traffic, stuck in the manufactured traffic jams that have resulted in London once again being

confirmed as the most congested city and the one with the slowest traffic. After not moving for several minutes, you might make a brief error in judgment and touch your phone. You're in zero danger of hurting anyone, as you're not even moving, but you are technically still breaking the law and suddenly out of nowhere some idiot in Lycra decides he's going to film you. He takes great delight in telling you, you're going to lose your licence and then laughs, as he says he'll see you in court. He explains how he is "saving lives" and how he is "saving lives" like Superman saving a person who's falling from a tall building.

If the cyclist was catching motorists on their phones when they were actually driving and moving or likely to be anytime soon, then he'd have a point, and I'd have no sympathy in those circumstances, as you are in charge of a potentially lethal weapon. But that generally isn't what happens. They stalk the continuous gridlock like that within in Hyde Park, looking for unsuspecting drivers who don't realise they are doing something wrong until it's too late.

Drivers are also losing their licence for a month or three after being deemed to no longer be 'fit

and proper' because they didn't notify TfL within 21 days that they had accepted a conditional offer of three points and £100 fine for a speeding offence of doing 24mph in a 20mph zone. It might be their first speeding offence in 20, 30 or even 40 years of driving. They may have never had a single complaint in decades of driving thousands and thousands of passengers all over our city. For whatever reason, they forgot to inform TfL of something within 21 days (this deadline will soon be lowered to 48 hours) so they are no longer deemed 'fit and proper' by TfL, well not for the next 30 to 90 days anyway. After that you can have your licence back and crack on.

An alternative approach?

Is depriving someone of their livelihood for three months and giving them all the worry, financial stress and mental burden that comes with that, really a fit punishment? A few years back, TfL were thinking of introducing a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) type scheme. So, I ask, what is a more appropriate course of action for someone who didn't inform TfL quickly enough of what is now a common event on London's roads, particularly since Mayor Khan set a one million a year target for speeding fines. Is it to take away their livelihood for a few months, which will do real harm to them and their families and cause severe mental anguish? Or should they utilise a FPN system. It will still hurt a bit financially, as you'll need to find money to pay the fine and will also serve as a good reminder not to forget in

the future, but crucially it won't cause the horrendous worry and stress, which currently far outweighs the offence for which the punishment is set.

'Paused' enforcement

Meanwhile, the same TfL that is so concerned with passenger safety and ensuring drivers are 'fit and proper' to transport the public has failed to bring back advanced driving tests for more than seven years (surely that is the very least thing they could do to improve and ensure safe driving). Worse than that, now they have 'paused' the SERU assessment, which stands for Safety, Equality and Regulatory Understanding

(SERU) because some mini cab drivers had concerns and were worried. I'm sure they will also have concerns and worries about maintaining their cars or having it MOT'd and insured, should those requirements also be paused so as to not worry them?

If like me, you watched a video online of Deputy Mayor for Transport, Seb Dance, telling a group of mini cab drivers (and

I paraphrase), we know sitting and failing a simple test has caused you worry, so we're not going to do it now, until we find an easier way to do it. You would then think that similarly TfL and City Hall would take our very real concerns with their interpretation of a driver policy into consideration. I guess there aren't enough votes at play in the upcoming election with our TfL enforced decline in numbers, when compared to the more than fivefold increase in private hire numbers.

So, it would seem that safety is paramount until something else is at stake.

LTDA





TAXI and LTDA Member Mail

Subject: A massive thank you

Dear Editor,

Just wanted to write an email to say a massive thank you as regards my recent taxi re-licence and dealings with TfL. Without your help and expertise, I wouldn't be driving my taxi today, saving my livelihood.

Thanks to Lloyd, Paul Kirby and Suzanne, who all gave me great advice, listened and put me at ease. With the new rules from TfL, I cannot stress enough in my experience just how important it is to have LTDA there to help and fight your corner.

Thanks again,
Danny Bolt



Subject: Praise for driver

Good morning,

It would be remiss of me not to write in praise of and grateful thanks to cabbie, Ronald Sands.

On 4th January at 1.15pm, I booked the return journey from University College Hospital back to my home address. I had been in the MRI scanner there for one and a half hours. By that time, I was already stressed, feeling harassed and fed-up. When I went to get changed back into my clothes and checked my phone, I then saw

that Ronald had arrived to pick me up. He managed to find somewhere safe to park on Grafton Road, which in itself is an accomplishment at that time of the day.

I was very apologetic for keeping him waiting, but he didn't mind at all. He was sitting quietly waiting for me. I didn't get a grumpy phone call or anything, just sitting quietly!

I really appreciated this good old-fashioned service and have added him to my favourites list. Thank you.

Kindest regards,
Marcia Luke

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Uber's Failing PR Stunt

Reports have emerged of Uber reps approaching taxi drivers at major train station ranks, offering them £400 to join the platform, but no amount of money will convince cabbies.

Streets ahead

Unsurprisingly, Uber's announcement that it was going to "partner" with London's iconic black cabs was met with widespread condemnation and has been universally rejected by the cab trade. Safe to say, it doesn't look like Uber's latest PR stunt is going to work out.

Short memory

In making this announcement, which was based on them convincing one solitary cab driver (a former PH driver) to join them, Uber seem to have forgotten everything that went on in the past. Maybe they have, as all the team who were there back then have since moved on.

8

Uber's entry into the London market was marked by controversy from day one. They seemingly disregarded Transport for London (TfL) regulations and repeatedly refused to play by the rules, resulting in them losing their licence to operate and multiple court cases. The corporate giant worth billions, backed by deep-pocketed investors, was willing to



disregard rules and regulations and drag TfL through the courts to defend its dodgy business model, all in the relentless pursuit of market dominance.

Uber's initial goal was crystal clear: to seize control of London's taxi market. However, it soon became evident that this ambition was not going to be easily realised. Londoners already had multiple ride-hailing apps at their disposal.

When they couldn't beat us, they suggested we joined them. Black cabs drivers were not interested in Uber's first attempt to entice them onto their platform back in 2016, even with significant financial incentives on offer.

Recruitment attempts

Now, they are at it again. Reports have emerged of Uber representatives approaching taxi drivers at major train station

ranks, offering them £400 to join the platform. Drivers, not easily swayed by the company that tried anything and everything to put them out of business just a few years ago, politely (or perhaps not so politely as you might imagine) declined these offers.

Uber has gained a reputation for exploiting workers and flouting safety protocols. They have been known to dispatch individuals to taxi ranks without high-visibility vests and without reporting to the station's main office, ignoring the safety procedures designed to protect both drivers and passengers. Despite their claims of now prioritising safety and having changed their ways, Uber's actions often still demonstrate otherwise.

Most recently, Uber reps were seen at City Airport attempting to recruit drivers. They faced opposition from many drivers who questioned their presence. In some cases, these encounters became heated as drivers insisted that Uber had no right to be on private land without proper authorisation from the authorities.

In my opinion, if any drivers join Uber, they must be mad. Just remember, we are renowned around the world as being the best taxi service and we don't want anything to jeopardise that hard-earned and well-deserved reputation.

Fleetwood Assessors

I have regular meetings with Chris at Fleetwood Assessors. Fleetwood has been servicing the taxi trade for decades.

Some drivers may know Chris or may have used Fleetwood's services before. When I first met Chris, I highlighted all the issues that our members have experienced in the past and how he could help our membership. You cannot beat the experience and knowledge that he has gained over many years on the shop floor in the motor industry.

Fleetwood have been dealing with vehicle problems in the taxi trade for a long time and put all this know-how and expertise into action to help LTDA members to find a resolution to all the issues that drivers are having with everyone from insurance companies and dealers to warranty claims and bad body repairs (and I have seen many dodgy repairs), and faulty parts, and this is only a snippet of what they offer.

Chris has been teamed up with the LTDA for two years now. During that time, he has helped resolve many drivers' issues with all models of cab, I am pleased to say with outstanding results, saving drivers thousands of pounds in some cases. Chris has also built a great rapport with many of the key players in the industry and is respected throughout.

If you are an LTDA member and need advice on issues relating

to a problem, you can contact the LTDA or Fleetwood Assessors directly. They can offer independent advice on the following:

Fault/Non-fault accident advice, accident damage inspections, estimate/reports, roadworthy Insurance inspections, total loss/vehicle valuation reports, body repair warranty claim reports, mechanical failure reports, end of vehicle contract hire reports, post repair inspection reports, expert witness reports and much more.

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Drivers are getting great results though this partnership and I would encourage you to get in touch if you have an issue, but I must make it clear this all depends on the problem you have.

■ LTDA

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LTDA Prize Winners

Two more great reasons to be a member of the LTDA, the chance to win £5000 in our lottery or £150 worth of vouchers with our diary prize.

The LTDA diary spotters have been out and about, on the lookout for members displaying their diaries on the dashboard. The first cab they spotted was owned by Mr Richard Costi.

Mr Richard Costi is a long serving member having been part of the LTDA for almost 25 years. He was spotted proudly showing off his LTDA diary and was thrilled to receive a One4all gift card worth £150.

One4all cards can be spent on a huge array of items from 130 high street brands in store or online and restaurants. Participating retailers and restaurants include Argos, H&M, River Island, B&Q, John Lewis, Harvester, Pizza Express and Marks & Spencer.

Each year, the LTDA gives away thousands of pounds worth of gift cards to its members. all you need to do to be in with a chance to win is have your LTDA membership diary proudly on display and let us do the rest. Good luck out there.



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January Blues



In the old days, it might have seemed reasonable for a customer to request a taxi driver to 'step on it' but these days they are effectively asking you to increase the risk of losing your licence.

M4 musings

December saw another good month for throughput at Heathrow Taxi Feeder Park (TFP), though this wasn't always reflected in the waiting time. The week between Christmas and New Year was also busy, but things predictably fell off a cliff in early January, with both parks full on several occasions.

New Year updates

Generally, the TFP system is working well, considering its limitations. The supply of cabs has met demand on the vast majority of occasions. HAL have informed the Trade that upgrades to the TFP should commence sometime this year and that this will include an app on which to purchase credit, amongst other things.

Drivers I've spoken to in town have also said it's quieter than the same period last year but at the time of writing things have picked up markedly, so to my mind we are still busier than before the pandemic, albeit with significantly fewer licensees and taxis.

On a personal note, no regrets so far on my decision to replace my 11 plate TX4 with a 67 Vito. It drives very well and the customers like it. The only drawback is that it sends me more messages than anyone else I know - in a TX, you only find out there's a problem when it stops or something falls off!

Step on it?

I picked up at the airport the other day, a routine job to Chelsea that I was pleased to get, as I was heading home afterwards.

So, I settled into 'autopilot', but as I joined the slip road towards the motorway, the customer piped up and said 'can we go a bit faster please, I'm in a hurry?'

I was completely taken aback by this. We were not on a 20mph road where you might expect it, or on the Westway where the 30mph that used to be National Speed Limit feels incredibly slow.

In any event, I just explained that it was a 40mph limit and gave the customer an ETA and they were fine, but it did get me thinking how much things have changed over the years. In the old days, it might have seemed reasonable for a customer to request a taxi driver to 'step on it', but these days that sort of thing is firstly a complete waste of time, as we crawl about at an average 9mph in town. Secondly, it's unacceptable, as they are effectively asking you to drive more aggressively and increase the risk of injuring somebody or losing your licence.

Of course, one of our selling points is that we use our expertise to choose the best route, and this does give us and our customers an advantage over the sat-nav jockeys. But it's not Starsky and Hutch out there. The majority of customers seem to understand that and appreciate a smoother drive. More haste, less speed and all that.

That said, 20mph on 'strategic' roads like Marylebone Road and Cromwell Road, neither of which are predominantly residential, feels absurdly slow and more symbolic than empirically safer.

And no, I am not arguing against safety and therefore an increase in road deaths or injuries - London needs ALL of its transport modes to move as efficiently as possible and this includes motorised road traffic.

It is for the authorities to find ways to achieve this

other than the blunt chisel of simply restraining motorists to 'encourage' other modes. These other modes can not meet everyone's needs and there is little evidence that they will ever come close to the utility or

productivity that motor vehicles provide to businesses and private citizens. The longer the ideologues keep hammering on about 'modal shift', the poorer (and more stressed) Londoners will become.



Twitter rant

I've always had a bit of a love/hate relationship with the social media platform formerly known as Twitter, now X. Despite not having sent a Tweet for years, I'm still on there most days because I find it a useful source of information.

A lot of cab drivers burst onto the platform when it first became popular, and it was seen as a way of democratising communication and access to politicians, journalists and others. This quickly turned sour, as we belatedly realised being abused on social media does not in fact encourage people to take cabs.

There's still a hard core of drivers on there, but most of these seem pretty sensible to me. The platform has had a well-publicised change of ownership (and name) and it definitely feels different now, but not necessarily worse as some people say.

Elon Musk seems to be of the opinion that if you let absolutely everyone say absolutely anything they want, then the truth will out in the end. I'm not sure history bears that out though. More often than not when everyone shouts at everyone else the whole time, then it's the people with the loudest voices and those who say the most outlandish things who come to the fore. And these are not always the smartest people or the ones with the best ideas.

I still open it up every day so more fool me I suppose; Doom and Gloom anyone?

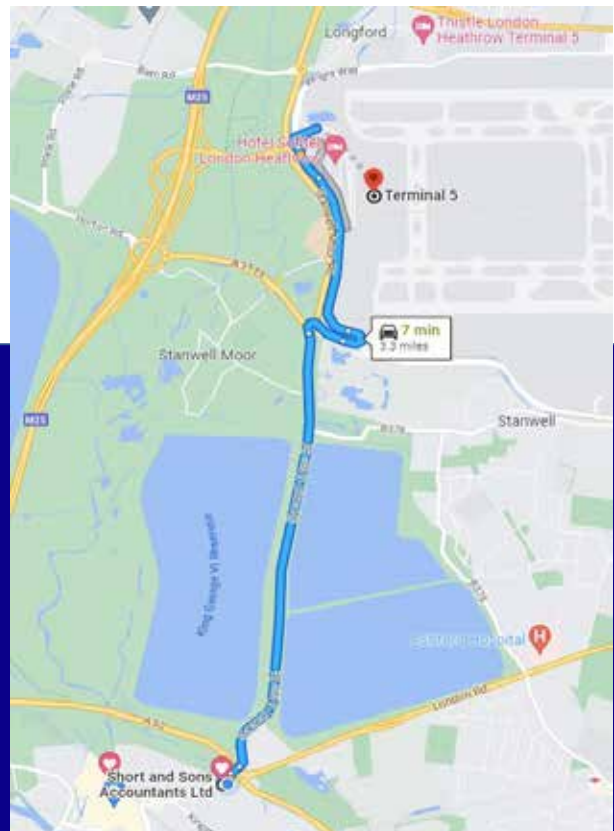
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Donald Edward Bonner

25th May 1944 - 11th Jan 2024



'The Best Black Cabbie There Ever Was', Hannah Bonner reflects on her grandad's life and the job he loved, as a proud London black cab driver.

Obituary

Donald 'Don' Bonner was a long serving London licensed taxi driver of more than 20 years and a loyal member of the LTDA. He sadly passed away earlier this month. He leaves behind beloved family wife Iris, son Martin and his wife Olga, grandchildren Hannah, Steven and Victoria and great grandchildren, Carolina and Santiago. Our thoughts are with the whole family at this difficult time.

Don's family wanted to take the opportunity to celebrate a life well-lived. His granddaughter, Hannah, shared some wonderful memories of him and his black cab with TAXI.

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Doing the Knowledge

My grandad, Don Bonner, was an amazing man, and many of mine and my family's best memories of him involve him and his black cab.

In 1989, Don Bonner was an area manager in Stoke Newington for Little Woods Coupons. He also had a full-time job working on the London Underground, as a railway signalling engineer supervisor, all whilst studying for the Knowledge.

Don's wife and best friend, Iris Bonner, helped him study for the Knowledge, revising the routes. My grandad was very proud and dedicated to passing the exam.

Family memories

One of mine and my cousins first memories of Grandad, is witnessing his 'superpower' of being able to know exactly where everything was, along with directions and exactly how to get there, straight off the top of his head.

Once he passed the Knowledge, he started his amazing journey completing 23 years as a London black cab driver. He hired his first black cab until he was finally able to buy one, which became his pride and joy.

Us grandkids, myself, Steven and Vicky, remember spending time with our Grandad Don just before he would be about to



start a night shift. We often had the privilege of being his first customers of the night, sitting in his cab, playing with the fold up chairs in the back and speaking to him through the sliding window. Little did we know that Grandad was keeping us busy and looking after us, so our mum and dad got the night off, away from us kids.

Our Nanny Iris would then equip him with his essentials for the long night ahead – a can of apple Tango and a Mars bar – and he'd be on his way.

Don loved going to Putney Bridge and sometimes seeing the sun rise. He would sometimes park up for a pint of milk and a little kip. One day it was raining, and it rained so badly that where he was parked flooded. He was woken up by the police and told not to open the door of the cab, as the water was up to the top of the wheels!

A local celebrity

Grandad Don moved to Paignton, Devon, in 2012. And even until this day, the local taxi drivers knew my grandad and where he lived. He is famed as 'the London black cab driver'. If one of my family gets a cab to his address they would say 'oh you're related to the London black cab driver', it felt like he was a local celebrity.

Famous faces

Grandad also told us all stories of the famous faces he had in his cab over the years. A notable radio producer once said he would play The Shadows on the radio for Don and send him across a CD of them, as they were his favourite band. He didn't think anything of it, but the CD actually came through the post a few days later.

Simon Le Bon from Duran Duran got in his cab and gave an autograph for Don's wife. He also once picked up the band All Saints and had a casual, long conversation with them during the ride, which had granddaughter Vicky and I in awe of our grandad's ever-growing coolness, at the time.

Don Bonner, was the best great grandad, grandad, dad, husband, father-in-law, uncle, friend and black cabbie there ever was. He will be greatly missed. **TAXI**

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The Scratchwood Murder

A grim discovery during The Great Depression leads to a double conviction, after a key piece of evidence is uncovered...

Rob's history tips

Located just under five miles from Staples Corner, London Gateway in Edgware is the M1's southernmost service station. According to legend, it is the site upon which HMS Belfast's mighty guns are trained: indeed, if the old warship were still capable of firing them, it would certainly be able to lob a shell all the way to the carpark!

When the service station first opened in 1969, it was known as Scratchwood Services; a name it maintained for many years. 'Scratchwood' being a reference to a nearby surviving patch of the ancient Middlesex Forest where, until the motorway ploughed through in the 1960s, the area was relatively rural.

'30s Scratchwood

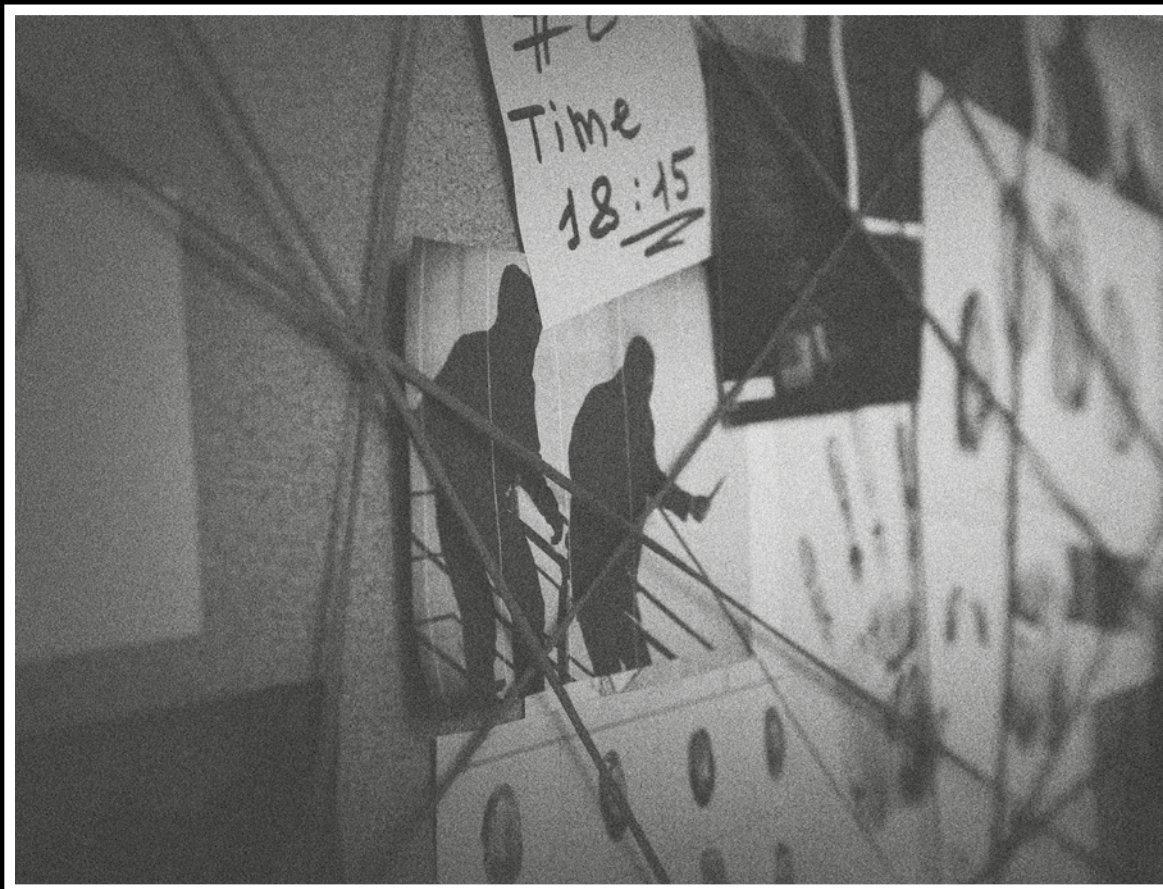
In the early-1930s, Scratchwood was home to a community of homeless men who congregated in a number of shacks, huts and tents clustered around a group of sidings belonging to the London Midland & Scottish Railway.

This setup was largely due to The Great Depression that was at its peak, with the men at the camp getting by after securing casual labouring jobs on the railway.

It was at the Scratchwood camp, on the morning of the 1st of June 1931, that a chap seeking work stumbled upon a smouldering rubbish tip, amongst which he spotted a human arm poking out.

The rest of the badly charred body was wrapped in sacking and, according to the renowned pathologist Sir Bernard Spilsbury, death had been caused by a fracture to the skull inflicted by a rectangular shaped object. The victim's jaw and nose were also badly smashed.

Although the body was badly burnt, rigour mortis had set in, leading to the stiffening of the arm, and thus causing it to poke out: had this not occurred, it's likely the corpse would never have been discovered.



Pigsticker

The dead man was quickly identified thanks to a tattoo on his arm; it transpired that he was 45-year-old Herbert Ayres, known as 'Pigsticker' to his friends. Originally from Watford, he had recently been living at the camp.

It was ascertained that two other men from the campsite had been seen beating him up a few days before, leading to the arrest of William Shelley (known as 'Moosh'), 57, and Oliver 'Tiggy' Newman, 61.

Charged with murder, Shelly and Newman appeared before Hendon Magistrates, where they were described as unshaven, dishevelled and nervously gripping the bar. Soon after, in late-June, their trial commenced at the Old Bailey.

Here, it was revealed that Ayres had regularly been accused of stealing food, the final straw coming on the evening of 31st May, when Shelly discovered his tea and sugar were missing.

Witnesses claimed Shelley was furious in the local pub, and had told someone that Ayres had

"been mooching around the hut," adding "if he came round many more times, he would get a crack."

Mum's the word

Later that night, back at the Scratchwood campsite, around 10pm, Shelley launched a savage attack on Ayres, which Newman quickly joined in on. The assault was witnessed by a man named Armstrong, who shared a hut with the pair.

Armstrong claimed he heard Ayres scream and then, in the moonlight, saw two pickaxe sticks raining down, estimating that Ayres was struck between 20 and 25 times.

When Shelley returned to the hut, Armstrong, supposedly terrified of further retribution, told the murderer that he'd seen what happened, but promised *"mum's the word"*.

Then, at around 4.30am, Armstrong saw the pair carry Ayres' broken, battered body to the rubbish tip, where it was promptly set on fire.

Despite pleading not guilty, Shelly, who stated that Ayres was *"like myself, a bit of a*

drunkard," claimed he hadn't wanted to burn the body.

"I wanted to put him on the line and let a train run over him," he claimed, adding that Ayres had started the fight, and that a brutal beating had been a long time coming.

Double execution

It took the jury just over an hour to find Shelley and Newman guilty of Ayres' murder, after which the judge, Mr Justice Swift, donned his black cap and passed the death sentence on the two.

Shelley's response to this grim punishment was surprising: *"Thank you sir,"* he replied. *"It ought to have been done 20 years ago."*

Despite Shelley's apparent resignation to his fate, an appeal was launched. That failed, and the pair were executed in a rare double hanging at Pentonville Prison on 5th August 1931.

If you wish to learn more, you can visit my YouTube channel, [robslondon](#). ■ TAXI



Warranty Worries

LEVC has raised the price of the three-year warranty, that covers the cab from year five to year eight and introduced an excess of £250 on any warranty claim between years three and five.



Cab you drive

Itend to shy away from cabbie social media, it's invariably either depressing, rumours, untruths or outright lies. Often, it's all of the above. Most of the time, I carry on oblivious to what's occurring on X, Facebook, WhatsApp or Telegram, and ignorance is more often than not, bliss!

So, last week, when I received a rather puzzling call from a fleet owner asking me if I had any of the 'cheap second hand TXEs' for sale, it was the first I had heard of yet another storm on social media. According to posts on X, after LEVC raised the price of the extended eight-year warranty, drivers were "queuing up" to offload their cabs, at bargain fire sale prices. Needless to say, it was all rubbish as usual.

What's happening?

So, what is the truth and what is actually happening? LEVC has raised the price of the three-year warranty that covers the cab from year five to year eight and introduced an excess of £250 on any claim on the warranty between years three and five. That's it.

It's not news anyone wanted to hear, but also not necessarily the disaster being portrayed.

It's amazing how quickly drivers have all come to expect a 120,000-mile three-year warranty on a cab, and to pay very little to extend it to 150,000 miles and five years. You don't have to go back too far to find a time when cabs had a one-year warranty, and you were guaranteed a steward's enquiry if you tried to claim on it.

No other manufacturer offers anything like the LEVC warranty. Audi cover three years or 60,000 miles, Mercedes four years or 50,000 miles, Volvo four years or 50,000 miles and Tesla come

with four years and 50,000 miles. Yet, according to some, the world has come to an end.

The truth is, there is no panic and no line of owners desperate to sell their cabs, which is a pity, because I could do with a few low mileage TXEs, as they still sell well and hold their money. The only ones I have been offered in the last few weeks are space shuttles with heavy mileage. I suspect this rumour was started by a fleet owner trying to scare drivers out of mushing and into their garages.

Weigh your options

My advice is, if you are buying a new cab, always buy the five-year

"You don't have to go back too far to a time when cabs had a one-year warranty, and you were guaranteed a steward's enquiry if you tried to claim on it."

warranty. If there is a service package being offered, I would take that as well. You are buying peace of mind. If you have a cab coming up to five years old, your options should be guided by your experience with the cab so far, has it been reliable? If so, maybe self-insure it by putting £50 a week aside. If the cab goes wrong, you have the money, if it doesn't, more's the better.

If you have had reliability issues, or the cab is grumbling, consider going again on the PCP and getting a new cab. The other option is to walk away from it and rent, or pay the extra money to buy the extended warranty that takes it to eight years. All these choices are dependant on your own personal circumstances and experience, but whatever you decide, certainly do not be panicked by some scare story on social media. **TAXI**





Entertainment Corner

Our resident film critic takes us through the biggest film releases to recommend to your passengers this January.

Reel Talk



Netflix

The Kitchen (15)

Children of Men, *This is England*, and *Do The Right Thing* are among the many inspirations for *The Kitchen*, a dystopian drama set in a near-future London. And while it's not as groundbreaking as those aforementioned titles, the directorial debut of both Daniel Kaluuya and architect-turned-filmmaker Kibwe Tavares deserves credit for its ambition. Credit even if the interweaving of several present-day issues, such as social housing, single parenting, and more, doesn't always pay off.

Our guide through this world is Kane Robinson's (aka musician Kano) Izi, a self-centred loner who can't wait to leave his meagre estate in the Kitchen behind, and move into a luxury apartment block. That changes when he meets Benji (newcomer Jedaiah Bannerman), who is mourning the loss of his mother. The bond that forms between them is one of the film's more compelling attributes, in addition to impressive world-building that showcases a vibrant Black culture and thoughtful performances from its cast. In the latter regard, Ian Wright is a surprising standout as Lord Kitchener, the soul of the community.

★★★★☆

The Kitchen is streaming on Netflix now.

The Holdovers (15)

Though its UK release has inexplicably come almost a month after 25th December, Alexander Payne's *The Holdovers* is poised to be a new Christmas classic. Set in the 1970s, it stars the iconic Paul Giamatti as Scrooge-esque grouch Paul Hunham, a classics teacher at a prestigious New England boarding school who is forced to supervise rebellious pupil Angus (Dominic Sessa) over Christmas break. While the ensuing shenanigans have a somewhat predictable end point, watching them go from dislike to something approaching friendship, all across the span of two hours, proves a hilarious, heartwarming delight.

Much of the hilarity is supplied by Giamatti. His Hunham is a one-man insult machine – “*entitled degenerates*” and “*snarling Visigoths*” are but two of the wonderfully worded barbs he uses to describe his students – but watching him thaw to reveal a sad, regretful interior is equally compelling. Helping him to do this is Sessa – who ensures Angus' pain and anger at having been left behind at Christmastime is evident, even when it's not explicit. And Da'Vine Joy Randolph's Mary, the school's cook, is a welcomed addition. It's a sensitive, subtle piece of work that could lead to an Oscar win in the near future.

★★★★★

The Holdovers is in cinemas now.



Universal Pictures

Mean Girls (2024) (12A)

One could be forgiven for asking why we need a new *Mean Girls* movie in 2024. Indeed, this latest incarnation from directors Samantha Jayne and Arturo Perez Jr. is written by Tina Fey, who is adapting her own *Mean Girls: The Musical* screenplay, which was itself adapted from the classic 2004 movie Fey also wrote. But while there may be a ton of familiarity here, nu-*Mean Girls* is a smart and sharp update on the original material, with some great tunes to boot.

Many of those songs are belted out with bold confidence by Renée Rapp. Reprising the role of Regina George from Broadway, she brings presence as well as pipes to the iconic character. Other standouts include the scene-stealing stage veteran Jaquel Spivey as Damien and Auli'i Cravalho as Janis, whose *I'd Rather Be Me* number is a musical highlight. Throughout, Jayne and Perez Jr. draw on their music video background for numerous visual flourishes, and the input of social media to the story is cleverly applied too. So while the original Lindsay Lohan movie is still superior, make no mistake: this *Mean Girls* is still fetch.

★★★★☆

Mean Girls is in cinemas now.



Paramount Pictures

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New Year, New Me? Sadiq Khan's Relationship With the Taxi Trade

December was heralded as the season to be jolly, and it seems as though the Mayor had become all warm, soft, and fluffy – at least where the taxi industry is concerned.

Man in black

When questioned by Caroline Pidgeon AM about the taxi industry during the Mayor's Question Time, Mayor Khan explained he was committed to concentrating on a new vision for the industry. This surprised many from within the trade, causing a few jaws to drop.

2016 action plan

It's no secret that when some politicians speak in the industry's favour, a proportion of the trade's workforce go weak at the knees and roll over to get tickled like my dog, Betty-Boo. The problem is she gets more out of a good belly rub than the taxi trade does, and it's fair to say that some within the industry struggle to differentiate between political concern and warm words.

In his 2016 Taxi and Private Hire Action Plan (a document so ancient that a hieroglyphics expert was employed to translate it), the Mayor said: "I am determined to create a vibrant taxi and private hire market, with space for all providers to flourish."

He also said: "London's taxi

drivers are highly trained and are required to meet the strictest safety standards. They drive wheelchair-accessible vehicles and possess an incredible geographical recall and sense of direction that only those with The Knowledge have. With the world's most qualified cabbies at the wheel, it's easy to understand why the iconic black cab is recognised across the globe and is a source of pride for Londoners."

I'd say with the exception of the first paragraph, Sadiq Khan is absolutely right, and you can see a copy of the 2016 action plan here:



At the time of the launch, the Mayor, stated that special new measures were being introduced to help taxis to continue to flourish. These measures included opening up an extra 20 bus lanes to us by the end of that year, and asking London Boroughs to consider access for taxis to a further 40 on roads they control.

There was also a promise to increase the number of ranks by at least 20 per cent by 2020, and the use of new technology to provide customers with information to help connect them with cabs quicker and easier. Taxi information to TfL's journey planner was to be

enacted by the summer of 2017.

Allied to the above, also from '17, up to £5,000 was to be made available to drivers who scrap the oldest and most polluting taxis. A grant of £3,000 was to also be provided towards the first 9,000 Zero Emission Capable (ZEC) taxis. TfL also asked the government to guarantee the 'plug-in car grant' for these vehicles, which would take the total grant to £7,500.

The Mayor's action plan also stated that from 1st January 2018, no more new diesel taxis were to be licensed - 'zero emission' ranks for drivers who pioneer green technology alongside a network of rapid electric charge points were also proposed.

A raft of other measures aimed at the private hire (PH) industry were to be brought in to enhance public safety, many of which were outlined in the Private Hire Regulations review that took place prior to this 2016 plan. These included a formal English language requirement for all PH drivers, the provision of driver and vehicle details to customers, including a photo of the driver before the start of each journey, and robust insurance requirements.

Other initiatives included quadrupling the number of

on-street Compliance Officers, with 250 more dedicated officers by summer 2017, as well as a requirement that PH drivers pass an advanced driving test before they can be licensed or re-licensed.

So, what has come to fruition so far?

The way, way back

At MQT in February 2020, the Mayor said: "There are now approximately 660 taxi ranks in London. This means we have exceeded the target I set to increase by 20 per cent the number of ranks, as set out in my Taxi and Private Hire Action Plan, published in 2016."

As of August 2023, there were in fact 714 rank spaces across London. The Mayor also stated that another 22 bus lanes had been made available and the taxi industry now has access to 95% of TfL operated ones.

Looking further at what the Mayor has delivered, the grant scheme mentioned in the action plan was brought in, along with the scrappage scheme. However, some within the industry have argued the grant should've been more generous.

The policy to stop licensing new diesel taxis from January 2018 has caused massive consternation, due to the artificial creation of an acceleration in the reduction of both vehicle and driver numbers. With a dearth of taxis available to rent and a new vehicle costing over £70,000 (excluding finance costs), it's not surprising that some of the older taxi drivers have quit the trade entirely.

February 2020 saw around 19,000 taxi drivers licensed in London, however as of January 2024 there are now 17,645. Worryingly, there are only 14,756 taxis left on the road - a fall of 6,944 from when Sadiq Khan entered office in 2016.

Looking at the performance regarding private hire, it's all a little patchy. As of April 2023, if an individual applied for a new PHV driver's licence, a speaking and listening English test would have to be done, along with a safety, equality, and regulatory understanding (SERU) assessment. With the current failure rate sitting at





an surprising 33%, the Mayor announced on 17th January that no enforcement would take place against PH drivers who hadn't met the SERU and English language requirements. A trial period is now happening to perform the tests in a different way.

The photocard system was introduced for the PH industry, but as for a robust insurance requirement we are still waiting, and patiently so for an advanced driving test. (Well, there's more chance of Admiral Lord Nelson getting his eye back.) The 'Drive', which was the taxi industry's driving test, was supposed to extend to the PH industry, but was dropped by the DVLA in December 2016 (source: On Route Magazine). Despite promises to find another provider to perform the test, nobody has.

New year new me

At December 2023's MQT, the Lib Dems' London Assembly stalwart asked Khan: "What future do you see for black taxis in London?"

Given the fractious nature of the cab industry's relationship with Khan, his response raised more than a few eyebrows as he expressed a commitment to developing a 'new vision' for its future, by exploring ways to reduce costs associated with vehicle replacement. The Mayor also showed openness to Pidgeon's suggestion of organising a roundtable discussion with industry representatives.

Pidgeon called on Khan to urgently revise the 2016 plan to ensure the industry's viability, highlighting the need for greater support in transitioning the taxi fleet to zero emission vehicles.

"Given the fractious nature of the cab industry's relationship with Khan, his response raised more than a few eyebrows as he expressed a commitment to developing a 'new vision' for its future."

She explained that, despite half of London's taxis now being zero-emission capable, the prohibitive costs of the ZEC models, which stand at over £70,000, were brought to his attention. When factoring in the 9% interest rate on finance, the real cost balloons to over £100,000. She informed him this financial burden is set to intensify as the 'plug-in vehicle grant' from the government, currently offering £7,500 towards new taxis, is due to end next year.

She concluded by telling the Mayor the financial strain doesn't stop at the vehicle purchase price

either. Taxi drivers who have transitioned to electric vehicles face the added pressure of rising energy costs. According to the RAC's Charge Watch, as those relying on public rapid and ultra-rapid charging points have seen a 50% increase in prices over the past year alone.

Change of heart or looming election?

So, why the perceived change of mindset? Could it be because there is a mayoral election on 2nd May 2024, or is there a thawing of hostilities? (Answers on a postcard please.)

With the polls showing a massive 27 point lead (as of 21st November 2023) over his nearest rival, it's hard to see why the Mayor would change tack. Perhaps this really is a case of new year, new me. **TAXI**



Telecom Tips: How To Keep Your Costs Down

More price hikes mean your money needs to go even further, but Emma is on hand to offer some helpful financial advice.

Money matters

Millions of broadband, landline and mobile phone customers will see their bill go up this spring - often by more than the rate of inflation.

Some households could see price hikes of up to 7.9% under rules that allow telecoms firms to hike bills mid-contract by more than the rate of inflation.

What you need to know

Most of the biggest broadband and mobile providers use either the December Consumer Prices Index (CPI) or the January Retail Prices Index (RPI) rates of inflation to calculate their rises.

The December CPI figure - 4% - has already been published so we now know the exact price hikes many providers will implement.

For example, most *BT* broadband, landline, paid TV and mobile users will see their bill go up by 7.9%. The main exceptions to this are *BT* packages designed for people on benefits - these prices will stay the same.

EE, *Three*, *Vodafone* and *Plusnet* will also all increase prices by 7.9% for most broadband, landline, and mobile customers. However, some *Plusnet* customers on a fixed price contract will only see call costs go up, not the cost of their standard package.

Sky will hike mobile bills for customers out of contract by 3%, but those who are still in their minimum contract period won't see a change.

Most *TalkTalk* broadband and landline bills will go up by 7%. The key exception to this are people on *TalkTalk's* Fixed Price Plus tariff - those still in their minimum contract period won't see a change, while those out of contract will see their bills increase by 4%.

Virgin Media O2 (they're now the same company) has not announced price rises yet as the company uses the January RPI figure (published in February) to calculate bill increases.



Out of contract?

The important thing to know about landline, broadband and mobile phone contracts is whether you are still in your minimum term or not. When you take out a telecoms deal it's normally for 12 or 18 months, or sometimes even two years.

During this time, you usually can't switch providers or exit the deal without paying a penalty. But once the minimum contract is up, you're free to shop around and switch to a better deal.

Virgin Media customers in particular should keep an eye on when their minimum term expires, as the monthly payment jump can be eye-watering.

Shop around

If you're out of contract, use a price comparison site such as *Uswitch* or *MoneySuperMarket* to compare deals from other providers. There are plenty of choices out there, so take a little time to research.

Using the same supplier for your landline, broadband and paid TV channels is known as 'bundling' - and can save you a lot of money.

You could also save by ditching

your landline and using your mobile for all calls.

If you're happy with your current supplier but not the price, try and negotiate a better deal. It's common to haggle with both broadband/landline firms and mobile networks - just ask to speak to their customer retention team and usually they will connect you to someone who will help.

Social tariffs

If you're on certain benefits, you might be able to take advantage of special 'social' broadband tariffs.

These deals allow households on a low income to get a reduced monthly cost and a more flexible contract than they would normally be able to.

Social broadband tariffs start from £12 a month (*Vodafone*) but most cost between £15 and £20. You can usually pay a bit more for a faster connection if required.

Mobile deals

Most mobile phones are sold with a handset and airtime, and have a minimum contract. These deals make it easy to budget, but they can work out expensive in the long run.

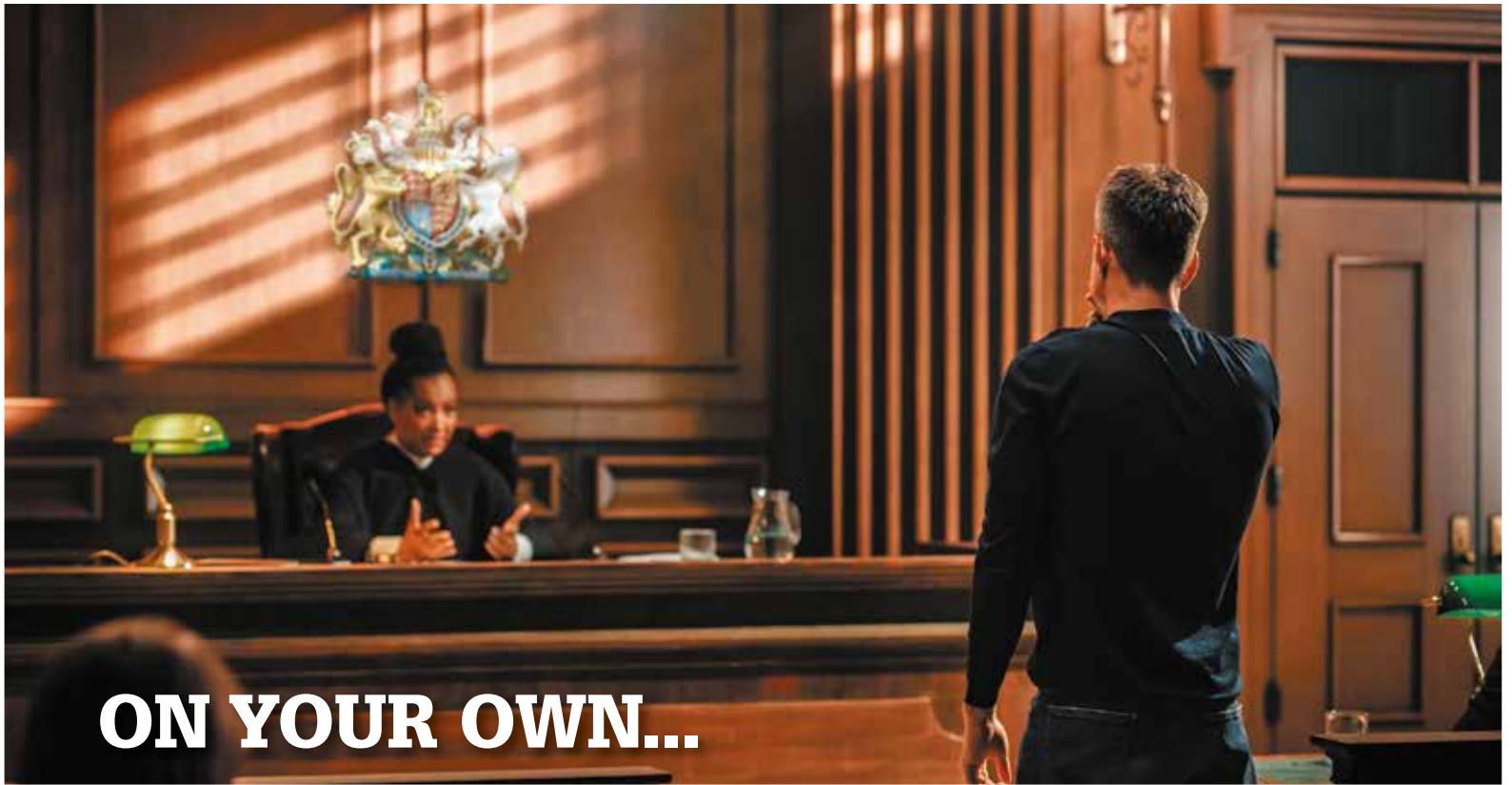
A better idea usually is to buy a phone outright if possible (or use a handset you already own) and pair it with a SIM-only tariff. SIM-only deals are just for airtime (calls, texts and data) and there's lots of choice for low, medium and high users.

According to **MoneySavingExpert.com**, most people don't use more than 6GB of data each month, so if you're paying for more, you're wasting your money.

Very low users might benefit from a pay-as-you-go (PAYG) SIM rather than a monthly deal. PAYG works by adding money to your account, or 'topping up' when you need to, so it's easy to stay in control of costs.

If you need a handset, there is no need to buy a brand new one. Professionally refurbished phones are often just as good, with ones in the 'as new' category often barely used.

If you're travelling abroad, check how much roaming (use of a foreign network) will cost you. Since Brexit, *EE*, *Three* and *Vodafone* have all introduced new charges for using data in Europe, whereas *O2* hasn't. **TAXI**



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As our plans for the new year kick into gear, we're excited to share that in 2024, there will be an even bigger focus on the Black Cab trade and taxi growth in the UK. FREENOW is launching several initiatives to help bring more work to Black Cab drivers and increase their earnings.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM FREENOW IN 2024

Improved on-car advertising benefits

On-car advertising plays a vital role in making the FREENOW brand more visible across the city. The more people know about us, the more passengers we get in the app and the more FREENOW work we can send a driver's way. Plus, with our upgraded on-car advertising program, drivers can unlock 12% commission (earning an extra £1.20 per trip)*. Interested? Call our office on 020 3935 2177 to join the program any time.

FREENOW Loyalty

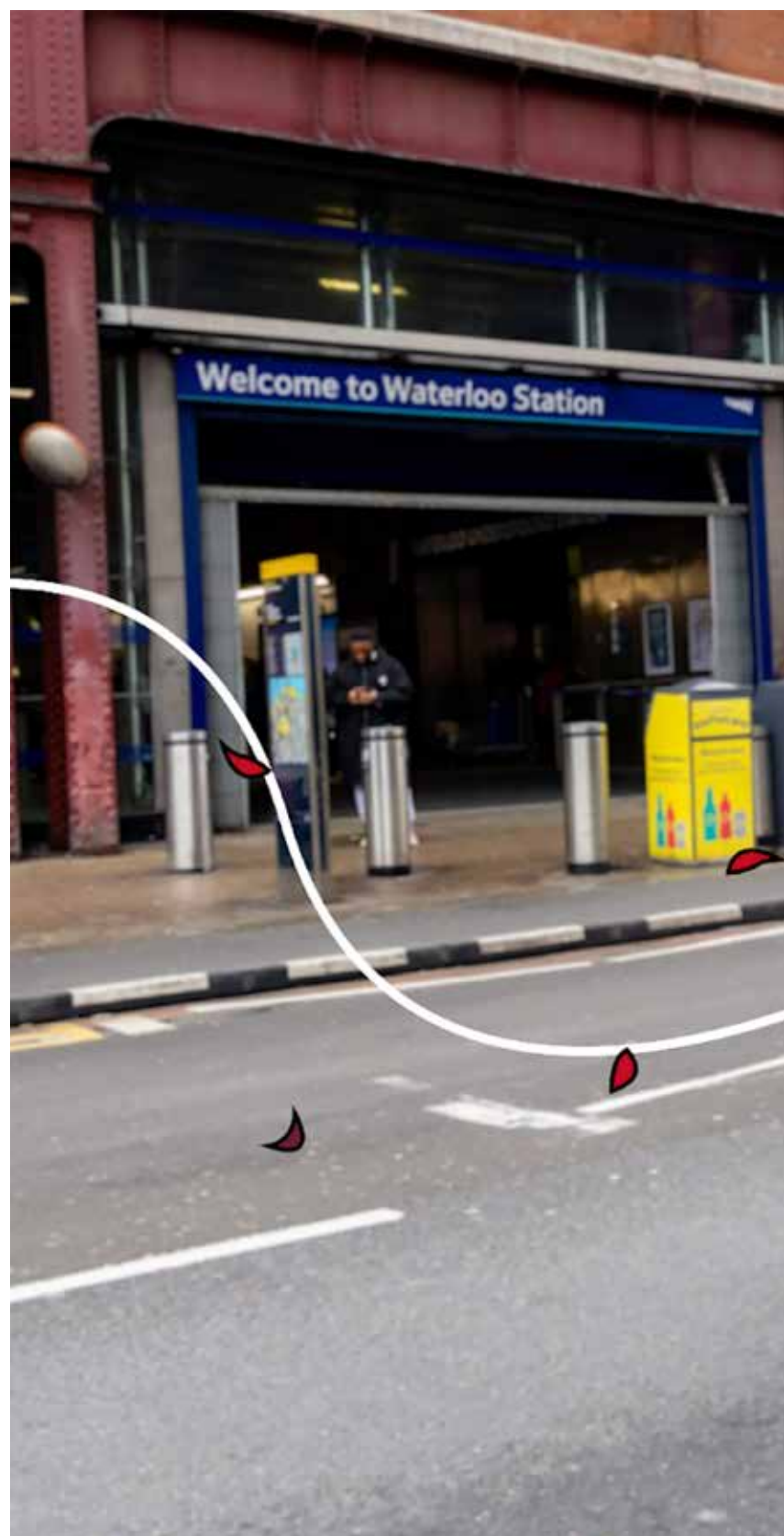
Great service deserves rewarding, so we're launching our new FREENOW Loyalty program. There are three statuses: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Drivers collect 10 points for every trip they complete, and the more points, the higher the status. The higher the status, the better the rewards. Plus, if you've got FREENOW on-car advertising, you'll get 2 extra points per trip so you can reach Gold status even quicker.

The rewards include first access to prebooked jobs so drivers can choose the jobs that suit them best.

As well as this, there's job-offer priority. This means that the higher the status, the higher priority of getting sent job offers, and the more work comes your way.

High-demand bonuses

We want to ensure that we offer our drivers and passengers the best experience with FREENOW. That's why we're launching high-demand bonuses. Drivers will be able to get up to £7 extra per trip* during times when there's a lot of passenger demand. If a job is eligible for a high demand bonus, this will be easily visible on your offer card. Areas with high demand are shown to drivers via heat maps on the app, which are updated every minute. High-demand bonuses will allow drivers to boost their earnings while helping passengers get from A to B when they need it most. On top



of that, there's no commission on these bonuses.

MORE BENEFITS FOR FREENOW BLACK CAB DRIVERS

These new benefits come on top of FREENOW's existing incentives for drivers:

Earn more with quests

Every week, drivers can earn even more with quests. These limited-time challenges are

different week-to-week and are exempt from any commission charge so drivers can regularly maximise their income.

Insurance coverage & more:

FREENOW offer drivers various benefits, making life that little bit easier both inside and outside of work. They include:

- Insurance coverage, so drivers are protected in case of accidents or sickness.
- Cover for parental leave to support drivers when they welcome a new



- child into the family.
- Deals & discounts on food, fuel, and more, to help drivers save over £200 a month.

Help buying a new cab

Thanks to our partnership with Marshall, a registered LEVC dealer, drivers could save over £2,000 when they buy a new LEVC Vista Comfort Plus Taxi.

DCL insurance

We know every little helps when it comes to cab

"Great service deserves rewarding, so we're launching our new FREENOW Loyalty program. There are three statuses: Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Drivers collect 10 points for every trip they complete."

insurance. So, as a FREENOW driver, you could get £50 off your new policy with DCL insurance using the code FREENOW50. Call them on 020 8669 4466.

Driver referral

Refer a new driver to join FREENOW and you'll get a cash bonus of £400 once they meet the trip requirement.

Want to learn more? Scan the QR code to find out more about the driver benefits at FREENOW.

***T&C's apply**



D-Day Veteran Celeb

On 12th January, Taxi Charity drivers, volunteers and supporters headed to Haverhill in Suffolk

We spoke to Taxi Charity Vice Chairman and London cabbie, Colin Mills, about Bill's celebrations.

TAXI What a wonderful age, how was Bill's party?

Colin: Everyone was sworn to absolute secrecy, as Bill thought he was going out for a birthday meal with his family. We didn't want to spoil the surprise party that his niece, Kaye, had worked so hard to arrange.

Around 100 members of family, friends and Taxi Charity volunteers headed to Haverhill for the party, which was held at a local football club. There was a huge amount of press interest in it and those who interviewed him before the party also had to keep mum.

When he arrived, he was met with a rousing chorus of *Happy Birthday* from guests, while cameramen and journalists from the BBC, the Associated Press and the Press Association recorded his entrance and reaction. To say he was surprised is an understatement! The absolute joy on his face was something I will never forget.

TAXI Do you know Bill well?

Colin: We all do! He is such a wonderful man who has always been a hugely important part of so many trips with us to Normandy and the Netherlands. He loves painting and many of us have portraits of our pets that he's done for us. He also loves singing and everyone looks forward to him entertaining us after dinner with a song from the '40s. How he remembers the lyrics I will never know. When he sang at his birthday party the room fell totally silent!

TAXI What is Bill's D-Day story?

Colin: Bill was a dispatch rider with the 6th Airborne Reconnaissance Regiment and landed in Normandy on D-Day, in a wooden glider loaded with six motorcycles and a 17,000-pound tank.

His unit was part of an operation charged with securing bridges over the River Orne and Caen Canal, so



Taxi Charity volunteer Colin Mills with WWII veteran Bill Gladden and his niece Kaye.



A self portrait by Bill.



WWII Veteran Bill Gladden.



Taxi Charity volunteer Colin Mills at Pegasus Bridge.

rates 100th Birthday

to surprise WWII veteran, Bill Gladden, for his milestone birthday.



Bill's birthday cake.



Taxi Charity cab drivers and volunteers with Bill Gladden.



WWII Veteran Bill Gladden.

they could be used by Allied forces moving inland from the Normandy beaches.

Based in an orchard outside the village of Ranville, Bill spent 12 days making forays into the surrounding countryside to check out reports of enemy activity. On 16th June, he carried two injured soldiers into a barn that was being used as a makeshift field hospital. Two days later, he found himself at the same barn, his right ankle shattered by machine gun fire.

I remember him telling me that, as he was lying on the grass outside of it, he read the treatment label pinned to his tunic: "Amputation considered. Large deep wound in right ankle. Compound fracture of both tibia and fibula. All extension tendons destroyed. Evacuate." Can you imagine seeing that?

Fortunately, Bill didn't lose his leg, but he spent the next three years in the hospital as doctors, including renowned surgeon Archibald McIndoe, performed a series of surgeries, including tendon transplants, skin and bone grafts.

TAXI How significant are the trips to Normandy for Bill?

Colin: Visiting Normandy to remember the friends that didn't come home is so important, not only for Bill but for all the other veterans we have the pleasure of supporting. In 2022, during the D-Day visit, we were able to take him to see the barn he had been carried to. The French owners couldn't have been more hospitable and

took him inside to see where his life had been saved. The emotion on his face and us being able to do this for him is what makes the Taxi Charity so very special.

Last year, Bill read a poem at the D-Day service, at the Pegasus Museum. I don't think there was a dry eye in the building:

*Come and stand in memory,
Of men who fought and died,
They gave their lives in Normandy,
Remember them with pride.*

*Soldiers, Airman, sailors,
Airborne and Marines,
Who in civvy life were tailors,
and men who worked machines.*

*British and Canadian,
And men from USA,
Forces from the Commonwealth,
They all were there that day.*

*To Juno, Sword and Utah,
Beaches of renown,
Also Gold and Omaha,
That's where the ramps went
down.*

*The battle raged in Normandy,
Many lives were lost,
The war must end in victory,
And this must be the cost.*

*When my life is over,
And I reach the other side,
I'll meet my friends from
Normandy,
And shake their hands with
pride.*

To find out more about the support the Taxi Charity offers to veterans or to donate visit www.taxicharity.org **TAXI**

About the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans

The Taxi Charity is run by volunteer London black taxi drivers and has been supporting thousands of veterans since 1948. It is the only Forces charity that focuses on providing fun and entertainment and arranges free trips (for veterans from all conflicts) to the Netherlands and France for acts of commemoration and days out to museums, concerts, or social events across the UK.

The charity received the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service in 2021 and celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2023, a remarkable milestone for a small, niche charity peopled by enthusiastic volunteers.

To fund and facilitate their work, the charity is wholly reliant on donations, grants and sponsorship. www.taxicharity.org

**WITH 6 DVLA PENALTY
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BE **REVOKED****



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Our expert officers and dedicated, in-house legal team will help keep you in the game. Don't get knocked out, scan here to join the LTDA today or call 0207 286 1046 to request an application form.

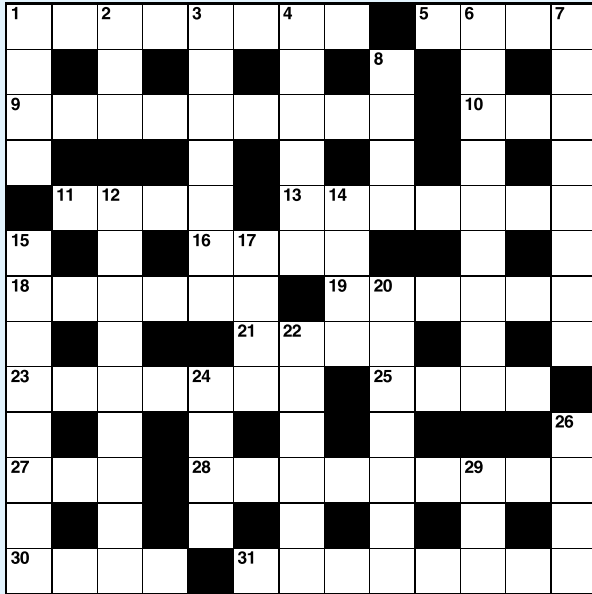


www.ltda.co.uk



Puzzler Page

Crossword



ACROSS

- 1 Rope-pulling contest (3-2-3)
- 5 Big march (4)
- 9 Kept to general custom (9)
- 10 Idly wander (3)
- 11 Hybrid of citrus fruits (4)
- 13 Child supervision facilities (3,4)
- 16 Sea crustacean (4)
- 18 Batman's mark (6)
- 19 Positive, optimistic (6)
- 21 Firmly against (4)
- 23 Drastic (7)
- 25 Elephant tooth (4)
- 27 Age (3)
- 28 Positioning (9)
- 30 Exchanged for cash (4)
- 31 Rustics (8)

DOWN

- 1 Discretion (4)
- 2 Colloquial term for inside information (3)
- 3 Merrymaking (7)
- 4 Spanish ___, warships of 1588 (6)
- 6 Etchers (9)
- 7 Remnants (8)
- 8 Swirl gently (4)
- 12 Chinese barrier (5,4)
- 14 Be next to, border (4)
- 15 Plotters (8)
- 17 Twenty quires (of paper) (4)
- 20 Arousing sorrow (7)
- 22 Scottish monster's nickname (6)
- 24 Completes (4)
- 26 Food items that can be cracked (4)
- 29 ___ Fleming, James Bond's creator (3)

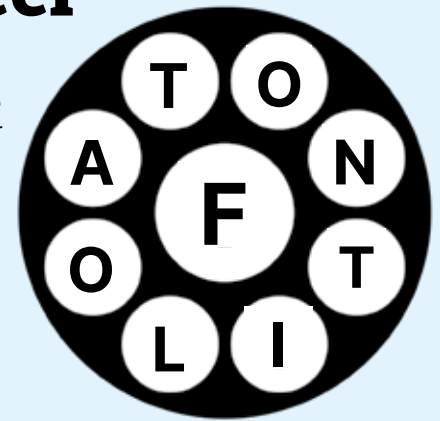
Sudoku

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.

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

Wordwheel

How many words of four letters or more can you make from this Wordwheel? Each word must use the central letter, and each letter may be used once only. At least one nine-letter word can be found. We found 13 words - can you do better?



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.

	>			<		
3	<					
2	<					
	>					

All answers to puzzler on p30

CABS FOR RENT



07957 465423
e16-taxirentals.co.uk

TX4s TO RENT

- Ascott's maintained.
- Pay by cash/bank/online.
- Mercs also available



SERVICES & REPAIRS

**De-commissioned your
TX4's and Euro 5's?**

**Earn more by selling
outside London.**

**We pay cash, collect
and drive away.**

**John
07702 554934**

CABS WANTED

● **All de-commissioned good quality** TX4s wanted. Instant decision, cash paid. We come to you. Also, white TX4 elegance wanted 07973 335 739

● **Euro 5 about to be** de-commissioned, Cabs wanted, TX4's and Vito's. Top Price paid. Call John 07702 554 934

● **We want your cab any condition** quick decision cash or bank transfer you decide, finance cleared if required – 07877 093 866

● **All cabs wanted. Tx4, euro 4, 5 & 6** also TXE wanted We come to you, any condition, very quick decision. Cash paid instantly. 07702 554 934

● **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 554 934

● **Looking to sell your TX4?** Too old to replate? Call James London based buyer for quick and easy sale – 07931 964 857

● **Thinking of part-exchange.** All cabs wanted any condition: plated or not, cash, same day collection service– call Roy 07956 293 748

CABS FOR SALE

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

● **TX4 Elegance Euro 6 2016 269000** miles full-service history from main dealer plated October £20,000 OHO 07788138316

● **TXE 2018, warranty 26/07, plated** september, just serviced in Jan23. 177k miles, £34,955. Call Alan - 07940305331

CABS FOR RENT

● **TXEs black no ads, Camden area** ring Steve - 07976729033

● **Rent Taxis, Euro 6 and also** Electric vehicles from £250 - £345. We also do repairs on cabs, call Nick 020 7700 1045 / 07951 661 430

● **Tx4's for rent full back up phone** Paul at Bermondsey Taxi Rentals on 07831 371016

● **TXEs, TX4s and Vitos available** from £260 per week contact Sabri – 07958973944

● **All Vitos for rent, full back up,** based in East London – 07872 504 604

● **TXEs for hire, loan cab available,** no ads – 07980288333

● **Euro5&6 vitos for rent, full** backup, prices starting from £230 please call – 07956211478



Get in touch



James Martin



james.martin@cplone.co.uk



01727 739 197

LTDA APPLICATION FORM

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 _____

Have you ever been a member of the LTDA before? (please tick) Yes ☐ No ☐Do you currently have points on your DVLA driving license? (please tick) Yes ☐ No ☐If Yes how many points do you have? Do you have any motoring or other prosecutions pending? Yes ☐ No ☐*Please note: We do not provide assistance for any matters that have occurred prior to you joining the LTDA.*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 this is confirmed I am not eligible to vote in relation to any form of Association matters. I agree that all benefits prior to approval of membership shall be at the discretion of the Council of Management.

Please note: We do not provide assistance for any matters that have occurred prior to you joining LTDA.

Signed _____ Date _____

29

LTDA Basic Direct Debit Instructions

Instructions to your Bank/Building Society to pay Direct Debits:

Please complete parts 1 to 5 to instruct your branch to make direct payments from your account. Then return the form to LTDA, FREEPOST, London, SE1 1PP

To the Manager of _____

Bank/Building Society Address _____

Service User Number

9 1 4 4 2 8

For Office use only

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

1. Please write the name and full postal address of your branch in the box (left)
2. Name of account holder _____
3. Account Number
4. Bank Sort Code - -
Banks/Building Societies may not accept instructions to pay Direct Debit from some types of account.
5. Signature _____
Date _____



This guarantee should be detached and retained by the payer

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.

You can now also apply to join the LTDA online, simply scan here to complete an online application:



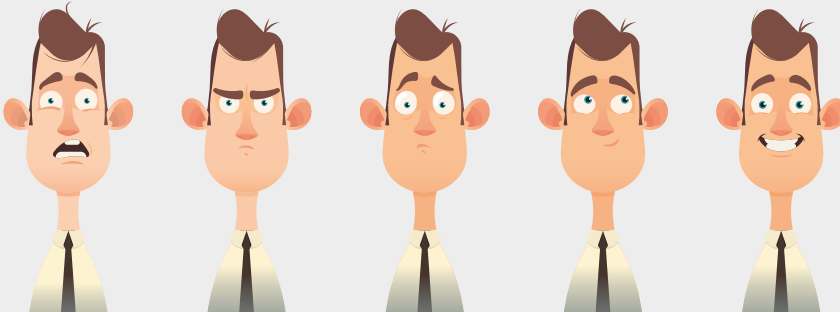


Cabbie's Cartoon



30

PUZZLER ANSWERS



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

Crossword

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Sudoku

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

Futoshiki

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

Wordwheel

SOLUTION: FLOTATION

All words: Afoot, aloft, aloof, fail, faint, fiat, final, flan, flat, flint, flit, float, foal, foil, folio, font, fool, foot, info, lift, loaf, loft, FLOTATION.

Word targets: Excellent: 20, Good: 17, Target: 12, Kids: 7



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