

October 2008



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by Brian Rice

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Call Sign

From the home of Dial-a-Cab International

**Steve takes Dial-a-Cab and Spurs to Uganda
to make some very happy young footballers!**





NASH'S NUMBERS

By Alan Nash (A95)

Following on from last month, prompted by Ray Sorene (A53), that there have been changes to Heathrow terminals. Excluding BA, here are the terminals by airline, plus their contact telephone numbers.

Airline	T	Code	Telephone #	Airline	T	Code	Telephone #
Aer Lingus	1	EI	0870 876 5000	Japan Airlines	3	JL	0845 774 7700
Aeroflot	2	SU	020 7355 2233	JAT Airways	2	JU	020 8745 0899
Aeroflot	2	SU	020 7355 2233	Jet Airways	3	9W	0800 026 5626
Air Algerie	2	AH	020 8750 3300	Kenya Airways	4	KQ	01784 888 222
Air Astana	2	KC	01293 596 622	Kenya Airways	4	KQ	01784 888 222
Air Canada	3	AC	0871 220 1111	Kibris Turkish Airlines	3	YK	020 7930 4851
Air China	3	CA	020 7630 0919	KLM Royal Dutch Airlines	4	KL	0870 507 4074
Air France	2	AF	0870 142 4343	Korean Air	3	KE	0800 413 000
Air India	3	AI	020 8560 9996	Kuwait Airways	3	KU	020 8745 7772
Air Malta	4	KM	0845 607 3710	Libyan Arab Airlines	2	LN	020 8750 4066
Air Mauritius	3	MK	020 7434 4375	LOT Polish Airlines	1	LO	0845 601 0949
Air New Zealand	1	NZ	0800 028 4149	Lufthansa	2	LH	0870 837 7747
Air Seychelles	2	HM	01293 596 656	Luxair	2	LG	0800 389 9443
Alitalia	2	AZ	0870 544 8259	Malaysia Airlines System	3	MH	0870 607 9090
All Nippon Airways	3	NH	0870 837 8811	MEA Middle East Airlines	3	ME	020 7467 8000
American Airlines	3	AA	0845 778 9789	Northwest Airlines	4	NW	0870 507 4074
Asiana Airlines	1	OZ	020 8990 9880	Olympic Airways	2	OA	0870 606 0460
Atlas Blue	2	8A	020 7307 5803	Pakistan International Airlines	3	PK	0800 587 1023
Austrian Airlines	2	OS	0845 601 0948	Qantas	4	QF	0845 774 7767
Azerbaijan Airlines	2	J2	0870 760 5757	Qatar Airways	3	QR	020 7896 3636
Bellview Airlines	2	B3	020 7372 3770	Rossiya Airlines	2	FV	
Biman Bangladesh Airlines	3	BG	020 7629 0252	Royal Air Maroc	2	AT	
Blue1 (SAS Group)	3	KF		Royal Brunei Airlines	3	BI	020 7584 6660
BMI	1	BD	0870 60 70 555	Royal Jordanian	3	RJ	020 7878 6300
Bulgaria Air	2	FB		SAS	3	SK	0870 607 2772
Cathay Pacific Airways	3	CX	020 8834 8888	Saudi Arabian Airlines	3	SV	020 7798 9898
China Eastern	2	MU	020 7935 2676	Singapore Airlines	3	SQ	0844 800 2380
Clickair	2	XG	00800 25425247	South African Airways	1	SA	0870 747 1111
Continental Airlines	4	CO	0845 607 6760	Sri Lankan Airlines	4	UL	020 8538 2000
Croatia Airlines	2	OU	020 8563 0022	Swiss International Airlines	2	LX	0845 601 0956
Croatia Airlines	2	OU	020 8563 0022	Syrianair	2	RB	020 7493 2851
CSA Czech Airlines	2	OK	0870 444 3747	TAM	4	JJ	020 8897 3700
Cyprus Airways	1	CY	020 8359 1333	TAP Air Portugal	2	TP	0845 601 0932
Delta Air Lines	4	DL	0800 414 767	Tarom	2	RO	020 7224 3693
Egypt Air	3	MS	020 8759 3635	Thai Airways International	3	TG	0870 606 0911
El Al Israel Airlines	1	LY	020 7957 4100	Transaero Airlines	1	UN	0870 850 7767
Emirates	3	EK	0870 243 2222	Tunisair	2	TU	020 7734 7644
Ethiopian Airlines	3	ET	020 8745 4235	Turkish Airlines	3	TK	020 7766 9300
Etihad Airways	3	EY	0870 241 7121	Turkmenistan Airlines	3	T5	020 8577 2211
Eva Air	3	BR	020 7380 8300	United Airlines	1	UA	0845 844 4777
Finnair	1	AY	0870 241 4411	US Airways	1	US	0845 600 3300
GB Airways	1	#N/A	9N/A	Uzbekistan Airways	2	HY	020 7935 4775
Gulf Air	3	GF	0870 777 1717	Virgin Atlantic Airways	3	VS	0870 574 7747
Iberia	2	IB	0870 609 0500	Virgin Nigeria	3	VK	0844 412 1788
Icelandair	1	FI	0870 787 4020	Yemenia Yemen Airways	2	IY	0870 732 3213
Iran Air	3	IR	020 8759 0921	Correct as of 15/ 08/ 2008			

Not enough room for 'What's On' this month, but go to www.nashsnumbers.co.uk/extras and you will be sorted! Don't forget all back issues at www.nashsnumbers.co.uk. For a FREE 70+ page document containing all the best of my articles plus more simply send an email to alan@nashsnumbers.co.uk with the subject as UID and the text just as name, call sign, badge number and contact telephone number.

from the editor's desk

TX4 taxis and press releases...

Well, when September began, I could never have imagined that over 1000 **Call Signs** being stuck in sorting offices all over the south east of England would come nowhere near not being my biggest problem of the month. Not by a long chalk...

When we began hearing about 56 registered TX4s catching fire and all the TV and radio news channels making it into a headline story, you knew then the trade was in for a bumpy ride. Amazingly, the last to officially know about the problem were the drivers. LTI obviously knew from the first cab catching alight and were looking at why. There was no need to inform anyone at that time because these things happen – rarely perhaps – but nothing is impossible.

By July 31, that one cab had become two and the PCO were informed. The trade weren't. When the number reached 7 in London, the story broke and suddenly the trade press began receiving notices, ending up with several from the PCO, LTI and TfL. They all gave a similar version of events and said that 56 registered TX4s would have to go for a safety check. When cleared and given a stamp confirming that, they would be ok to return to work. Then came a further press release literally hours after the 'ok to work' batch. This one pulled all 56 reg cabs off the streets immediately and came at 8pm on a Friday evening.

Press releases are one thing and we have no doubt that the earlier information was true at the time, but to pull all the 56 cabs at 8pm on a Friday evening giving them almost no chance of weekend work? Could it be that the PCO are showing signs of panic? Why was the press release with the suspensions signed by both Mary Dowdye and Ed Thompson. We never have two signatures on a press release.

I have no doubt that LTI will solve the problem, but I do not believe that our licensing authority and their bosses have come out of this well. The sooner the matter is put to rest, the better. In the meantime, you can read the story of Richard Hennessey in this issue. His burnt-out TX4 made number eight...

LTI and the credit crunch

Just when you think things can't get any worse! With the recent turmoil in the City, the HBOS merger with Lloyds – described as the biggest banking rescue ever – not only saved the Halifax and to a lesser degree, the Bank of Scotland, it also may have saved a worthwhile project from LTI that has already received worldwide publicity. The plan is to build a fleet of hydrogen cell taxis with financial assistance from Intelligent Energy and Lotus Engineering. The target is to be ready for the 2012 London Olympics.

The problem is that HBOS not only owned



the Halifax, it also owned amongst others, Intelligent Energy! Had that gone, LTI would have had to look around for another backer – and judging by the way companies are dropping, that might not have been too easy.

Black Mercs

In a month that must have seen Mercedes rubbing their hands in anticipation of TX4 drivers changing their minds on which cab they are going to buy, **Call Sign** has given a right-of-reply to a Dial-a-Cab driver who recently bought the Vito and who claimed that this mag was too anti-Merc with our view of it looking like a minicab/van. Several drivers have told me the same thing and even Chairman Brian Rice in a chat about life, felt that I had been pushing too strongly – although, as always, he gives me the right to say whatever I think.

Colin Salmon (N81), as you will read in this issue, loves his Mercedes Vito. I have put my faith into a new TX4. No it hasn't caught fire and yes, it drives like a dream. However, Colin tells this mag that his Merc also drives beautifully.

During our chat, it became obvious that whilst our thinking on taxi driving was very close, our views on the taxis we drive were quite the opposite. But we were agreed on one thing: if you choose to drive the Mercedes Vito, you should stick to the colour of black, which at least is the natural colour of London licensed taxis and does give the Merc something of that traditional look. The current in-colour of silver does nothing to help recognition and does indeed make it look like a people carrier...

PS. My DAB digi radio with the TX4 is wonderful. At long last I can listen to Spurs losing on 5Live without any interference!

No pump at Aldgate!

When I was young, just a few years back, I knew that whenever I walked past the Aldgate Pump at the junction of Fenchurch at Leadenhall Streets, I was leaving the east end and closing in on the west end. In those days, the City was a quiet place where very little happened and which closed at 5pm. Anyone

working there would be over 40, usually wear a bowler hat, carry a rolled-up umbrella and have the ability to whisper.

Nowadays the City has become an asylum where you are washed up by 35 and the Aldgate Pump is now purely decorative, because Aldgate is now also part of the City – and the way things are going, the only way you will be able to get to Aldgate is by the way I did in those younger days – walk!

See inside this issue for the real reason that TfL and the good old London Corporation are allowing Aldgate to become a no-go zone for motorists. And it isn't the official reason about creating open space!

Lou Gitlin

I hear that the health of DaC's former Saturday Night Fever man, Lou Gitlin, isn't too good at present. Lou kept Saturday night drivers entertained for hours on end during our time on voice dispatch and I sincerely wish him a speedy recovery...

Nanny!

I recently picked up the lovely Felicity Kendal. Perhaps most famous for her portrayal of Barbara in *The Good Life* and as gardener Rosemary Boxer in ITV's murder mystery series *Rosemary and Thyme*, she has appeared in a myriad of roles from Queen Victoria's daughter in *Edward the Seventh* during the 1970s to a 2008 episode of *Dr Who* opposite David Tennant and Catherine Tate. Felicity is a regular caller to DaC and whenever you pick her up, you can marvel at not just the fact that she still looks as she did 20 years ago, but what a wonderful British actress she is... but not to everyone!

On that last occasion I picked her up, it was just her and four very young children who I assumed were her grandchildren. They were going to a local Chinese restaurant and because children don't know how to speak quietly, I couldn't help but overhear the conversation – most of it revolving around what they would have to eat.

But the loveliest part was that to these four well-behaved children, this wasn't acclaimed British actress; Felicity Kendal, this lady to them was just Nanny! Such small things can create the biggest smiles!

And...

If you don't read the Financial Times, you might want to see the issue of Saturday October 4 when Brian Rice has a full length interview in the supplement. He is too shy to tell you himself.

And on that rather happier note, all I can say is that thank God September is over! October just has to be better and of course, the 9th is my birthday – but then I'm sure you knew that and have been saving up all year for my prezzie!!!

Alan Fisher
callsignmag@aol.com

Reflections Of The Chairman

Turbulent September

What a month September was! What with the financial institutions in turmoil and then the problem with the '56' plate TX4s catching fire, I am really pleased that September has now departed.

Beginning with the financial institutions; I still find it quite remarkable that companies such as Bear Sterns, Lehman Brothers and even Merrill Lynch have experienced such turmoil, it does appear that in the main, it is the investment banks that are experiencing most mayhem. Then of course you get the traders that just add to the uncertainty by exploiting the nervousness in the system with short term buying; consequently, people relinquish their shares in financial institutions forcing the shares to fall even further.

No doubt many people have made a great deal of money from the situation, but I am very pleased that the British and American governments acted so swiftly in order to help remedy the situation. Not only has billions of dollars been poured into the American financial institutions by the government, it has also helped to restore some confidence to the market. But with that type of investment, the American government has mortgaged its future for many years to come.

Although, as I have already written, I'm pleased that governments have attempted to bring some stability to the market place, there is however a part of me that feels that *the chips should stay where they fall*. In other words, if the businesses are so poorly managed and go bankrupt, they should be allowed to fall – but of course I understand that would not be allowed to happen due to the panic that would be instilled into the public at large.

I wonder what would happen if Dial-a-Cab was so poorly managed that this business failed? I wonder if the government would intervene in order to remedy the situation – I think we all know the answer to that!

So in the main, yes, I'm pleased the situation is being dealt with and many ordinary employees will not be losing their jobs. It was getting to a situation where I was dreading turning the news on in the morning for fear of what might be announced regarding the banks.

Anyway, we can now look forward to some really drastic cost cutting by the banks and others, no doubt they have already had a meeting and decided to attempt to regain their losses by cutting down their taxi usage and endeavouring to force down our administration charges!

As I reported last month, the last third of our financial year showed a downward trend compared with the corresponding period for the previous year and I cannot see a reason that would prevent this trend continuing over the short term. But I have absolutely no doubt that we will weather the storm, mainly due to the fact that we do not have any debt that has to be serviced, that will be a terrific advantage for us compared to others in our industry. Consequently, in the short



term we will all have to cut our suit according to the cloth, but what is extremely important is that the media latch on to some stories where the situation has improved – such as sales being up at John Lewis during August. It is so important that confidence is restored as quickly as possible, as a lack of confidence by the public is one of the main reasons for the downturn.

TX4's

As if the turmoil in the economy wasn't enough, we then get a situation where the trade is experiencing unexplained fires with the '56' plate TX4s. Although the vehicles

were being recalled, LTI could not find a reason why the taxis were catching alight, so at the time of writing all the '56' plate and even some 07 TX4's have had their licences temporarily suspended whilst the fault is being investigated. I have never known a situation like this and I am pleased to see that it appears LTI will be compensating drivers who through no fault of their own, could not work. It's a terrible situation for the drivers involved regarding their finances and I know it is easy for me to say, but they should try to look on the bright side because it could have been only a matter of time before a member of the public or a driver lost their life due to the fault with the vehicle.

So at a time when all the corporates are endeavouring to cut back on their taxi usage, we get this bad publicity concerning our trade. As I've said, I have never known anything like it. I was even receiving emails and telephone calls from the PCO on a Saturday!

Then at around 5pm on Friday 26 September, the good news filtered through that the problem seems to have been solved – a lovely way to end not such a lovely week!

Brian Rice
Chairman, Dial-a-Cab

Stop Press Stop Press Stop Press

TX4 fire problem cured!

As Call Sign went to press, we have heard that the cause surrounding the instances of 12 early model TX4s catching fire has now been discovered. LTI had employed independent fire investigators, leading engineering company Ricardo and TX4 engine manufacturer VM Motori, to assist in finding the cause of the fires and as a result have now identified a range of solutions designed to stop the under bonnet fire those twelve early TX4s suffered.

LTI will now replace the exhaust gas recirculation pipe, fit a sleeve to it and install a heat shield over it. They will also replace the bulkhead noise vibration and harshness pad with one of a new design and material in addition to thoroughly inspecting all pipe runs and wiring for evidence of unusual wear and replace as necessary.

In an effort to assist in rebuilding driver confidence in the TX4, LTI will also fit a fire suppression system.

The work will be carried out at Mann & Overton on a day / night shift and will utilise thirty ramps and sixty technicians to initially rework approximately 50 vehicles per 24-hour period.

Drivers will be contacted by LTI in ascending VIN number order and requested to leave their vehicle at M&O for the day (or night) work to be carried out. Drivers will need to adhere to the booking system and are asked NOT to call M&O or LTI regarding the booking process. LTI have assured us that drivers they will be called in the VIN sequence described above.

BBC reports of a further 1000 cabs being taken off were completely untrue, although all TX4s will eventually have the upgrade done. The process is estimated to be costing LTI around £4million...

ALEX CHEATS DEATH IN FOG CRASH!

The remains of
Alex' taxi.
Inset pic: Alex -
relieved to be
alive



Alex Laird (O64) is undoubtedly lucky to be alive. Less lucky was his taxi, which has been written-off after a high speed collision with some street furniture - namely traffic lights, a sign post and the central reservation protective barriers along the A10 near Cheshunt!

Alex takes up the story:

"Over the last weekend of August and having finished my usual Saturday night / Sunday morning shift, I decided to stop for a quick bite to eat and meet a friend on Seven Sisters Road before heading home. As we looked out of the café window, we noticed the fog beginning to descend to street level, but decided it didn't seem too bad.

However, as we ended the meal and drove our two cabs steadily north through Tottenham and Edmonton, the fog began to get thicker. My friend turned off towards Waltham Cross and I tooted him 'good-night' as I continued northwards alone. Later he told me he almost missed his filter lane turn-off due to the density of the fog.

Struggling to see through the ever-thickening fog and staying on the A10, I crossed the M25 towards Cheshunt, a road I am very familiar with having travelled along it for the past 30 years! But on this occasion I became disorientated as to precisely which section of the A10 I was actually on! There are two sets of traffic lights on this section of road, after which it becomes plain sailing along the dual carriageway to Ware.

I was going at around 40mph when I suddenly saw the first set of traffic lights appear out of the fog and suddenly realised I was almost on them! Just as suddenly, I saw the lights were on red and that there were several stationary vehicles ahead of me waiting for them to change. I was only about 20yards behind the last car in the queue and did not have either the space to brake or time to think. I just reacted instinctively by pulling the steering wheel sharply to the right to avoid a multiple collision!

The taxi careered into the central reservation, uprooting a bollard, three sets of railings, a signpost and traffic lights. It all happened so fast. I had no control over the cabs' direction and was thrown around

inside it like a rag doll as debris flew past my window. The taxi finally came to a stop in the middle of the road junction and was a total wreck. Inside the cab, the scene was chaotic with my personal effects strewn all over the place. Anything that was not screwed down had moved. My MDT screen was smashed and the windscreen shattered. Yet thankfully, I was able to step out of that mangled heap!

I spent 30 minutes in the ambulance being thoroughly checked over, but apart from a few grazes and a stiff neck I was fine. The medics and police that attended the incident said I was lucky to be alive - let alone survive virtually unscathed!

I have no doubt that what saved me was the inherent strength of the London taxi and I am also grateful that no one else was involved or hurt."

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TAXI

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Jerry's World



Hmmm... If we put a net on the middle taxi's roof, we could practice ping-pong for the 2012 Olympics!

Brian Rice presents WCHCD with £4000

At the Company's 2008 Installation Dinner...



Brian Rice presents the golf cheque to Michael Davies

The Charity Fund for The Worshipful Company of Hackney Drivers has received a cheque for £4000, thanks to a Dial-a-Cab sponsored Golf Day held in July 2008 (see Aug **Call Sign**).

DaC Chairman **Brian Rice** presented the cheque to **Michael Davies**, Upper Warden of the Company, just prior to the recent Installation Dinner. This is the second year the WCHCD has held a fund raising event, which it is hoped will become an annual event.

The 2008 Installation Dinner was held at the Tallow Chandlers' Hall (Dowgate Hill), which dates back to 1672 following the destruction of the original hall in the Great Fire of London.

Two new Court Assistants, **Sandie Goodwin** and **Alan Roughan**, were installed as well as a new Freeman, **Stephen Mullen** being sworn in. The dinner also heard the first speech from the new Company Master, **Andrew Overton**. Andrew has a long connection with the cab trade and his family have been connected to it for over 100 years. Our congratulations go to him on this deserved honour

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The Great Call Sign Postage Cock Up!

Never in the history of Dial-a-Cab's in-house magazine have so many written in about the mag itself – or should we say the lack of it! At one point there were over 200 emails waiting on Editor Al's PC. Not to mention the fact that his phone was burning with subscribers all asking the same question: **Where is *Call Sign*!**



The "missing" Call Sign

The problem was that as far as Alan knew, they had all been posted – over 2000 of them, just as they are every month.

Then a further batch of emails and phone calls that had a slightly different tone, which enabled more of an understanding about what had happened. These drivers were in two camps. Some said they had the mag put through their door along with the usual mail, but that it had a yellow sticker placed on the envelope, claiming that the postage had been underpaid by 24pence. However, there was nothing that said anything about actually paying it.

Drivers in the second camp weren't quite so lucky. They had a card pushed through along with their daily post informing them that they had something waiting for them at the sorting office that had been underpaid by 24p in stamps and that there was an extra £1 to pay for administrating the envelope!

Most drivers seem to have gone and picked it up, which *Call Sign* took as a huge compliment. A few didn't and one phoned us from the sorting office asking for the £1.24 from the mag's editor before he would get it! He later admitted he'd been joking and paid the £1.24.

But why was it underpaid? That goes back to the printers who were in the middle of a name change from John Brown to PJB. The problem was that they couldn't use their previous franking machine and the new one was not yet available. So the post office had to issue stamps. The first 800 or so had no problem, because they all had ordinary stamps attached. For the following 1300, the printers were given special stickers that they were told would cover the postage – *second class large*. They paid up and left. Unfortunately the Post Office had cocked-up and given the incorrect information!

When drivers began phoning, emailing and going to Driver Reception to see what had happened, we sort of knew something had gone wrong!

They may have cocked-up, but at least the Post Office did the decent thing and held their hands up. As a result, *Call Sign* has been given a donation of £500 to give to a charity and decided to present it towards The London Taxidriver's Fund for Underprivileged Children's Xmas party at the Grosvenor House in January. The donation will not be addressed as coming from *Call Sign* but from *The Drivers of Dial-a-Cab*.

The Fund's Chairman, **David Lessman (D19)**, told us that the donation was very much appreciated and asked us to thank all those drivers that had paid the £1.24 and not claimed it back, leaving them the complete £500.

Our thanks to PJB for paying the cheque rather than leaving us to chase the PO.

Ron Yarbrough

Views on life as seen through the eyes of David Kupler (Y74) at...

Kupkake's Korner



One strike and you're out...?

This new rule says we cannot refuse, to accept uneconomical 'hikes', yet Rickshaw touts can pick and choose and charge whatever they like!

How can it be that licensed taxis must work within such laws, yet Rickshaw touts can ply their 'trade'... This rule is surely flawed!

Soho is overrun with these scum and the streets that once were ours, are impossible to use on runs it's all turned very sour!

They park on ranks, they fill bus lanes they slow the traffic flow; some have no lights, most have no brains yet no one wants to know!

TfL can't or won't pursue nor apparently will the Met! But if you dare stop to 'interview' you know what you could get!

To loose your Bill for one long year is unjust and excessive, a punishment far too severe - draconian and repressive!

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LTDA "LOOKING FOR FIRE COMPENSATION"

The Licensed Taxi Drivers Association has said it is unhappy about the length of time the investigation had taken in attempting to find out why 12 TX4 taxis had self-ignited. The organisation added they "...would pursue those responsible for compensation and this could include LTI, the retailers and possibly Manganese Bronze and the finance companies." The LTDA said any claim could be significant. It has been estimated that should the trade's biggest organisation pursue the claim in full, Manganese Bronze could face a liability of more than £30million. With its last set of half year figures (to Jan 31) showing pre-tax profits of just £1.5m on turnover of £43m, it could have an horrendous impact on the trade. MB chief executive, John Russell claimed they did not know yet whether the problem would have a material impact on its business.

Mr Russell said that the investigation they had launched would establish responsibility for the fires and if and how compensation would be dispensed, but he said the company would accept responsibility for warrantee claims. He added that driver's loss of earnings could be covered by the company's insurance but went on to say that he would expect drivers to do their best to minimise losses by sharing cabs or renting replacements where possible rather than not work. The City seems to believe that the problem will be sorted out, with very little movement in the Manganese share price which has hovered just below 300p for some time.



Andrew Overton with Brian Rice on a recent visit to DaC House

"It is a great honour to be elected new Master of the *Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers*. Although I am not a taxi driver, I have been involved with the taxi trade for 39 years and I enjoy my work, meeting many wonderful people. My family has been part of the taxi trade for over a hundred years; **Mann & Overton** was founded by my grandfather in 1899. In 1906 our family business began selling taxis as the *Conditions of Fitness* began for motorised taxis. Mr Mann died in

SMILE



A little old lady went to the doctor and explained how she had a rather delicate problem with excessive wind.

"It really doesn't bother me too much," she said "they never smell and are always silent. As a matter of fact, I've passed wind at least 20 times since I've been here in your surgery, but you wouldn't have known because they don't smell and are silent."

"I see" said her doctor, "take these pills and come back to see me next week."

The following week, the lady went back to the surgery in a rather distressed state.

"Doctor" she said, "I don't know what you gave me, but now my wind smells awful!"

"Are they still silent?" asked her GP.

"Well, yes" replied the elderly patient.

"Good" said the doctor, "we've cleared up your sinuses, now let's work on your hearing..."

Danny was driving down the road until he was flashed by a police car and pulled over.

"Your wife fell out of your car nearly five miles back" said the policeman.

"Thank goodness for that" said Danny, "I thought I'd gone deaf!"

A man walked into a bar and ordered three triple brandies. The barman duly served him and the customer immediately downed all three together.

"You know" said the customer, "as wonderful as this stuff is, I really shouldn't be drinking it considering what I've got."

"What have you got?" asks the barman sympathetically.

"80 pence..."

Andrew Overton on becoming WCHCD Master

1908, so it has been a bit of an Overton affair ever since!

Back in those early days the growth of the taxi trade was quite remarkable, especially when the motor cab took over from horse drawn hackney carriages. In 1903 there were 10,000 hackneys, all horse drawn. By 1914, 7,000 of these had been converted to motorised taxis, so it was huge period of change. There were many makes and models in those early days - most of them being European, so it is surprising to think that the fleet of London has only doubled in a hundred years. The wars, of course, caused big drops in the fleet size and our present fleet of just over 20,000 has grown from just 4,000 in 1945.

This trade has many talented and dedicated people who over the years have seen through all the changes and challenges to keep our trade strong and maintain driver's earnings. I have no doubt that this is still the case and indeed we are honoured to have so many of them as members of our Worshipful Company. Just as the trade accepted change in the past, so we will in the future.

I am delighted to be going on *The Magical Taxi Tour* to Disneyland Paris this year in my role as Master. This is the 15th annual trip, which has brought happiness to so many children and I feel privileged to be a part of this year's trip. *The Magical Taxi Tour* charity is just one part of our Company and the trip puts London's taxi trade in the minds of so many who are suffering from debilitating illnesses and their families.

On the road to becoming Master, I have sat on various Company committees and become involved in many different aspects of the Company. Livery Companies stretch back even further than my own family's involvement in the taxi trade and that makes being Master even more special. The membership is far reaching with all sorts of different people involved, although the majority of members are indeed licensed taxi drivers. The City plays an important role in London life and taxis that transport passengers around, not only in the City but the rest of the capital, are an important part of everyday life. That is why I am so delighted to be Master this year and I look forward to meeting those from other Livery Companies during this period. I also look forward to processing at the Election of the Lord Mayor and taking part in the Lord Mayor's Show. For me *The Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers* shows all that is good about the trade, from charitable events and endeavours, through to the Education Committee and the Cab Guiding Course and not forgetting the social fellowship one gains from belonging to such an organisation. With the future of the Company in the hands of my Wardens and Court of Assistants and supported by our excellent Clerk, I am sure the WCHCD will continue to prosper for years to come."

If you would like to know more about the Company, please do not hesitate to contact our Clerk, Mary Whitworth, on 01494 765922.

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"May 10 2008 was going to be one of my best sporting moments of my life. I was going to join the elite few that had graced the hallowed turf at the Emirates Stadium, home of my beloved Arsenal Football Club. Sadly for me, it didn't quite turn out that way..."

The football consisted of eight teams, four in each group, with the winners of each group to play in the final.

Once entering the ground, we got changed in the away team dressing room. Dressing room? The size of it was more reminiscent of a ballroom - it was vast with 4 foot gaps between each clothes peg! Then my team made the walk from the dressing room and up the steep slope to the tunnel entrance, which then leads onto the pitch. As you stare out of the tunnel, the view is akin to looking at an emerald green carpet. Not one blade of grass out of place - sheer magic. Then as we walked onto the pitch, my moulded boots sunk into the lush grass as if I were on a thick shag pile carpet.

We would be playing three 20 minute group games and kicked off in blazing sunshine with the stadium temperature up in the high 70s. After five minutes of running round like a headless chicken, it began to feel more like 100 degrees! In no time, the 20 minutes was up and the game ended in a 1-1 draw.

Our second match saw us take an early lead; I was just getting my third wind when I suddenly turned on a sixpence (perhaps more like an old cart horse) and headed for goal, when a very loud pop came from my leg that could be heard by everyone within a 10-metre radius of me. It felt like someone had lunged two-footed into the back of my left leg.

As I looked behind me, there was no one within two yards and I then knew I had done something that was going to cut short my dream day. As I lay clutching my leg on that hallowed turf waiting for the physio to access the damage, horrifying thoughts entered my head and I could picture the wife wagging her finger and saying to me: "I said you were too old to be playing football and now where's the money going to come from to pay the bills!"

The physio immediately told me what I already knew - I had snapped my Achilles tendon. As I was being stretchered off the pitch, I took one final glance around the stadium and had just one thought - it was still worth it!

With eight weeks in plaster and fourteen weeks off work, I have now recovered and I'm back in that stressful cab. That day at the Emirates may have been one of the worst of my life - but I still maintain that it was also one of the best! And my wife was quite understanding - although I've now had to give up football - at least for the moment! If Arsene Wenger is reading this, the editor has my phone number and I am available!"

Darren Dennis (W65)

Dial-a-Cab driver Darren Dennis (W65) has run several half-marathons in aid of charity and is reasonably fit. But the day he played football at Arsenal's Emirates Stadium turned into...

The Best and Worst Day of my Life!



Darren about to leave his opponent standing!



It's the end for Darren as the physio says his Achilles tendon has snapped

GLA VICE CHAIRPERSON VISITS DAC HOUSE

Caroline Pigeon, who alternates with Val Shawcross as Chairperson of the GLA Transport Committee, recently paid a return visit to Dial-a-Cab House after meeting Chairman Brian Rice at City Hall.

Caroline is a Liberal Democrat member of the London Assembly and has been a councillor in Southwark for ten years. She often campaigns on issues such as strong policing and improved public transport across the capital and it was in that guise that she visited DaC's East Road HQ.

Caroline told **Call Sign**: "It was really great to meet Brian and the team and to see what work goes on behind the scenes. The volume of calls and how quickly they are dealt with was impressive, providing an efficient transport service for Londoners."



Caroline with Brian Rice

The last issue of Call Sign contained the incredible story of how Dial-a-Cab driver John Davis (V41J) put his life at risk by stopping at a 3-car smash and helping others to pull four children out of one car, before moving onto a second car and pulling out the driver. Any of the cars could have exploded and the children's father rightly described John as a hero, whose help went far beyond what was expected in a situation like the one he faced head-on. Without John's timely assistance, at least some – if not all – of the children trapped in their mother's car would have died. Now John tells Call Sign why his view on seatbelts has changed because of his experience that evening along Epping New Road...

"Firstly, can I thank *Call Sign* for the nice things it wrote about me, however, I would like to say that it was a joint effort between myself and two other men, in addition to two girls who were also involved in the accident, but who fortunately were uninjured.

The reason for this article to Dial-a-Cab drivers, our staff and anybody else that reads the magazine, is to bring to their attention one thing; if the woman involved in the accident had not been so considerate to her children by putting them in the middle and back row of her Ford Galaxy car seats and making them put their seatbelts on correctly - including the youngest one in the baby seat - this accident would probably have had a completely different ending. I have absolutely no doubt in my mind about it. Their seat belts saved their lives.

It was a classic example showing that it may not be anything to do with how safely you are driving, you never know what circumstances apply regarding the 'other' driver.

This accident has now made me sit up and think about when I get into a car; before I move I now make sure my children, myself and my wife all put our seatbelts on no matter how short the journey is. In my DaC taxi working, it is not really practical to wear my seatbelt in town. But if I am lucky enough to get a roader into the suburbs or onto the motorway, then I will now definitely put on my seatbelt.

Whilst writing of the accident, I would like to congratulate all three emergency services on their efforts that night - especially one brave fireman who worked so hard for well over an hour in order to get the children's mother out of the car. Not surprisingly, after succeeding he almost collapsed, so I hope this message to my DaC colleagues and their families makes them all think about when they get into a car – and buckle up.

Whilst I have the opportunity, I would also like to thank Editor Alan and *Call Sign* magazine for their support over the years in the events that I have been involved in – the most recent being my parachute jump from a plane in aid of Jack Pitcher, who sadly died a few years back. The article helped garner some great help from DaC drivers and staff and especially Tom Whitbread's Dial-a-Dream charity, which gave Jack and his family some great

Why my view on seatbelts has changed



John Davis: Why I now wear my seatbelt in the car

memories in Florida. Knowing the huge number of members and others that read the mag made me decide to try to put this message across. We've all been guilty – including me – of not bothering to wear a seatbelt because we're only going round the corner. I now know how important it can be. The perfectly imprinted marks of the seatbelts on those children proved to me that the strain the belts took undoubtedly saved their lives.

And Alan, I think that *Call Sign* is one of, if not the best publication, in the cab trade. My wife and I look forward to reading it every month. It works well alongside Dial-a-Cab which is undoubtedly the best radio circuit in London by far.

Be lucky..."

John Davis (V41J)

MR TAXIMAN DIES

The man said to have created what the world knows as the iconic London "black cab" has died. Bill Lucas worked for Carbodies Ltd - now LTI - for 31 years. He became their technical manager and was appointed to the board in 1965. Four years later he became the company's general manager, overseeing production of the FX4 taxi – the first one to have the distinctive shape. He held that position for 10 years until ill-health forced him into retirement.

During his time at the Coventry factory, Bill presented vehicles to such famous names as Prince Charles and Sir Laurence Olivier and even had a taxi made specially for himself with a cocktail counter in the back.

When he retired, Mr Lucas said: "There have been two landmarks in my 31 years with the company - the introduction of the FX3 in 1947 and the improved FX4 in 1969. In my opinion, they are the finest taxis in the world."

His son, Michael, said of his father: "He had a great career and helped to create the black cab which we still know today. He was also a very caring man and loved helping anyone. I know I am biased because he was my father, but he was brilliant."



A Bill Lucas landmark - the introduction of the FX3 in 1947

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BRIAN RICE: DRIVER'S PCN IS A DISGRACE

Call Sign's views on some of the PCNs received by Dial-a-Cab drivers is well known. Several even send them onto us to see whether we would like to write about them when they really do not deserve a ticket. While we can sometimes offer a view and occasionally print the story, rarely can we offer any physical help. That was until we received an email from a rather distraught driver. **John Shakeshaft (P52)** wrote briefly after speaking to Editor Al on the phone. His email said:

"Dear Alan, I rang you on Friday regarding a Westminster PCN that I was issued with. I haven't appealed as yet, but will the CCTV footage be useful for DaC? If you could view it, I would appreciate your comments."

John then sent the details needed for us to view the video clip from which several stills showing a taxi that was apparently parked on double yellow lines in Moscow Road also appeared. Had he not had a PC to view the CCTV movie images, he would probably have had to pay up as it is unlikely that he would have remembered the incident.

Call Sign logged in and sat down to watch the video. To say we were shocked would be a gross understatement. The clip, which lasted for around 90 seconds certainly showed the taxi waiting on a double yellow line. But 25



The Photo shows John's Taxi parked on Yellow lines. Yet the video shows passengers getting out and new ones getting in

seconds into the clip, you could plainly see the door opening and a passenger getting out and then walking away. A few seconds later, another passenger got in and John then drove off. The manually operated camera is then seen searching for a street nameplate and finally found one with Moscow Road on it.

Our question is this: On the Westminster website, there were 5 photos taken from the 90 second footage. Not one showed any sign of passenger activity. Surely it would be too much of a coincidence for that to have been just bad luck and **Call Sign** believes that it was a deliberate ploy to catch a licensed taxi driver. As we said earlier, with no PC, John would have had no proof that he was setting down.

With assistance from PCN expert **Barrie Segal**, we emailed Westminster, guided them to the video and within 30 minutes it had been cancelled. That's fine, but the question still remains why it was ever sent?

We showed the clip to DaC Chairman **Brian Rice** who called it an absolute disgrace and backed **Call Sign's** attempt at getting to the bottom of the matter.

Looking at the video, there is absolutely no doubt that the camera was being manually controlled and in all probability controlled by the same person who watches the lavatories at the north end of Queensway where the Editor was given a ticket as have

been several other drivers.












The spokesperson at Westminster told **Call Sign**: "Our policy is two minutes observation by a camera unless we see evidence of setting down, when we give five minutes to complete. I've looked at the video footage and it's clear, as you say, that the passengers are getting out of the cab. I'll have the PCN cancelled immediately."

Whilst we appreciate that and have no doubt that the person who replied – whose name we are not currently revealing – knows nothing about any "irregularities," we feel that the video shows that the same cannot be said for the person controlling the camera.

If we do not get a response, we will consider taking the matter further...

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On Sunday 7th September, the *London Taxidriver's Fund for Underprivileged Children* took over part of the Piazza in Covent Garden as part of their 80th anniversary celebration year and attracted many visitors to their site with a great display consisting of vintage taxis, tombola and a raffle stall, plus quizzes for drivers and visitors. Even *Cartoon Network's* lovable characters Scooby Doo and Four Arms were on hand to make sure the children got lots of cuddles and photos! The Fund told **Call Sign** they were grateful for the channel's continued help and support. The threatened rain kept off and a great time was had by all.

At noon Hon. Chairman, **David Lessman (D19)**, made an official presentation of 20 children's wheelchairs with a total value of £4,000 to Sue Dowell, the London Fundraising Manager of the British Red Cross and these were proudly displayed by the Fund at the Piazza. Sue thanked the LTFUC and said the chairs would greatly improve the lives of the children.

There was great interest in the vintage taxis thanks to Doug Cheshire of the LVTA and also to two drivers, Martin Hayter and Graham Waite.

The tombola stand attracted large crowds and the star attraction, a huge white cuddly bear, was won by a family from Melbourne, Australia, who regrettably had to hand him back, being too large to travel with! He was replaced with a much smaller bear for the long journey back to Oz.

The Fund thanked Costco of Chingford for donating the first prize of a flat screen TV for the raffle, while congratulations go to Barry Caplin on winning the Drivers' Quiz and also to Mr Betts of London N19 who scored a maximum in the Visitors' Quiz. He won a 2 hour guided tour of London donated and given by Blue badge driver Gerald Nathanson.

Speaking on behalf of the Committee, David Lessman asked **Call Sign** to thank the Covent Garden management for not charging them for the day whilst they raised much-needed funds.

Several days later, British Red Cross volunteer Nigel Gooze, wrote to the Fund:

"I received a call at 2pm from the Royal London Hospital last Friday with an urgent request for a wheelchair suitable for a 5 year old – one of their long term patients was a little girl who would only be allowed to go home for the weekend if they could find a suitable wheelchair for her. Thanks to the donation of new chairs from the LTFUC, we had a chair available and the girl's father was with me by 5pm to collect it. The relief and gratitude on the father's face will stay with me for a very long time. That wheelchair meant that he could have his daughter home and surrounded by her family for the weekend. You can't put a price on that..."

Many images taken on the day can be seen on the LTFUC website at www.ltfuc.org.uk.

LTFUC Fun Day at Covent Garden Piazza



One of them is David Lessman!

David presents the children's wheelchairs to Sue Dowell of the British Red Cross



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The Board of Directors of the **DaC Credit Union** would like to say a great big thank you for all your patience during this difficult financial time. What with work getting quieter, cabs needing emission systems, overhauls, tax bills and horrendous fuel prices, most of the regular users of the DaC Credit Union know that we have had to implement a queuing system on a first-come first-served basis. We have tried to adhere to a maximum amount each week, but it has been difficult due to those needing the money asap and our proud boast of never turning down a request for emergency repairs to get a cab back on the road.

The amount of money coming in each week is often far greatly outnumbered by the amount going out. As an example, for the first two weeks of July we had £32,000 in loans but £68,000 in share withdrawals. Coming back to us was £65,000. So you do not have to be an Albert Einstein to work out that there is often a shortfall. Therefore we have to try and be pru-

The Dial-a-Cab Credit Union asks... **Who Says Cab Drivers Have No Patience?**



answerphone, leave a message and someone will get back to you asap. If we have a member in the office, we try to keep their downtime to a minimum so if only one person is in, we'll turn the phones off for a short while to maintain your privacy.

We are sending out a letter to all members highlighting a few ideas to generate some more revenue into the DaC Credit Union. I've spoken to quite a few members about these ideas and they all seem keen, so with this encouragement we have decided to continue. Non-members can always phone this office for details. Can you please return the slip of paper at the end of the letter so that we know who to contact. For those who asked, our rollerbond suggestion was turned down by the DaC Board.

I hope you are all happy with what we have been trying to achieve since we took on the running of the CU and any ideas to try and improve things would be greatly appreciated. If any drivers are considering joining us, you can phone or leave a message on 0208 522 4502 or 4503. The way financial problems are beginning to hit, NOW is the time to join and start saving because you never know when you might need a few bob. Don't forget that Christmas is fast approaching and then there's the January tax bill. So come on ladies and gents, get dialling and make the Dial-a-Cab Credit Union even more successful than it is now.

Be lucky... but above all be careful out there.

John Riley (K38)

Vice-President DACCU

**Suite 209, Channel Sea House,
Canning Rd. Stratford, E15
0208 522 4502 or 0208 522 4503**

Campaign To End Child Poverty - October 4



**Chris
Parker**

Forty one per cent of children in London are living below the poverty line. This can be changed. That's one of the reasons I'm backing the *Campaign to End Child Poverty*, because I believe that no child should miss out on a good start in life simply by default of being poor.

It seems unbelievable to me that the UK has one of the highest rates of child poverty in Europe, despite being the fifth richest nation. I will be at the largest-ever rally to end child poverty in **Trafalgar Square** on **October 4th**, because I believe that together we can show the Government that as a nation we are no longer prepared to tolerate children failing school or risk dying from poor health because of their social circumstances.

The Government made a bold promise to halve child poverty by 2010, but with less than two years to go and without bold action this will not be a reality. The *End Child Poverty - Keep the Promise* event will see charities - including NSPCC and Barnardo's - unite with thousands of families to show their desire to see an end to child poverty. Now is a crucial time to show your support to end child poverty. One in three children in Britain are living in poverty, we have to change this.

I have signed an online pledge, which will be sent to the Prime Minister telling him that child poverty is not acceptable and I urge you to do the same. This small action will make a big impact. Even better, join me and thousands of others at the *End Child Poverty* rally and together we can show Gordon Brown that we mean business!

For more info on signing the online pledge of support, visit:

www.endchildpoverty.org.uk
**Chri Parker, TV Presenter and NSPCC
Supporter**

dent with your money. As I've said on previous occasions, we are the second largest credit union in the country per capita (shares per member) and we are very proud of that - just as you should be of this achievement because as I've also said before; as a Dial-a-Cab member, this is **your credit union** and I believe all DaC drivers should be members of it.

Why everyone isn't, I just do not know. Just ask anyone who is in the DACCU and they will tell you how much it can help you at a time when you may suddenly need help. It's so easy; money can be taken via your credit work, standing order, posting a cheque or even bringing in plain old fashioned cash! We take your dosh any old way.

So back to the question: Who says cab drivers have no patience? Members have been saying that it can be hard to get through by phone and again I can only apologise for this. Although we have two phone numbers, there may be just one person in the office at the time and lately it has been a matter of put the phone down and bang it rings again! So please keep your patience going. If you get an

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COMPLIANCE OFFICER'S REPORT

Hello Ladies and Gents...

Having spoken to a number of you over the past few weeks, it seems as though there are still a few drivers who are booking into certain physical and non-physical ranks and zones incorrectly. As you know, this is a violation of a Society procedure rule and is quite likely to lead to a complaint. There have been many terminal messages and **Call Sign** articles over the last few months relating to this issue and there really is no excuse and offenders will be treated with this in mind.

There are certain ranks that are continually monitored and everything will be done to ensure that the system is fair and equal for everyone. I would strongly suggest that if you are on a physical rank and your queue position is incorrect, you should inform the Call Centre who can easily check the loggers and GPS of drivers on a real time basis. If you feel further aggrieved, than I would please ask you to contact me and again, it is not difficult to prove when and where a driver was at the time of booking in or accepting a trip through the system.

W101 rank - Stratton Street

You will have no doubt noticed that as from Monday 15th September, this rank has been permanently disabled. It appears that since re-opening under a new name, the hotel - which is adjacent to the rank - no longer feel the need to run a fair allocation of work and many of our own members have complained that they will no longer use the rank for this reason alone. The Board of Management would never force any of our



drivers to use a rank that is not knowingly 100% straight. All account work in this area can be easily dispatched into W1SW and its back up zones and so long as service levels are up to their normal high standards, there will be no need to relocate this rank. In the end, the hotel will be the loser and perhaps they should do their own internal investigations. As a driver myself, I am happy to take the rough with the smooth, but I will not be taken for a fool.

Credit card hirings

I can't stress highly enough how vital it is that you are able to provide proof of a particular journey when you travel to areas where you are unable to print out receipts at the end of the trip due to the loss of signal. Even though you've had the trip authorised, without a signed receipt and the card number / expiry details imprinted, the payment is **not** guaranteed by the cred-

it card company. Unfortunately, giving a receipt to the passenger without asking them to sign a copy receipt for you can result in a substantial fare being declined by the credit card company. It is hard to accept that a journey done in good faith can be paid and then be taken away a month later - but it can if you do not follow the correct procedure.

There are manual credit card receipt pads available both at this office and Roman Way and I would strongly recommend that you always have a book in the cab for these types of journeys. Please remember the following points that will prevent non-payment...

* If you are unable to swipe the card through the terminal, do not agree to undertake the trip.

* If you cannot print out a receipt through the terminal at the end of the journey, you must obtain a signed manual receipt that clearly shows the card details and expiry date.

I have mentioned on numerous occasions that I am always available to help any driver who may have a query that could prevent a pending complaint and follow up on a genuine grievance. Please remember that if you don't make us aware of it, it may go unnoticed...

Allan Evans

Allane@Dialacab.co.uk

DaC Compliance Officer

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Please check out my portfolio on www.anjaking.com
Enquiries: email: anja@anjaking.com



FIXED PENALTY NOTICES FOR CAB OFFENCES...

And how you can protect yourself...

A new Bill received Royal Assent on July 22nd 2008, which will result in any contravention of the 1934 *London Cab Order* or *Hackney Carriage offences* carrying a Fixed Penalty Notice. The outcome could also result in penalty points being incurred and added to your licence.

If you do not belong to a trade organisation, you run the risk of suspension or revocation of your cab driver's licence, or those penalty points could even take you closer to losing your DVLA licence and your livelihood.

Now Dial-a-Cab drivers have an opportunity to join a scheme that will cover the above and in addition, any motoring offences incurred while working as a licensed taxi driver. This does not include Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) for parking offences.

The cost of the scheme will be around £6 per month and every member joining will have cover for up to £25,000 legal expenses. Membership also includes a 24/7 help and advice line.

If you would like this invaluable legal protection for your licence, contact either Ian Lewis or Dee Scott at Lewis Hymanson Small LLP and they will send you all the relevant information. You can telephone them on 0161 827 1808 or write to them at:

Lewis Hymanson Small LLP
South Central
11 Peter Street
Manchester M2 5QR

Lewis Hymanson Small LLP also have offices in London's Royal Exchange Avenue, but the Manchester office has all the details relating to the scheme. LHS have a wealth of experience in Hackney Carriage and motoring legislation and will be on hand to advise you and to protect your interests.

Ask any cab driver who has lost his licence how difficult life can become. This is an opportunity to gain complete peace of mind for approximately 20p a day.

Following LTI informing the PCO of a number of engine fires in TX4s with a '56' reg, a recall was made and all London TX4s within that registration range had to visit M&O in order to undergo a safety check. In addition to their mechanics, also waiting at M&O to check the cabs were LTI's top people from Coventry in addition to safety officers.

There had previously been 7 TX4 cabs with a 56 registration catching fire, but that was a small proportion of the numbers sold, so it was hoped that now the problem was being looked at, the threat of more fires could be eliminated.

Richard Hennessey (K04) has been on Dial-a-Cab for over 30 years and had a two-year old TX4 that fell into the category of possible fires. He was driving westwards and empty through the Euston underpass in a cab that he said had never run anything but beautifully. He couldn't imagine having a fire problem with his cab but all the same, was pleased that his M&O check was booked for the next morning.

As he came out of the underpass, he thought he could smell something but wasn't sure as London does have its occasional whiffs! Then his headlights picked out a swirl of smoke and it didn't take long for Richard to suspect what might be happening. It would have made sense to some to just leave the cab where it was, jump out and make sure he was safe. But Richard couldn't do that. He decided to go to Park Crescent, a few hundred metres further on, where he thought there'd be more space and less risk to passing vehicles.

There was then the matter of the two sets of lights – Great Portland Street and Park Crescent – which were both on red.

"I went straight through them," Richard told **Call Sign**. "Are you kidding! The smell was pretty strong by then and I didn't even consider stopping!"

Fortunately, there was a fairly large space on the nearside as he turned in to the Crescent. He pulled in and jumped out. Then he could see flames coming from the nearside, so powerful by then that the pavement still showed burn marks the next morning!

The fire brigade were on the scene very quickly and as **Call Sign** spoke to Richard to see if he was ok, we could hear the brigade officer telling him that if there were any more reported cab fires, then he would seek an order taking all 56 reg TX4s off the street. Within minutes, another cab was reported as having caught fire in Battersea, but this claim turned out to be groundless. According to the Evening Standard, that showed how jumpy the cab trade was. To **Call Sign**, though, it gave the impression of someone attempting to make a bad situation even worse. Why? We can but guess.

Call Sign was at M&O the next day and watched the queue of cabs build up. There was no quick way of safety checking them. Some went through in 30 minutes, others over twice that. But coming

Richard's TX4 fire makes number 8...



The remains of Richard's Cab.
Pic courtesy www.the-london-taxi.co.uk

were now cleared to return to work. Late that same afternoon, we spoke to TfL to enquire how long the PCO had known about the fires? They said that Penton Street had been informed on July 31, at which time the number of cabs catching fire was just two. They also confirmed that drivers that had been through the check and with a stamped book could return to normal working.

At 8pm on that Friday evening, the PCO informed the

trade press that because LTI had been unable to identify the cause of the fires, they were suspending all 56 registered TX4 cabs. It is of little consolation to those drivers that queued patiently and then still found themselves without a cab or especially to Richard Hennessey. Passed or suspended, he began the week with a TX4 that he described as beautiful and ended it with nothing...

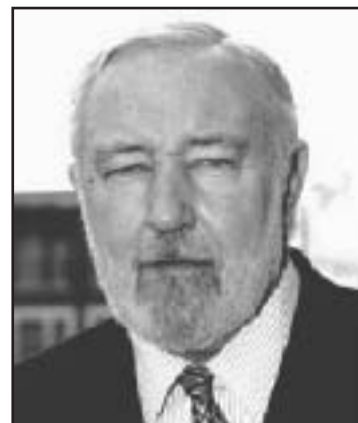
On the following day (Friday) **Call Sign** heard from both the PCO and LTI, who confirmed that those cabs seen at M&O

out of the other end, believing that their livelihood had been reinstated with a safe cab, made the wait worthwhile. The drivers were fairly good-natured, much of that probably being down to **Trevor Hattersley**, LTI's Customer and Technical Support Manager from their Coventry HQ. He attempted to answer driver's questions as honestly as he could.

ALAN FLEMING AND PCO VISITS

If for any reason, you have to visit the Public Carriage Office and feel that you would benefit by having someone experienced with you, Alan Fleming, the former Chairman of the London Cab Drivers Club, is available to represent Dial-a-Cab members on PCO matters. He has already successfully represented several DaC members.

Contact Alan on a.fleming1@tiscali.co.uk or obtain his number via Driver Services.



Worse than childbirth?

"It's worse than childbirth," moaned my DaCman Glen about a dozen times in the course of his Great Kidney Stone crisis. "I've read it and it's true." Of course he didn't really **know** that it was true, but pain blocks out rational thought and apparently we were talking about severe pain here.

Now this isn't like man-flu, which is quite endearing when Glen catches it, padding about the place looking silly in big slippers and a dressing gown, remaining hair messed up, a thermometer projecting from his mouth and an Olbas-oil-soaked handkerchief covering his nose. He tells me to stop annoying him, no he doesn't like *Lemsip*, it's costing him packets of money missing work, it's all right for me with my paid sick leave but taxi drivers don't get any you know, and no, he doesn't want a honey drink and why don't I just go out shopping or something and leave him in peace!

Well, misery loves company - but apparently not my company. At least not, he says, when I'm nagging and laughing at him at the same time - as if I would - and pointing out that the thermometer won't give a good reading if he can't keep his mouth shut.

The kidney stone was quite a different pain level, though, and it was a great relief to get the diagnosis at St Mary's Hospital A&E, as it's not life-threatening. They explained it was caused by not drinking enough fluids. Impurities collect in the bladder and they solidify into pellets if there's not enough water to flush them away. Glen, like most taxi drivers I expect, prefers not to have to keep stopping at hotels, pubs or public inconveniences and risking parking tickets to spend a penny.

Views on life, love and the laundry basket from the lady behind a DaC driver...

Back Seat *Driver*



that the pain was worse than childbirth. I declined to monitor him on the capture of the stone, as I think of myself as a fading beauty, respected career woman, charming companion and hostess... but not really a toilet attendant.

The next few days were up and down, then the pain stopped and his follow-up scan showed the stone was gone, perhaps broken up and washed out they said. All that little pellet of pain left behind was me going on at Glen to drink masses more water now. Even if he's prepared to go into childbirth again, I'm not.

Twice as many men get kidney stones as women, internet sites claim and for male taxi drivers it's almost an occupational hazard. As for so many things, I salute you drivers and respect what you have taken on - finding toilets is another of your everyday challenges we office workers just don't worry about.

Just one last thing, though, for the record. I haven't suffered bone cancer without morphine or been burnt on 90% of my body, or anything awful like that, but in the normal course of events, I promise you, there is **no** pain worse than childbirth. But please, every male driver who has read this far, including Glen...drink loads and you'll never need to make the comparison.

Till later...

Love Poppy x x x

Former Dlal-a-cab driver, Bob Woodford, writes a regualr column for
Call Sign from his home on Languedoc, France...

CALL SIGN EN LA BELLE FRANCE

I want to give a plug to a couple of half-decent services this month. The first one goes to a little firm called **Arival Airport Parking** - that's not a mis-spelling, there is only one 'r' in their 'arival', but they do offer a first class service to anyone using Stansted Airport who does not fancy paying the £9 per day for long term parking. That can work out to quite a bundle when you return to pick your car up - especially if you have been away for a fortnight!



Instead, you can drive to the Chequers Pub in the village of Ugley, 6 miles north of the terminal, park up in a secure car park for just £5 per day, receive a transfer to the terminal and a pick-up upon your return. Parking is fully secured and the free courtesy transport operates 24 x 7. If your flight is particularly early, you can even stay overnight at this charming little hotel on the Cambridge road. I've tried it out for myself and am happy to recommend it. Ring Alan - who once ran a taxi garage up in Edmonton - for further details on **07809 121569** or see the website www.arival.co.uk/parking.

While on the subject of flights from Stansted, we've had quite a few enquiries from DaC drivers since my last **Call Sign** article inviting property searchers to check out our new office in Narbonne, but two non-subscribers - fellow cabbies Phil Stern and Denis Berry came out a few weeks ago to soak up the sun while the rain continued to fall in London. Just to remind you; we specialise in the sector to the North of Narbonne, an area where the Canal du Midi is at its most beautiful, the villages are very varied and within easy access to the Mediterranean and of course the airports. Once you have decided that you would like to start looking, contact us either by email (Bob Woodford via woodford19@btinternet.com or Michael Bowditch via mbowditch@mac.com) or phone **0033 468 27 18 13** and we can send you details of properties that may interest you.

My second plug goes to an old mate of mine; we have together served the rank at Southfields during Wimbledon fortnight for more years than points Spurs are likely to win in the Premiership this season (sorry Ed)! **Reeds of London** have been cutting hair in Waterloo for over 100 years. Current owner of these hairdressers is taxi driver Russell Reed and the business has been in the family for five generations. The shop at 109 Waterloo Road, just opposite



Pic Russell Reed
the fire station, is in a good location for cabbies who don't want to venture too far from a main rank to get a haircut. Russ is well aware of the difficulties drivers may

have finding parking spaces, but once you have located one - most likely in The Cut - you can have your 1-hour parking meter fee of £4 refunded when you pay for your haircut! So come along, take a break from the traffic, enjoy a cuppa and return to work comfortable having had your quiff, perm or ducks-arse (remember that, Ed) sorted. *Ed's note:* You're pushing your luck! Appointments are not normally necessary and the shop is open for styling for men and women from 9am till 6pm. Why not give manageress Charlotte a call on **0207 981 9814**. Her stylists are poised ready to sort out your 'barnet'!

Be lucky, be careful et à bientôt...

Bob Woodford (Ex-P49)
Saint Genies de Fontedit,
Languedoc, France

Dial-a-Cab driver **Steve Bryant (Y41)** and NHS Practice Development Facilitator, **Jane Barr** – who as a nurse is in charge of 22 community hospitals across Devon – recently went to Uganda on something of a mercy mission (see *August and September Call Signs*). Jane's mission was to give advice to Ugandan medical staff and hopefully help extend the lives of their patients. With HIV and AIDS so prevalent in many African countries, Jane's task was a difficult one. The more practical side was to show how staff could re-use wheelchairs for young children – so often the victims of landmines.

Steve, although going mainly to help where he could, also cheered a local group of young footballers – many with severe injuries – from the Kampala Kids League by getting Dial-a-Cab to provide them with a set of Spurs tops. The kids are soccer mad and know all about the English Premiership. Steve told Call Sign how it all went...

"It's hard to know where to begin. The Ugandan people are very friendly, the climate and food is great, everyone has respect for each other and there are no stabbings! Will it last? I don't know, it's just a few years since it was all so different in a war-ravaged country..."

So to the beginning of our trip... the main mode of transport in the city is by motorbike. You just hail one, jump on the back and begin to weave in and out of the traffic. Three on a bike is a squash, but at 30p a mile what the heck! There are very few crash helmets worn on the very uneven roads and it isn't for the faint hearted. To make it worse, there is no rate three! I don't think our Dial-a-Cab drivers will be queuing up for work!

With Jane, I went to Mengo Hospital to see if any of the British ways of working could help the staff, overrun with patients suffering from malaria. I assumed that HIV would have been the main problem, but now drugs have become more widely available and seem to be helping to slow the death rate down.

There is also a decade of people missing. These are the 30 to 40 year olds who died mainly from HIV. There are huge challenges in health care, especially the basics of preventing and treating malaria, which remains the biggest killer in children under five years of age.

Next we travelled to Gulu where we were told the Dial-a-Cab football shirts would be most needed. It was a 7-hour bus journey away. An old bus with no aircon or suspension took us northwards from the city.

On arrival, we went to the local football ground and witnessed children playing in bare feet on a sports day. They had some football shirts, but these were old and following the game were handed back, washed and kept safe until the next match. Some had been washed so often they had almost no colour left.

The Dial-a-Cab 'Spurs' shirts were handed out for photos and then given back for safe keeping ready for the next game. You can see by the two cover photos how thrilled the kids were. I was told that if I returned in 10 years, the shirts would still be in use! So

STEVE: MY TIME IN UGANDA

And DaC's football legacy to the Kampala Kids League...



Steve and Jane visit an orphanage.

Inset pic: Winston enjoys playing – even with no feet. They were blown off by a landmine



from all at Gulu, we were asked to send a big thank-you to Dial-a-

Cab.

The Kampala Kids League is run by British born Ann and Trevor Dudley and some very dedicated local people who know exactly what the children need.

Jane and I then moved on to Murchison for a brief rest before travelling back to Kampala and visiting an orphanage run by the Salvation Army. What truly dedicated people they are! We took pens, pencils, paper, balloons, blow bubbles and clothes. Our visit and gifts caused much

excitement and my heart really went out to these kids. We don't always appreciate how lucky we are in the UK – downturn or not. These children have very little going for them.

Whilst there, I met the boy who was pictured in an earlier *Call Sign* playing football as a goal-keeper. Winston's feet were blown off by a landmine, but he is a credit to the Ugandan people for his sheer spirit. I hope life will become easier for him, but the country is so poor and his opportunities are limited.

I hope this gives *Call Sign* readers a small insight into what an amazing place Uganda is."

Steve Bryant (Y41)

GOOD NEWS FOR DARTFORD CROSSING USERS

If you are a local resident in the Dartford or Thurrock areas and use the Dartford River crossing regularly, you can now register your vehicle for a one-off £10 fee and from 15th November 2008, you will get 50 crossings free of charge and any thereafter at 20p.

However, if you do not live within the area and pay cash, then between the hours of 6am until 10pm, the fee will be going up to £1.50.

However, night time crossings between the hours of 10pm and 6am are now free of charge.

Go to www.dart-tag.co.uk for more details. If you get a dart tag pre-pay card, the fee remains at £1 per crossing...



New Charges – but free between 10pm and 6am

Richard Potter

AUBREY SITEMAN HITS EIGHTY!



Former Chairman Jack Russell (left), Brian Rice and Aubrey at DaC's 50th anniversary bash June 2003

For those who don't know, Aubrey Siteman - who on October 17 celebrates his 80th birthday - had been a licensed taxi driver since 1953 and came to ODRTS ten years later when Eli Solomons was just handing the Chairmanship over to Jack Russell. Three years later, he successfully stood for the BoM using the need for computerisation as his 'election ticket.' He became Treasurer for the first time in 1968. Barring one short period, Aubrey kept his place on the BoM until 1984, when he decided to stand down.

In 1989, he stood again and was re-elected, 22 years after his first election success. Between 1992 and 1996 Aubrey was the Chairman of Dial-a-Cab, but eventually stood aside and continued on the Board in several different positions and is still proud of the fact that he has - at one time or another - filled every BoM position within the Society.

In 1999, he had to decide whether at almost 70, it was worth converting his cab - as all had to at that time - into wheelchair accessibility. He also confided to **Call Sign** readers that he felt he had gone as far as he could go in serving the Society and suggested that the time was right for him to pursue other interests and to make way for some young blood.

Nowadays Aubrey still enjoys life, so from all those at Dial-a-Cab who appreciated all the time and effort you put into helping make Dial-a-Cab the success it is today, a very happy birthday, Aubrey...

Brian Son Loses 9 year Battle for Life...

The brother of DaC Board member Mike Son finally lost his brave battle against acute lymphoma leukaemia - an illness he had been facing for 9 years. The end came after Brian Son had yet another recurrence of the illness - this time worse than any previous occasion. He told his wife Julia, who was at his bedside, that he realised there was no point taking further treatment. He died peacefully soon after on Wednesday 17 September.

Brian was on Dial-a-Cab for several years, but was always keener on politics than he was on driving a taxi. The highlight of his political career came in 2005 when he was elected Deputy Mayor for the Borough of Tower Hamlets.

When Brian was driving his cab full time, he decided to take various part-time studies at the local university and eventually graduated with a BA Honours degree and became a teacher. Later on, he was elected as a Councillor for Tower Hamlets.

Through it all, Brian had that constant leukaemia lurking, but with the advent of new and improved drugs and by successfully managing the after-effects, he successfully battled the illness through to virtual normality.

Mike told **Call Sign**: **"We have always been very proud of Brian. He battled against so much adversity and came through it successfully so many times. He was my baby brother and I will miss him so much."**

Phillip Son, a driver with Radio Taxis, is a third brother and to Julia, his brothers and the whole Son family, we all send our sincere condolences...



A happy Brian Son after becoming Deputy Mayor of Tower Hamlets in 2005

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We are now into what should be our busiest time of the year and though there has been much talk of recessions and downturns, I don't think it's been as bad as some others. I began driving in 1992 and even though I didn't know it at the time, during one of the worst of them and it was only later that I was told of the *golden era* that had gone before and disappeared. In those days I'd be taken by surprise when approaching other cab drivers to tell them I had just passed out and rather than get a pat on the back, be told: "That's all we need, more cab drivers on the streets!" Also, when you did get a job, the public would be quite forceful: "You are going to Highgate whether you like it or not...!"

Yes, the days of earning your money in record time, doing a four-day week whilst taking a day off for golf and the public having to hire you for hours at a time because of a shortage of cabs, were over. I think that starting in that economic climate did me good because you had to graft and take what came to you and I still do that today.

Solidarity with Bob Oddy at TfL?

At last the cab trade is showing signs of solidarity with all driver associations regularly meeting and engaging in constructive dialogue. What's even more pleasing is that we now have a voice on the TfL board in Bob Oddy. In fairness to the Mayor, so do Private Hire in Steve Wright. But if we think that we are now going to get our own way, that TfL will do whatever Bob Oddy says on cab trade issues, we should think again. TfL board members are hand-picked by the Mayor to give advice in their particular fields in transport, but are not allowed a vote on issues that directly affect them. One man's voice on TfL against many, all wanting to get their own way, will be hard. However if Bob Oddy has the backing and added weight of 25,000 licensed cab drivers behind him, that voice will be much louder. Now more than ever, the trade needs to persuade all those drivers not in an association or union to join one. It needs those officials within the associations to settle old scores and stop point scor-

With so many issues involving the licensed taxi trade, DaC driver Richard Potter takes a look at some of them. His views do not necessarily reflect those of Call Sign or DaC...

A Dac Drivers Views on Life and Everything...



a good time to start restructuring to cement the future of our trade.

Mayor's question time...

So far the new mayor seems to be doing all right and has taken to his sessions, which include Mayoral questions. But it must have been rather unusual to see his predecessor sitting in the public gallery!

If you live across the water, you maybe interested in some of these questions. One was about the Thames Gateway Bridge and the other the Blackwall Tunnel northbound tidal lane. The Mayor is still determined to get a bridge built across the Thames to replace the Woolwich Ferry and to relieve congestion at other crossing points. At present, the plans on offer are not acceptable for various reasons and new plans are being drawn up with better consultation for local residents. Also, the mayor has submitted an application to the Met Police to lift the northbound tidal flow ban. This was brought in after a number of motorists were caught on camera overtaking inside the tunnel whilst it operated two ways. This has caused a major traffic jam every morning and you have to be through the tunnel by 6am to not get caught, meaning an even earlier start to the day for drivers. A decision is expected in the near future...

If you want to get in touch, it's Richard Potter in the subject line to Callsignmag@aol.com.

Richard Potter (T51)

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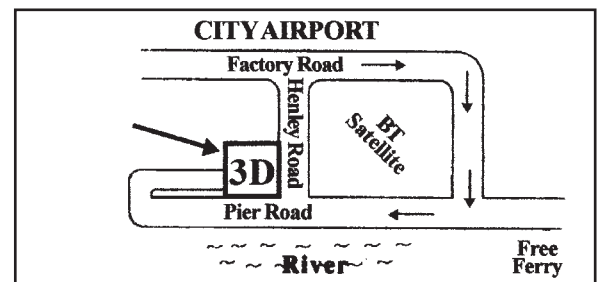
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A surprise visitor to Dial-a-Cab House recently had a rather unusual request: Mr Ihab Gohar, Managing Director of *Animation Advertising* wanted Chairman Brian Rice to give them information on how they could set up a radio taxi organisation in Egypt and asked if he would be available to go over there and organise it!

Ihab is the founder and has been MD since the company was established in 1989 and the driving force behind the company's various activities that include an advertising agency as well as being behind Egypt's best-known fashion and furniture catalogue, *Selections*.

Now he wants to move into radio taxis and was recommended to go and see the company that he had been told were the best in the field – Dial-a-Cab. And contrary to our headline, Mr Gohar doesn't plan to use camels, but is reputed to have ordered several hundred left-hand drive taxis from the new LTI / Geely factory in Shanghai.

LTI International Marketing Development Director, Matthew Cheyne confirmed to *Call Sign* that their Chinese joint venture with Geely had been given the Egyptian order and he already knew of the offer to Brian Rice.

Meanwhile, Ihab has appointed the former general manager of Phillip Morris cigarettes, Michelle Ward, as the new company's managing director and she brings along with her

Can Brian help with our camels...er cabs!



Ihab Gohar - wanted Brian Rice to go to Egypt

much commercial expertise, but her experience with taxis comes down to using them rather than running a company for them.

Hence the invitation to Brian Rice to go over to Cairo and assist their efforts once the taxis arrive and also to match the oncoming of the first radio taxi company in Abu Dhabi, which commences operation in October. *Call Sign* asked Brian about his views regarding a trip to Egypt, but it doesn't seem very probable that he will take up the offer.

"It is a huge compliment that they were told to come to DaC," Brian said, "but as much as I like nice weather, I think I'll be staying put! I wish them the very best of luck though..."

In 1957, then ODRTS Chairman (and Founder) Bonnie Martyn was offered a trip to Bermuda where he helped to set up a radio taxi organisation which consisted of putting Pye 'Reporter' sets into 12 Austin A55's. He resigned as ODRTS Chairman and left for Bermuda via New York on the Queen Mary with his wife. He stayed for a year before returning to London leaving the Bermuda taxi company with 50 cabs and a huge success.

LTI China Strikes Again: Now It's The Cyprus TX4

In what must be exciting **London Taxis International** no end, Cyprus has become the latest country to announce they would like the TX4 to be available in their sunshine island. At the residence of the British High Commissioner in Nicosia, Londoner Peter Millett, the *Charalambos Pilakoutas Group* who plan on importing the taxis to Cyprus, showed off one of the TX4s to the gathered press.

Marketing Manager Andros Skalistis said that there was a big market in Cyprus for the London icon and he was very confident of selling them. He added that the TX4 would be the only taxi on the island capable of transporting five people plus the driver and made the point about how the lives of travelling disabled people would be made much easier thanks to its wheelchair facility. "And," he added, "it also offers an extremely comfortable ride."

The MD of the group chimed in that various surveys had proven the London taxi to be the best in the world and that there was a real need in Cyprus for such a vehicle, which catered equally to both passenger and driver.

Peter Millett added: "I am absolutely delighted to see a London icon in Cyprus and am sure that it is the best and safest taxi in the world, coming with great tradition and a long history."

But then the first clue as to the difference in price between the London and Chinese versions of TX4 – albeit that the Chinese one runs on a petrol engine. According to a director of the company, prices in Cyprus will start at €39,000 –

around £31,500.

DaC driver **Alex Constantinou (N05)**, whose family are from Cyprus and who is a regular visitor to the Island, told *Call Sign*:

"I think it is a great idea with the proviso that there is aircon in both front and back as in our Gold version - and it must work well! Then I believe the Cypriots will love it!"

What this new sale proves is that LTI have succeeded far beyond their wildest dreams in their Shanghai joint venture with Geely although, interestingly, Cyprus drives on the same side as the UK and China usually builds left-handed drives...?

DaC's Alex Constantinou believes the TX4 will be a hit in Cyprus - provided the air con is good!



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but DaC drivers can get each bottle for £11.00 (+£6 postage).**

Or you can pick up a bottle at Roman Way for £13...

More info on 07763 962 422

If **Call Sign** had a tenner for every Dial-a-Cab driver who emailed or phoned to tell us about an article in the *Evening Standard*, the *BBC* and several other places regarding taxi driver's SatNav brains, we could open up our own medical facility!

The fact is that **Dr Hugo Spiers** from University College, London – the man behind the experiment – only advertised in **Call Sign** and on Dial-a-Cab driver's terminals for volunteers.

It all started in July 2004 when Dr Spiers asked DaC drivers via this mag:

"We need your help. Our research team at University College London are looking for retired and semi-retired London taxi drivers to help with studies on navigation and memory. This research will help advance our medical knowledge of how the brain allows us to find our way around and remember information."

Two years later, Dr Spiers department came back and informed us how things were going, but explained that they now wanted to investigate further. They explained that their previous work showed that part of the brain in London taxi drivers, the *hippocampus*, was different compared to non-taxi driver subjects. Part of the structure was larger and another part was smaller. It was subsequently suggested that perhaps this effect was produced by driving in London and not as they had originally thought, as a result of our learning The Knowledge of London's complex layout.

And as a bonus – although not unexpected to **Call Sign** (TfL take note) – we were told that in a series of brain tests, we outstripped bus drivers quite easily! They added that their next intention was to test taxi drivers aged 60 and over. Several DaC drivers wrote to us at this time and were used as volunteers. One of them, **Sam Harris (exD95J)**, told us at the time that even he hadn't realised how clever he was!

Now, another two years on in 2008 and with their third batch of DaC drivers, the University College scientists have uncovered evidence suggesting that we have an inbuilt SatNav system within our brains as against lesser mortals and minicab drivers! This latest group were tested via magnetic scanners using *Magnetic Resonance Imaging* (MRI) to explore taxi driver brain activity as they navigated through a simulation of London streets. As various suggestions were made altering the route etc, different brain regions were shown to activate as our clever drivers worked out instantaneously which route to use. Unsurprisingly again for TfL, no bus drivers were used as the only differences they know are the lengths of their bendy buses!

As the latest tests continued, our brains grew the longer we remained as taxi drivers and working our way through London's labyrinth of streets without the need for maps or manufactured SatNav units. Dr Spiers explained that he wanted to go beyond brain structure and to see what activity was going on inside taxi driver's brains while they were doing their job. Much of the info was gained from the 20 drivers on test by getting them to play the *Playstation2* game of *Getaway*, which brought the streets of London into the MRI scanner. After the scan and without any warning, the taxi drivers watched a replay of their performance and told Dr Spiers team

BRAINY DAC DRIVERS!



Dr Hugo Spiers - admires the brains of taxi drivers

what they had been thinking at each point.

The scans revealed a complex choreography of brain activity as the taxi drivers

responded to different scenarios. Going back to his original tests in 2004, Dr Spiers said the *hippocampus* was only active when the drivers had initially planned their route or if they had to suddenly change their destination during the course of the journey... *"Excuse me driver, I'm a bit late, can you take me to Heathrow instead?"*

When the drivers came up against the blight of our lives – unexpected road works (are you reading this Thames Water), the scientists saw activity in a different brain region. Yet another part of the brain helped the taxi driver group track how close they were to the end of the trip and brain activity increased as they closed in on their destination..

Dr Spiers has a great admiration for us as taxi drivers. His results showed him one thing but showed **Call Sign** another... Clients who try to save money by using private hire with SatNav units are losing out in the long run. Intelligence doesn't have a price...

COLONY CLUB: END OF AN ERA...

Those Dial-a-Cab drivers that have been around for more years than they care to remember, will feel a touch of sadness about the demise of **The Colony Club** in Dean Street, which is to be turned into a block of flats!

The private members club was once a magnet for the rich and famous and drivers dropping someone outside could usually be assured of a big tip because the celebrity – which most members were – would not want to appear mean or even worse, hard-up!

Moving on to the past year, the Colony Club could be more aptly described as a fleapit. The carpets are worn and heavily stained and any ambience once there departed years ago.

It gained notoriety in the mid-sixties when American actor, George Raft, who made a name portraying gangsters in movies before it turned out that his experiences with real life gangsters gave him much experience, was made the casino host. He was later banned from England as *persona non grata* because of those alleged gangster connections and 41 Dean Street was never the same again!



George Raft was the host at the Colony Club but was later banned due to gangster connections

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Rough Guide: *"One of the most stunning small towns of southern Italy, a gleaming white splash of sun-bleached streets and cobbled alleyways..."*

St Pancras 'shouts'

During the past month, I'm sure you will recall that Eurostar had serious problems with a fire in one of the tunnels. On that Friday evening (12th) we were contacted to arrange for a Marshal to be in attendance and have taxis on standby. My reason for writing about this is because of what happened on that evening, which found a number of drivers waiting for a long period of time without doing any trips.

Unusual as this is, this particular 'shout' has proved that with all the best will in the world, the best laid plans do not always come to fruition.

On that Friday evening, the call was received from Eurostar requesting a Marshal and taxis, because four French coaches were on route from Dover with approximately 200 passengers on board. Our Marshal arrived to assess the situation and found that Coach Road was set up with barriers in place for the taxis to pick up and that Eurostar staff were ready and waiting with clipboards and travel authorisation forms.

Talking with their senior staff, it became apparent that the two front coaches were on their way but had been delayed because they were going via Heathrow. However, there was no direct communication between Eurostar personnel and the coach drivers. Messages were sent out from our Call Centre to drivers and everyone was waiting for the coaches to arrive. It was anticipated that going via Heathrow would delay them by around forty-five minutes. After about an hour, everyone was becoming agitated when the coaches still had not arrived. The second two coaches were expected to arrive soon after, but there was still no sign of the first two. Eventually Eurostar made contact with someone who advised that the first two coaches had arrived and dropped the passengers somewhere near the station. We all knew it wasn't in the Coach Road where everyone was waiting. It can only be assumed that all the passengers found their own means of continuing their journeys and the exact same thing happened with the next two coaches. To date, no one knows where the passengers were dropped off.

This did cause drivers to be booked in to the NS1 zone for a long time, but hopefully they will understand that nothing more could have been done between ourselves or Eurostar to prevent this from happening. In hindsight, it could be said that cabs should not have been called in until the passengers arrived, but this would only have taken us longer to get the passengers away and would have caused more unrest, which everyone

Call Centre Chat



driver's gratuity. It has also been agreed for the mileage rate to be increased annually in line with any increase percentage set by TfL. Due to the very good mileage rate we have been fortunate to negotiate, premiums will not be offered as additional incentives to tempt drivers to cover the work. It will be the service that you, the drivers, provide that decides whether we keep the account for a further 30 years or lose it within one year.

Keith Cain**Call Centre Manager****Driver Operations Manager**

was aiming to avoid. Even though we believe this to be a one-off situation, it has been agreed that ES1 and NS1 will now be programmed as Ranks within a Zone.

They will continue to be used solely for train work from Euston and St Pancras, but while a driver is booked in they will be offered any trips in NW1E. It will then be the driver's decision whether they continue to wait for a train trip or take a job from NW1E.

House of Commons

As you are all probably aware, the House of Commons and House of Lords have awarded Dial-a-Cab their account again. It is very unusual - certainly in my 18 years of being a Board Member - that an account won via a tender was cancelled during the duration of the contract. This gives our Society a second chance in servicing one of London's most prestigious accounts. Therefore, when the Commons and Lords return from summer recess, we have to ensure we are ready to supply them with an exceptional service. All trips are calculated to a mileage rate and should a driver be kept waiting at the pick up for more than 15 minutes, then the trip will revert to a meter reading but will not carry a



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Call Sign**October 2008**

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Web Site: www.dac-callsign.co.uk

Printers: John Brown Printing 112 Portland Rd,
London SE25 4PJ

Design: Aldan Publications,

Tel: 07958 300 428

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Call Sign's opposition to the new **Mercedes Vito** cab is well known. However, there are others who take the opposite view. **Colin Salmon (N81)** was the first Dial-a-Cab driver to buy the new cab. In fact he was one of the first taxi drivers to put his name down for one with KPM as soon as he heard it had been passed by the PCO.

In addition to driving a taxi, Colin is a DaC Marshal and an ordained Minister in the Apostolic Church with his own following. He is also a staunch Arsenal supporter, but as the Editor told him, he shouldn't reproach himself for that!

Call Sign asked Colin to give our readers his view after his first few weeks of driving the Mercedes Vito...

"I love tradition," he said, "but when we talk about tradition in the cab trade, we came away from it when we got rid of the horse and cart, the Unic, Beardmore, FX3, FX4, Fairway and then the Noddy car... sorry, I mean the oversized Micra aka TX1. And of course, not to mention taxis with liveries and no longer needing the requirement of being just black.

No, tradition to me means what is around my neck – a green badge that I wear with pride. The Knowledge is why people get in our cabs; why they rate us as being so good and professional. For as long as that doesn't change, nothing else really matters. What I don't think is very professional is a London taxi driver with a Tom Tom on display in the front of his cab.



Colin in his new Vito

Ask the public what they think about the Mercedes Vito as being someone who owns one and hand on heart I can tell you that passengers love it. Our DaC account customers love the extra space - although it is only six inches longer than the TX4. And of course as you'd expect with a Mercedes pedigree, the ride is superb compared to any previous taxi. In fact many passengers are already asking me if they can order a Vito for their journey.

Colin Salmon: My Lovely New Vito Taxi!



Colin with Editor Al and his new TX4

Driving a Licensed taxi in London should be about giving a public service in addition to being comfortable as the driver – it's not about selling your soul, as the Editor wrote in his Editorial.

Of course it's wonderful to have tradition behind you, there is nothing wrong with tradition. But change can also be good and if you can't go along with change, you will find yourself being left behind."

CURLS DAUGHTER IN FESTIVAL HALL'S WIZARD OF OZ...

Most long-time Dial-a-Cab drivers know Curlette Villiers as just Curls! Although related to former West Indian pace bowler Curtley Ambrose, whose brilliant test match career ended at The Oval against England in September 2000, Curls fame as a DaC telephonist, back channel operator whilst we were still on voice dispatching and Night Shift Controller still continues!

Curls is now in her 23rd year with DaC and told **Call Sign**: "I've enjoyed all my 23 years here and even though the prime purpose is to pay the rent, it's lovely to work in an environment where there are so many nice people."

But now another Ms Villiers has taken the spotlight... Curls daughter **Stacee** recently played a Munchkin at the Royal Festival Hall in Jude Kelly's production of *The Wizard of Oz*. Starring Roy



Stacee gets Roy Hudd's autograph - one day he may have to ask for hers!

Hudd as the Wizard, Gary Wilmot as the Lion, Adam Cooper as the Tin Man and Sian Brooke as Dorothy, the show packed out the magnificent auditorium every night.

As for Stacee, she told **Call Sign** that she really enjoyed the experience having just completed a run at London's Hackney Empire with the Chinese Opera before being suddenly asked if she would like the Munchkin job.

"I was really surprised to get the sudden call," she

said, "and working with Roy Hudd and Gart Wilmot was really nice. They were so helpful and friendly."

A proud Curls added: "We think Stacee is a really talented and gifted girl. She has no stage experience yet is happy to get up in front of a packed theatre and sing. I think she may have her eyes set on being an actress and I'm sure she'd make a brilliant one!"

And so do we...!

Gordon's Memory of Knife-point Attack

While working the streets some time back, **Gordon Thompson (K48)** stopped for two suited and booted City gents. In their smart attire, with brief cases at their side, he had no reason to suspect the journey would lead him into a nightmare that would leave him mentally scarred...

"I stopped in Moorgate for these two guys," Gordon told **Call Sign**. "They asked for Stockwell and so off we went."

"It was mid-afternoon with good light, so I had no qualms about going south of the river," he joked, referring to the taxi drivers' mythical reluctance to journey south of the Thames! "When we neared Stockwell tube station, they said they would give me directions. As we turned left and right into unfamiliar side streets, I began to feel less confident about them and as we turned into a cul-de-sac, I stopped the cab and leaned sideways intending to lock the nearside luggage door. and it was then I felt the cold steel of a knife blade against my throat." Gordon paused for a few moments to compose himself as the memory



Gordon now locks front doors at all times

returned.

"My cab at the time had the opening central division and the first passenger had reached through that opening, knife in hand, while the second character came around the cab and

proceeded to rifle through my personal effects," he said looking visibly moved while recalling the events of that afternoon.

"They took absolutely everything," he said. "Not just my money bag and wallet, but my mobile phone and even my wristwatch. I was totally helpless. When they had gone, I was physically sick with shock. I reported the matter to the police and just about managed to drive home. I did not - could not - touch that cab for two weeks," he confided to **Call Sign**.

"Now, I make sure my doors are firmly locked at all times," he stressed.

As a result of that horrific experience, Gordon has changed his work pattern and is now very wary of street hirings, far preferring to cover account work. He's a new recruit to **Dial-a-Cab**, having recently left another radio circuit.

"And I am delighted to be here," he said. "It's much nicer, more civilised all round," he concluded, the grin beginning to return to his face!

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Every issue of Call Sign takes a look back at ODRTS history through the pages of the magazines of the time with a...

DIAL-A-CAB FLASHBACK

Flashback
1930

For a change, this month's Flashback goes back to 1930 and to a book called TAXI written by Anthony Armstrong (AA in Punch). One problem and one suggestion from a bygone era...

From the Hodder and Stoughton book, Taxi, November 1930...

A problem with the roof?

Though the 1929 taxi will doubtless remain much the same for years to come, there are sure to be improvements and changes in service. There has, for example, been passed by Scotland Yard a patent sliding roof called the S.O.S which can be easily operated by the passenger from inside and locked in any desired position from full open to just a chink. For some while only one cab, a Beardmore, was so fitted, but the summer of 1930 produced several more.

It is very likely that something of the sort will ultimately become a universal fixture, for the present type of roof needs improvement. It is most inconvenient for the public that a few drops of rain or a realisation that it is more chilly than one anticipated, necessitates stopping the cab while the driver gets down and wrestles with the hood. Moreover, there is no intermediate position. The taxi driver has to decide daily, in spring and autumn, whether to ply with hood up or down and though it can be altered quickly, many a crawling cab loses a fare to a rival behind because his idea of the weather was not the same as an intending passenger's. As a matter of fact, those who have studied London's traffic will tell you that there seems to be a sort of mutual understanding between taxi drivers about the seasons. One spring day all will have their hoods up and it is still winter; the next day as if by telepathy, all hoods are down and summer has come.

In Vienna, cabs have recently been put on the streets with glass roofs, the idea being to exclude draughts and yet obtain all the sunshine. This innovation is unlikely to be adopted in London because Scotland Yard would never permit it due to the added danger in case of accident. Anyone who has been young can probably think of another reason why glass roofs would be

unpopular with a large section of the public!

Hiring lights

One necessary innovation that the next few years will see if the public's wishes are consulted, is the fitting of a hiring light to show if a taxi is free after dark. By hiring light, I don't mean the little blue spark like a turned down gas jet that some have.

Taxi drivers seem to insist that hiring lights are not necessary; that they are looking out for fares and if by chance they don't see the prospective hirer, it is no good if they see him. But passengers are generally embarrassed at hailing a cab that might have a passenger already in and find it irritating to have to wait to see whether the small flag is down, by which time the taxi is almost level with them. And as most of them can't whistle...

A radio taxi? Unlikely...

There is a suggestion that driver's seats should be fitted with wireless to enable drivers to pick up calls, but this would of course necessitate a depot and could only be attempted by a well-organised taxi company. Besides, it would be impossible in England until the American custom of phoning a cab company for a taxi rather than phoning the rank has been introduced.

Successful experiments did take place in Ohio in 1929 and when a call came in it was relayed to the nearest unhired driver. However, until some future time, London is looking at placing frame aerials on taxis to receive calls direct from ranks. Anything beyond that seems unlikely...

One organisation?

In order to put any ideas into practise with the minimum amount of trouble, there must be just one central authority representing the whole taxi trade. As things are, unfortunately, there are about six - 2 for proprietors, 2 for owner-drivers and 2 unions for drivers - one merely an offshoot of a big trade union with whose other half million members the cabbies have nothing in common. It is this multiplicity of associations that is the stumbling block to progress...

At a press call by LTI Vehicles held at M&O London, Manganese Bronze Chief Executive John Russell together with LTI Vehicles MD Peter Shillcock, dismissed rumours currently circulating through the London trade that the now successful Chinese partnership between Geely and LTI, would soon be producing taxis for the London market.

The trade press were told that whilst the joint business in China between Geely and LTI was more successful than the instigators had originally envisaged at this stage, the idea that the small town of Fengjing in Shanghai where young Chinese workers were on the verge of full-scale production would soon be taking over from Coventry, was untrue - and that was after the recent TX4 fires.

Mr Russell emphasised that although some staff had lost their jobs with the arrival of the credit crunch - early retirement being one of the ways - Coventry would still remain as the UK's TX4 builders. However, he agreed that there was a strong probability that China could be used for cheaper spare parts. He was also delighted that over 90% of the components needed to build the TX4 in China could be sourced locally.

When the question was raised about the TX4s that had mysteriously caught fire, John

BORIS: HALF-YEAR CHECKS GOING!

In a response to *Call Sign's* Danny Fresco, London Mayor Boris Johnson has announced that the 6-monthly check is on the way out! His actual



words being that the check was doomed!

The Mayor added that the consultation had begun on August 5 and that he intended signing the cab order to abolish the check "within a few weeks."

Call Sign had previously advised all those who were against the mid-year examination to take part in the consultation and we can only assume that you did just that - so well done to all those who voted against - including DaC Chairman Brian Rice.

No Chinese taxis to London...

LTI Squash the rumour!

Russell said they were taking the matter extremely seriously, but that up till that time they had found no reason why the incidents had occurred. It was also pointed out that several thousand had been sold, so the percentage that caught fire was tiny but they would keep investigating until they found the answer.

Soon after, early TX4s were withdrawn from service after the PCO withdrew their licenses.

As you'd expect, there were questions on the competition provided by KPM and the Mercedes Vito, but the LTI spokesmen both confirmed that they were pleased to see that a competitor had arrived on the scene that had not tried to sneak through the Conditions of Fitness requirements. The pair also reiterated that KPM would remain as a dealer for LTI and added that they were pleased a company that knew how the taxi business operated was selling the new cab.

Also on the agenda was LTI's progress in producing a greener taxi that would help cut down carbon dioxide emissions. *Call Sign* has already written of next year's TX4E electric vehicle being built in conjunction with Tanfield and also the small fleet of hydrogen cell taxis to be produced along with assistance from Intelligent Energy and Lotus Engineering in time for the 2012 London Olympics.

Among other questions put to Messrs Russell and Shillcock was one on Biodiesel and could the TX4 use it if the biodiesel element was in excess of 5%? The answer was just as it was when Radio Taxis first opened their pump - if the biodiesel you are using



Peter Shillcock

represents more than 5% of the fuel, you will invalidate the part of the warrantee connected to the fuel. It was claimed that following any problems in that area, VM would know if the incorrect biodiesel fuel had been used. **Regardless of what you are told, you use biodiesel above 5% at the risk of nullifying part of the warrantee.**

Finally, a website is available for questions to LTI. Go to www.lti.co.uk and click on contact LTI on the top tab. Then click on enquiries and comments and follow the cue. Maria Holmes-Wood will be at the other end and forward your question on to the appropriate member of staff or department.

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Obika, meaning *here it is* in Neapolitan, is quite an original concept - a kind of Italian sushi bar with the main theme being mozzarella. The hand-made mozzarellas are all exclusively produced from Italian water buffalo that are owned by dairy farmers around Napoli and flown in fresh every day.



Newly opened and situated in *Northumberland Avenue* as part of the *Club Quarters* hotel, Obika has opened after the success of its sister restaurant - the first Obika in London - situated in Selfridges store, Oxford Street.

The restaurant has a clean and modern decor of glass and steel and a black polished floor with wine bottles making an interesting wall feature. There are stalls round the bar for single diners and the produce is displayed in glass cases making up the bar.

We were firstly given a selection of breads and foccacia to soak up the olive oil and balsamic vinegar dip and while we originally found the menu somewhat confusing, it soon became clear that there were basically 4 main mozzarella to choose from - the *Paestum*, which had a more delicate taste, the *Pontina*, with a stronger taste, the *Smoked* and the *Stracciatella di Burrata*, which is sweeter and

David Kupler (Y74), David Ballard (N28) and Alex Constantinou (N05) are Call Sign's restaurant reviewers. These DaC drivers and their guests will visit restaurants periodically and give their honest opinions. This month David Ballard visited the Obika Mozzarella Bar in Northumberland Avenue...

Eating Out with Call Sign

creamier. All come with a varied range of accompaniments ranging from *grilled seasonal vegetables to wild boar and peppery salami to smoked fish*.

Prices vary from 3 items for £12 to 7 items for £18. We chose 3 items to share as a starter; the *smoked mozzarella* with a selection of meats being a *prosciutto from San Daneil, salami from Tuscany* and a *Bresaola from Valtellina* that came served on a platter with fresh spinach, tomatoes and olives. The individual flavours of each meat were distinctive and went down well with the creamy, smokey mozzarella.

Then it was the two main courses; one a hand made *spinach and ricotta ravioli* for £14 that came in a rich tomato sauce, while my good lady had the *layered aubergine parmigiana* at £10. Both dishes were extremely good and well presented. A variety of salads are also available as either a starter or side dish from £4, or as a main course from £8. All were sourced from the various regions using only the freshest ingredients.

The dishes were ample but not huge, so there

was room to share the dessert taster menu. This consisted of - so we were told - the best *tiramisu* in town, a *ricotta and honey mousse* and a *lovely light chocolate and almond cake served with vanilla ice cream*, which at £8 was more than enough for the two of us.

A bottle of Italian Moretti beer was an extremely reasonable at £2.50 whilst a bottle of Italian white house wine will set you back £16 - not bad for a restaurant.

A three course evening meal would cost around £20 per head without drinks. Next time we go to Obika, I think we might go for a lovely sounding light lunch.

Obika is open daily from 7am - 11pm (last orders at 10.45pm). Obika at Selfridges is open daily Monday to Saturday from 9.30am - 8pm (9pm Thursday) and Sunday from 12 noon - 6pm. More information can be found at www.obika.co.uk. All food is also available to take away...

David Ballard (N28)

TEACHING THE MAYFAIR A LESSON?



Pat Keefe

In the September issue of *Call Sign*, Dial-a-Cab driver **Pat Keefe (G01)** wrote to *Mailshot* and asked that the Board consider disbanding the W101 rank that was situated by the former Mayfair Hotel - now the Edwardian Radisson.

Pat said: "I used to be a regular on what was then the Mayfair Hotel as it was a reasonably straight hotel ie first cab, first job. It suited us as cab drivers for local account work and if we had not yet accepted a job off the radio by the time we got to the point of the rank, you might be lucky with a flyer or possibly not so lucky with a local. Either way it was a fair gamble. Not any more; when it closed for refurbishment as the Mayfair Hotel, the BoM closed the rank whilst ongoing work was completed and our accounts still got covered very well from W1SW or its backup zones. Now we have a situation where the hotel has reopened as the Edwardian Radisson with many new staff and porters and a concierge playing the high game. I know very well they are using private hire for LAPs and any other job that gives them a commission. I'm also ashamed to say many of our own so-called 'black cabs' are

paying a bung to get a decent job while we Dial-a-Cab drivers are servicing the hotel."

Keith Cain responded by saying that he would ask the Board to discuss the subject at the next Board meeting and added that he agreed with Pat's sentiments and would not want to force drivers into having to sit on a hotel that was not 100% fair. The Board discussed it and the rank has now been

disbanded - although it can be reinstated should the situation change.

Pat told *Call Sign* that he was delighted with the decision, but now wanted to hear other DaC driver's views on the rank.

In the meantime, another driver in this issue's *Mailshot* has asked that W101 should not be disbanded. Who'd be a Board member...!

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Dial-a-Cab driver **Terry Dodd (W15)** – who is also President of the DaC Credit Union – has told **Call Sign** of feeling stunned when his wife Janice told him about a recent breakdown in her Mitsubishi Colt after putting in the wrong fuel. Covered together with Terry's *RAC Taxi Assist*, she phoned the RAC from Kidbrooke needing to get herself and the car back to the Isle of Sheppey where the couple live. When she explained that she had put the incorrect fuel in, the RAC said that because her breakdown had been "self inflicted" they could only give her a free tow for 10 miles. She'd have to pay £200 for the rest of the tow or they could send out a garage, which would "only" be £190! Neither price included draining the tank. Janice had no choice but to agree to the RAC...

After waiting an hour, Janice phoned to see where the RAC tow truck was only to be told it had been cancelled because it was a fuel problem! But no one had thought to tell Janice.

The RAC say they are no longer a mem-

ber's association but a with profit one and had cancelled the job because they do not

courtesy to phone and tell her they had scrubbed the tow."



Terry Dodd: Disgusted by RAC lack of action

cover fuel problems. They couldn't explain the lack of a return call.

Terry told us that he was disgusted with the RAC...

"They left a woman on her own for an hour in a strange area without having the

LEE'S BEDFONT GREEN PROGRESS IN FA VASE



Lee makes a save against Badshot but the team still lost
Pic Stewart Cook

"It hasn't been the best of months," DaC driver and **Bedfont Green** goalkeeper **Lee Pearce (J71)** told **Call Sign** after the team had been dumped out of the FA Cup in their second (preliminary) round match, "but we've had so many injuries to the team." After their 4 – 0 success in the first round against Barking, they were hoping to sneak a result against Great Woking, who although a league higher than BG, looked ready to be scalped! Sadly it wasn't to be...

"I've had better days," said Lee after the match which BG lost 4 – 0. That followed a 2 – 1 home reverse against Badshot Lea just 5 days earlier and a 3 – 0 away loss to Cove!

But Bedfont Green put that recent run of poor form aside as they hit Rothwell Corinthians for six in their FA Vase cup match on Saturday 20 September. Unlike the FA Cup, the FA Vase is aimed at teams outside of the main football leagues and judging by this performance, The Green must feel they have a shot!

BG's leading scorer, Adie Barrance, stunned Rothwell when he gave BG the lead on 18 minutes with Gavin Hart adding a second on the half hour mark latching on to a cross from Chris Henry. Henry then raced through on the stroke of half time to make it 3-0 and added his second on 55 minutes when Hart rounded the keeper and unselfishly squared for a tap in. Adie's cross 10 minutes later was volleyed home on the run by Jon-Barrie Bates – having probably his best match of the season.

With 5 minutes to go, Henry completed his hat trick with a fine strike after being put through by Hart.

After a great first half double save, Lee Pearce was finally beaten on 89 minutes when Rothwell's Andy White rifled his shot past the DaCman from 25 yards.

After the match, Lee told **Call Sign** that although results had been going against them, the team had the belief that they were going to turn the corner soon and Rothwell Corinthians just happened to be there when it happened! "Now we've got to get some momentum going for league games," said Lee with the smile back on his face!

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Stanley Roth (Y53) is usually a representative on these pages for *use LPG not diesel* having been driving a gas taxi for longer than most of us have been driving a cab! But this month is different.

Now he wants to ask Dial-a-Cab drivers whether anything like the story below has happened to them or was this purely a one-off?

The story began in January this year when Stanley found a wallet containing £345 in the back of his taxi. He took it to a London police station from where it apparently went missing. Stanley told us:

"I handed the money into their safe-keeping according to procedure for onward transmission to the Lost Property Office. The fact that this has not been done meant that had the owner approached the Lost Property Office, he would have left empty handed and questioned the honesty of London taxi drivers. Not having received a reward by the last day of April, I assumed that the wallet had not been claimed by the owner and had become legally mine."

That's when Stanley found out that it had disappeared. He complained to the police and they launched an investigation at the end of which they wrote to Stanley with the results. The investigating officer claimed that many dif-

How Safe is the Taxi Lost Property System?



Stanley Roth wants to know if this incident was a one-off?

ficulties had arisen due to the time elapsing since the property had been last seen. They added that the CCTV pictures had been deleted and that items they would have expected to locate, they were unable to as they had apparently been removed. That included the original

entry into the lost property book, which recorded Stanley as handing the wallet in.

The officer on duty on the evening concerned was interviewed but was unable to shed any light on what had happened to Stanley's lost property. The police also claim that the money may have just been misplaced.

Stanley's response was that the investigation hadn't revealed how the money had disappeared but pointed out that it was "convenient" that all the relevant records had disappeared along with the CCTV.

In the meantime, Stanley still holds his receipt for £345 and correctly points out that had he not handed the money into a police station, it would have been stealing. He asks how he and his fellow taxi drivers can be confident that this will not happen the next time money is handed into a police station for forwarding on to the Lost Property Office? His last comment? "What incentive is there to be honest?"

Has anything like the above ever happened to you as a taxi driver? Let **Call Sign** know...

call sign comment...

DAC DRIVERS CALL IT *THE MESS!*

It's AKA the Aldgate one-way system!

In 2005, a cyclists group said that the Aldgate gyratory system made life very difficult for them. Three years on and their wish has become reality with the gyratory moving to a two-way system of operation.

Koy Thomson, Chief Executive of the *London Cycling Campaign* adds his twopence-worth by referring to the previous system as an "urban blight" and claims that this new system "will restore this historic area for business and personal use." He adds that the new road layout will also make it easier and safer for cyclists to travel through the area. There are also more crossings planned to make the area easier for pedestrians.

So that takes care of almost all groups - bar one... the poor motorist, unfortunate enough to need to make their way through the new Aldgate two-way system. The question is why?

Well, the new scheme is a privately funded one, which means that they are not doing it for the benefit of the world, but to make money! That obviously worries no one at TfL.

A new public open space will be created by closing off the western half of Braham Street, between Mansell Street and Leman Street, which the group say will play an important role in regenerating Aldgate for the whole community. Then we have the important part - which sadly for those affected runs into a whole one line of text.



A terminal message warns drivers

They add as almost an afterthought:

Braham Street will also be closed off at the eastern end for a private development.

So we know that cyclists will now be able to get back up to their tricks of cutting up anyone in their way and showing how easy it is to go through red lights by pretending they aren't there, pedestrians will be able to cross the road as often as they want and we will all be able to sit in the park! Oh yes, and Braham Street will also be closed off at the eastern end for a private development!

Private development? **Call Sign** managed to get some further details through unofficial sources ie from a surveyor who added: "Please don't give my name as I like the job...!"

He told us that the western end of

Braham Street would be redeveloped into a pedestrian zone - and here is the (credit?) crunch - it will also include huge two tower blocks while creating an island from the back of the Bank of Scotland building to the junctions of Mansell Street and Leman Street. Whether in the current climate the developers will manage to sell the offices is neither here nor there. What is apparent is that the motorists who already pay through the teeth, are of no concern other than as revenue providers and that this area of London is slowly going to grind to a halt.

TfL's Interim Director of Road Network Management, Dana Skelley, says: "The changes we are making to the Aldgate gyratory system have been welcomed by all of the road users we've spoken to, particularly cyclists."

That probably says it all. Do TfL care about cyclist's safety? Probably no more than any sensible person who doesn't want to see them get hurt. But are they using cyclist's views as an excuse to go ahead with a development that will kill the area so far as motorists, who already pay through the teeth, are concerned and who would probably say no to it? And how long will the two tower blocks remain empty for? If you think the suggestion is good, please let **Call Sign** know why?

Alan Fisher



Imagine yourself at the helm of the world's largest Tall ship, its three-masted barque or helping to set more than 2000 m2 of sail in less than one hour! It isn't just a dream, because Dial-a-Cab driver Mike Bures (B01) has done exactly that. In the March Call Sign, he told of booking his place on the adventure trip, now he tells of his experience on the Statsraad Lehmkuhl ...

"The day finally arrived when at the ripe old age of 57, and never having been to sea, I decided to offer myself up as a trainee sailor along with 150 others on the Norwegian Tall ship, the **Statsraad Lehmkuhl**. The ship was named after a rich Norwegian businessman who bought it from the British government after the First World War. The ship was bounty! It was won from the German Navy and apparently sat docked at Portsmouth until Mr Lehmkuhl took it back to Bergen.

The **Statsraad Lehmkuhl** is not a passenger ship. You come aboard as a trainee sailor, which means that you participate in the activities of the ship. It is 325 foot long and the main mast is 157 feet high. She weighs 1516 tons and has 800 tons of Bergen cobblestones as ballast in her hull. She was built to train German sailors before they joined their Navy. The ship's height - although restricted - is still a scary 157 feet from the deck. I know this from experience as I managed to overcome my fear of heights and eventually stood on a wire rope on the top Royal yardarm, while sailing south in the middle of the North Sea doing the job of letting out the gaskets to release the sail. A job that - believe it or not - I volunteered for!

There are 22 sails, equalling 2000 square metres. There are no words I can write in **Call Sign** to tell you of the feeling of being up there, looking down at people on the deck looking like ants, with the continuous wind blowing and whistling through your *foul weather* gear and the horizon gleaming and shimmering in the distance! I thought of the sailors of old who did this without any harnesses to stop them falling and where, on long trips, they expected to lose two or three sailors overboard.

You are on duty alongside professional seamen and doing anything from being on watch or steering the ship, to working in the galley.

DaC Driver

Mike's Adventure of a Lifetime!



The worlds largest 'Tallship' the Statsraad Lehmkuhl

use a sextant and best of all, the range of people of all ages from all over the world - especially Sweden Norway and Finland - some of whom I am still in touch with via the net. Not to forget the excellent food they served - albeit one occasion while trying to walk in the canteen from the buffet to the table in rough weather reminded me of

The maritime traditions are kept active, especially the sail manoeuvres. For many, going aloft up the rigging to furl or unfurl sails is one of the most exiting things on board. But it is absolutely voluntary. And there might even be time for some shanty singing and a course in tying knots! The atmosphere on board is indescribable; it has to be experienced!

The trip from Bergen to Rouen I can recommend strongly for those of you who are on the adventurous side and can afford a week away. Below are some links for you to see the ship. Sleeping in hammocks, steering at the helm, bow watch, fire watch, scrubbing the decks and polishing the brass, learning how to

when I got really drunk many years and walking in a straight line was not an option!

I will certainly go again. The Atlantic quite takes my fancy as the **Statsraad Lehmkuhl** does go to all the oceans on our planet. If you'd like more details about how to register, email me on buddybures@yahoo.co.uk.

Well shiver me timbers..."

Mike Bures (B01)

You can watch some short videos of Mike at:

<http://www.vimeo.com/1328704>

Or see photos of the ship at:

<http://www.jtasbippphoto.dk/JTAStaatsraad%20Lehmkuhl.htm>.

DaC 's Ron Desborough (P42) on a nasty kipper season - in rhyme!

IT'S TOUGH OUT THERE...

The economy's on a downward trend, but that's just half the story my friend.

Working harder to make ends meet, really is an impossible feat...

King William St and London Wall, accounts of ours you might recall,
a short time ago they were full of cabs, take a look now - all you see is scabs...

Or take a ride down to E14, maybe it'll be a different scene?

But you won't be surprised to hear me say, all out there are going the same way.

You can always try to work the stations, I've seen less lights at Blackpool illuminations!

Perhaps you could try to work the street, it's easier to find the River Fleet!

And when you thought it couldn't get worse, you're cut up by a three-wheeled hearse -
nicking our work when the theatres burst, these pedalo bikes really are the worst.

Then two hundred quid to get your plate, and don't forget your half-year date.

Three hundred quid my bill cost me, I can still remember when these were free.

A job from the flyers would be something to treasure, now you pay a fiver for the pleasure.

If you're lucky you'll get a job back to town, then up comes the local to get you down.

On arriving home it gets no better, on your doormat you find a letter.

A PCN has been sent to you, have these people got nothing better to do?

So you decide to count up your money, I bet you don't find that too funny.

Takings now are getting low, as the price of diesel continues to grow.

But despite all this I still find a smile, as I sit in my cab and think a while.

At least I've still got my health... but I think I'll go home and shoot myself!

Post war electric cabs...

In case the funny guys who think they may know who I am are around, this article is about electric cabs after World War 2 - and not the Boer War! Incidentally, did you know that income tax at 1shilling in the £ was introduced to help pay the costs of the war and that this tax would be ended soon after the aforesaid war ended? That statement was made in Parliament by the-then Prime Minister and goes to prove that nothing much ever changes so far as believing the words of politicians is concerned!

Anyway, much of the current talk is about electric taxis, but the idea isn't new. Personally, I have no doubt that when electric-powered vehicles become numerous, they will be taxed in the way current fossil fuelled vehicles are. To prove that point, once the numbers of hybrid-powered cars increased, their reduced or nil tax advantages were taken away.

This same style of tax practice happened when the use of LPG fuel began to increase. And remember the *Powershift* grants that were supposed to encourage owners to change to LPG? Those grants ceased once the total reached £7 million, a drop in the Government budget bucket that takes £7million in seconds each and every day from motorists.

The electric taxi that never made it!

The **Lucas Electric Taxi**, designed by Tom Karen from Ogle Design, better known for their Scimitar GT as driven by HRH Princess Anne, started out as a development vehicle for Lucas power plants. These were to be found propelling such delightful vehicles as milk floats -remember them?

This 'taxi' was designed to be fully compliant with PCO rules and requirements, have wheelchair accessibility and no doubt be very suitable for a Lucas taximeter. It was no beauty to look at with its long, one box style of body. It would have been very heavy with its weighty battery pack, power train and reinforced steel girder-like chassis. To absolutely nobody's surprise - at least those who understood the somewhat

"Sunset Strip" has now handed his badge and bill back to the PCO after 50 years - much of it with ODRTS. These are his memories...

FIFTY GREEN YEARS...

arcane workings of the London cab trade and its regulatory bodies, official and unofficial - the Lucas Electrical Taxi never received type approval.

As one of the very few to have seen this 'taxi' in the flesh, so to speak, and one of the even fewer to have driven it, let me say right here and now that it was dreadful to drive, uncomfortable to be a passenger in and looked more like a small box-shaped van than anything even faintly resembling a taxi, even in these days of conversions of commercial vehicles into 'taxis'.

And LTI?

There was a project looked at by LTI for a modern taxi that would be powered by a hybrid combination of gas powered turbine electric power unit. Two world famous automotive design houses collaborated on this design. They were *Design Research Limited* lead by Roy Axe who had carried out work for companies such as Land Rover and *Automotive Engineering Centre* controlled by Professor Jim Randle, whose influence in the car industry is renowned. The shape of that proposed taxi closely resembled a streamlined TX1 and that of the stillborn Asquith taxi project.

In 1994, LTI dropped the whole idea as they thought that the complicated and expensive hybrid power units would not be suitable for use in a taxi. So it's back to the drawing board...

Be lucky and be careful out there...

Sunset Strip



The Lucas Electric Taxi - it had a range of aprox 70 miles and a top speed of 55mph c1977

TX4 FIRES AND RIP OFFS?

As if instances of some TX4 taxis catching fire and those drivers who had been losing money because there was a shortage of available taxis for rent until the problem has been sorted weren't enough, there then came a further problem.

Call Sign has heard of some DaC drivers who loaned their cabs out for very little just to help out fellow subscribers. The Gentlemen's Circuit certainly lived up to its name. But we have also heard of some people who have been trying to cash in at those driver's expense. The most outrageous so far was the DaC driver who was asked by a garage for £258 a week for an N reg cab!

If you have any instances such as that one involving profiteering against taxi drivers, let Call Sign know. If you have the relevant proof, we will name and shame and remember these people when things get back to normal...

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Dress Code

The question isn't to be or not to be, but to be dressed or not to be dressed. Do Boris Johnson or Brian Rice or Bob Oddy have the bottle to bring in a dress code for the Licensed taxi trade? We need to face up to this question because I think it's about time we started to present a professional image. What's the point of working for such a professional company like DaC if so many drive around like tramps? The time for deciding is here because the competition isn't hanging around!

Gary Cox (O46)

Allen Togwell responds: By me answering Gary Cox's letter, there will I'm sure be a number of our older members groaning 'Oh no don't start Togwell off again'. I say older members because those that have read *Call Sign* for the past 20 odd years would have seen numerous articles by me about the necessity for the cab trade to change its image if it is to regain the increasing avalanche of work being lost to PH. And in many instances the change in question was not so drastic as to just to look smart, God forbid, but to at least give the impression that a visit to the bathroom is occasionally made. And I do refer to the trade as a whole, not specifically those on Dial-a-Cab. In the early days my articles were aimed primarily at our members, because quite a few really were an embarrassment to the point it was affecting our business, clients were actually complaining. But over the years I'm pleased to say and particularly since all of our fleet have been carrying our logo, the vast majority of our members are conscious of the importance of appearance. Not all I would hasten to add, but the majority. We don't have a dress code on Dial-a-Cab and it has nothing to do with having 'bottle' as Gary puts it, but for the simple reason it is unenforceable. How can we possibly check every driver is adequately dressed? Every new driver I interview will confirm that I make a big issue over the importance of looking presentable and how as a member of Dial-a-Cab driving a taxi carrying our corporate logo, they will be compared by our clients to the smartly dressed drivers of PH. What surprises me, particularly those members who rely on a high volume of credit work, is how reluctant they are to say anything to those on this circuit whose scruffy appearance could jeopardize their very living, which as a shareholder they surely have the right to do, or at least make a note and inform the board.

When I stood for the board over twenty years ago, I did so in the hope of changing our image, especially at board

level and specifically in the sales dept, where the person responsible for sales considered it perfectly acceptable to visit clients dressed in jeans, open necked shirt, leather jacket and trainers. Within six months of being on the board and taking over the role of sales executive, *Call Sign* became inundated with letters castigating and resenting me for the manner in which I was dressed and my opinion on how I felt the members should dress, a resentment that still exists in some quarters to this very day.

As a tailor by trade and having run my own fashion business for over twenty years, I know first hand the power of dress. Most of you know how immaculately smart our Chairman Brian Rice dresses. When BR goes into any meeting, be it with clients or at the various business associations or when for example networking or representing our Society in the UK or abroad, he is noticed, approached and listened to by people who he has never met in his life, for one simple reason - the manner in which he is dressed. Apart from being impressive, it gives off an air of authority and I know because I have on many occasions been with him. I defy any man to put on a dinner suit, sparkling white shirt, bow tie and look in a mirror and then not to feel that he looks the dog's cajones! Conversely, how many of you whilst out working would stop for four guys wearing hoods? Such is the power of dress. In last months *Call Sign*, editor Alan Fisher started his article by questioning Mayor Boris Johnson's pre-election promises concerning the cab trade. Alan please, how many broken promises have you experienced from politicians since you have held a badge, let alone been editor? How sincere could you honestly believe Mr Johnson was and how much credibility do you really believe he was giving the various groups of cabmen whilst on his campaign trail, the majority of whom were happy to appear on TV dressed like dockers? Over the years, I have heard many drivers say they never go to a taxi watering hole because many of those that use them are an embarrassment, which represents an awful lot of drivers. What chance then, if the masses they are referring to, including certain known faces who speak on behalf of the trade, have of convincing the powers that be that they are a professional body deserving to be listened to? No chance and what's truly sad and remarkable is they cannot understand why...

Passenger privacy?

After reading Alan Green's article in last month's *Call Sign*, it left me thinking about people's privacy. A few years ago, I was waiting for an account job in Harley Street when I noticed a lady (actress Elizabeth Hurley) running down the road with her baby son in her arms being chased by the

paparazzi. When she reached what I presume was her doctor's office as we were in Harley Street, she rang the doorbell for entry. Whilst waiting for someone to answer the door, the paparazzi persisted in shoving their cameras in her face as well as her young son's face until someone let them in. I must say, it was a disgusting scene to witness. Her son must have been terribly frightened.

I then wondered whether, once inside, did her doctor say to her something like: "I'm a great fan of yours, can I take a photo of you for my company's magazine?" I don't think so! It would be against his professional ethic to do so.

I think we, as cab drivers, should follow the same professional ethic. Don't you think these celebrities get fed up with being pursued day in, day out and treated as public property?

Everyone has a right to privacy be it a celebrity or everyday Joe. Give them the privacy they deserve!

Peter Hallett (S01)

Peter is referring to an article last month where *Call Sign's* photographer Alan Green had Sienna Miller in his taxi - although he originally thought she was someone else. Following a phone call to me, I suggested he ask the person he thought it was if she would mind posing with a copy of *Call Sign*. In my defence, if I were to follow Peter's suggested code of professional ethics, I wouldn't have a magazine whereas the doctor would still be a doctor. I think there is a difference in asking a celebrity politely if they would mind posing or answering a question in the back of your taxi whilst being prepared to accept no as an answer, as against chasing them down the street as Peter's paparazzi were doing. But that's just my view and if anyone wants to disagree, feel free ...Ed

Keep up the good work...

With regard to the economic climate - and it doesn't look like its getting better - it's nice to see what a great job the BoM and Sales team are doing. In spite of strong competition from others, we have managed to stay in the forefront plus, of course, our new investment in technology, so things can only get better. The increase in subs is justified, I can't think for the life of me why you didn't make it 20 quid.

My full congratulations to all at DaC House for all your efforts. Keep up the good work.... **Patrick Noble (S55)**

Brian Rice responds: Well, well, well, you seem to be mellowing Patrick, not the normal derogatory letter you usually write to the magazine! Could it have



MAILSHOT

Mailshot continued from page 32

been prompted because you read last month that we have won back the 'House'? Anyway, the staff here are thrilled that you have recognised their efforts. Regarding subs, I know they were not increased during the last financial year, but to have increased them by £20p.m, even though you did go a year without an increase, could not possibly be justified. But we are glad that you are happy for the moment!

Mercedes taxi

I must admit that I quite fancied the Mercedes taxi when it first appeared, but now having seen two of them in action and spoken to other drivers, I now agree with your editorial that they are more like minicabs than taxis. One concern besides the van-like / minicab look is the necessity to go below 5mph before executing a u-turn. You sometimes see an opportunity and you have to take it. Then there are the sliding doors that seem to guarantee hassle at traffic lights if you are waiting for them to close when picking up or setting down a passenger quickly. Finally (for the moment) your comments about the wheelchair ramps; I hadn't realised that they needed to be taken out of the boot and that they weigh similar to a spare wheel – something the Merc doesn't even have. I do wheelchair work and that process doesn't sound too easy and puts me off even more...

Alex Constantinou (N05)

There is an article in this issue from the first DaC driver to purchase the Mercedes Vito so that both sides can be heard ...Ed

And again...

I agree entirely with your Editorial on the new Mercedes Vito. It is a van and not a taxi. Call it a minicab if you want, but never a taxi. A van is a van. In fact, with its increased size over a real taxi, had it been any bigger we could almost call it a lorry! If I really wanted to drive a van I'd have bought a Ford Transit!

Sid Nathan (K88)

Six-month safety check and the Vito

I read your editorial (*Aug Call Sign*); well done for bringing it to the notice of drivers that we must make our feelings felt to the TfL/PCO to abolish the 6 monthly check. The problem is that once you've allowed these things to go through, it's always a battle to get rid of them. But you can rest assured I will be writing to them.

I also echo your thoughts on the Mercedes Vito, but what puzzles me is why our trade representatives (and no, I'm not pointing any fingers) have not challenged the PCO as to why the Act of 1853 has to be

changed to allow instant stops? Well I'll tell you why the PCO are doing it... it's because they can. Many of us now own our own vehicles and they wouldn't take on the London General when Geoffrey Trotter was in charge, or Nelson's, Levy's or any of the large garages. It was more than they dare do! But divided we fall. If only drivers would show more courage and unite. Vehicles today are safer, more reliable and far in advance of those of yesteryear. If it worked then, why does it need to be changed?

Mike Pollington (K17)

Thanks for your support, Mike. Whilst you are correct and reinforce something I have said many times in *Call Sign* – that everyone should join just one trade organisation – the fact is that it will never happen unless membership is free and compulsory. And that seems rather unlikely! I've been a member of the LTDA for many years and consider it to be money very well spent – even if it means I am subsidising those that can't be bothered ...Ed

The Royal Mail and Call Sign

I had a note from the Royal mail to go and collect some post from them that had not been delivered because there was money owing on the postage. After paying £1 for parking and £1.24 to the Royal Mail, they handed me my copy off *Call Sign*. This has never happened before so I am a bit confused. Was this just a one-off?

Thad Carter (P21)

£1.24 to retrieve my *Call Sign* from my local sorting office. I hope it's worth it!

Terry Meares (M63)

I told my wife I was going down to the post office to pay extra postage for my *Call Sign*. She didn't believe me and now thinks I've got a bird on the side! Can you please send me a large piece of steak for my eye...

Gary Cox (O46)

Has anyone else reported any problems with the Post Office Revenue Protection and delivery of the *Call Sign* mag? I received my magazine a week or so ago and it had a yellow sticker on the front stating that there was *Postage Unpaid Deficient Postage* to the tune of 24p + £1 handling charge - total £1.24 that I owed them. The interesting thing is that it was in the letterbox along with other mail and that the postman did not ask for any extra postage? Hoping you can shed some light on the situation.

David Abel (H39)

If I were to publish all the emails and letters I've had on the subject of the Royal Mail and *Call Sign*, I'd need to print a 60-page issue! There is an article in this issue on the post office debacle regarding delivery of the September issue and how it has ended ...Ed



Doreen Freeborn

I would just like to thank everyone who contacted me before and after Doreen passed away and to have such nice comments in *Call Sign*. It is so good to have such friends at such a hard time. Of course I am not the first or the last to have to go through this, but after over 35 years on DaC, I can only say that we have made so many friends.

Gents, we are THE best circuit. You have to do your bit - clean cab, dress, politeness, etc to keep it at the top.

My best wishes to all...

Martin Freeborn (C67)

Where are the Marshals?

I've noticed of late that on several occasions there have been no marshals at DB on London Wall but that when someone queries the fact, a message goes out to say that a substitute Marshal will be on the way. I appreciate that August was quiet and there were a substantial number of cars outside – although word was that more than a few were just parking and waiting for a trip. If that was the case, it certainly gave the impression that the cars were busy whilst we weren't. But is there a reason why our Marshals are not there regularly?

If it is the case that cars are getting more work than us – and I don't suppose we can force them to use us – would it not be feasible to charge DB more for using Concierge? Dial-a-Cab is by far the best radio circuit and the most reasonable when it comes to subscriptions and I enjoy doing account work from it, but it does strike me that while the £5 subs hike wasn't unreasonable in percentage terms, the organisation at London Wall should pay more if they are using our facilities but choose not to give us the work. Perhaps they could even have subsidised part of the subs increase?

Of course, now that August and September have gone, it could be that they will be giving us more work again and the above comments will become irrelevant. I certainly hope so.

Mark Tiller (K90)

Brian Rice replies: There should be one of our Marshals at DB every night between 9pm and midnight! However, on the odd occasion we have a situation where a Marshal does not turn up or is unwell etc, then of course a second Marshal has to be sent. For example, what happened on one particular occasion was our Marshal was unwell and sent a text message to a landline in this building, the young lady that should have dealt with the text was on holiday -

MAILSHOT

Mailshot continued from page 33

so never heard the text - and of course the person that sent the text never heard the recorded voicemail on the landline stating the person who was intended to receive the text was on holiday! Hence, there was not a Marshal at DB until we were informed and could send a substitute, but rest assured Mark there will always be a Marshal at DB.

Regarding the remainder of your letter, it is nice to see you have thought things through and understand the situation. As you can no doubt understand, I cannot go into too much detail in the magazine regarding pricing, suffice to say everything is taken care of and there are sliding scales in place. I am not endeavouring to be evasive, but neither am I too keen on our competitors knowing how I charge, as they might endeavour to copy - after all they copy everything else we do! However, if you wish to give me a ring or pop in to see me, then I will be more than happy to explain the situation to you! I'm sure you can understand that although the magazine is totally uncensored, some things should be kept confidential.

Call Sign catfight

Re *Call Sign Catfight* (*Sept Call Sign*), as a regular reader of my uncle's *Call Sign* magazine, I have been following the story of *Love on the Internet* from Jenny and wonder if you would be kind enough to print a letter from a non-taxi driver. In a way it made compulsive reading, but rather in the manner of a painful tooth; you keep testing to see if it's still sore, but it just gets worse! The embarrassment factor was so high and I could not believe that she ended up writing a poem that was more treacle than sickly. However, your columnist Poppy, who is always erudite and entertaining, also has a sense of humour; something Jenny clearly lacks.

Your magazine is always well produced and the articles that are not strictly related to the taxi trade bring welcome relief to what could otherwise be a platform for endless moans and groans!

Boh Taylor
Chislehurst, Kent

What really amazed me was the number of people who were hooked by the love story. Although most claimed "it was their wives that read it," they all seemed to know everything that had happened! Even Chairman Brian's wife Brenda admitted that was the first page she looked for! And actually for the record, both Poppy and Jenny have a sense of humour. Anyway, Boh, I'm pleased you enjoyed it ...Ed

Bob Oddy

Although Bob Oddy and I do not see eye over certain issues, I wish him the best

of luck following his election onto the TfL board. He will speak up for us because we have waited a long time for this moment...
Stanley Roth (Y53)

And here they come!

It didn't take long! I saw a Peugeot people carrier tonight in the SW6 area. I think it was an E7 but can't be sure. Anyway it was black and along the sides written in orange were the words EURO BUS in the same style as a Mercedes Vito has the words TAXI on the side. I'm sure I could see PCO roundels in the back window making it a minicab! You said this would happen when we spoke. Next time I see it I will try for a picture...

Jon Robinson (E88)

Thanks for that Jon. My belief is that Allied Direct who put out the E7, only supply them as licensed taxis. However, another van conversion - the Peugeot Expert - is available to anyone and that may be what you saw. The thing that amazes me is that the TAXI flash you mentioned on the Vito is not compulsory ...Ed

Yellow badge drivers beware!

Dear Alan

Please see the letter below, which details a complaint I have made regarding yellow badge drivers. I would be grateful if you could publish this in the Mailshot column of *Call Sign* under the heading Yellow Badge drivers beware. I have withheld my details as I do not want them published, but have given my full name and address on the original complaints letter. I will, of course, let you have a copy of any reply that I receive...

My husband is a licensed London taxi driver (green badge) and therefore has completed the full London Knowledge. We also have friends who have gained the same green badge to become taxi drivers and have the authority and knowledge to work in central London. It has come to our attention over the last 6 months or so that many yellow badge suburban drivers are illegally working in central London when they only have the authority and knowledge to work in the suburbs. It appears that many yellow badge drivers are waiting until about 8 or 9 o'clock in the evening when the carriage officers are off duty before going into central London to ply for hire. They are in effect stealing work from the men and women who have put many years of hard work into gaining a green badge and the privilege of working in central London. I am sure that I am not the only person who has written to you complaining about this and would like to know if TfL, the PCO or The Mayor of London have put into place any procedures to combat these illegal drivers? Are there plans to introduce a *one strike and out* policy as with touting, or do the drivers need to be convicted on more than one occasion before having their licence revoked?



Because of the current economy (credit crunch) many would-be passengers are not taking cabs and for that reason and the recent rise in the price of fuel, taxi drivers are seeing a loss in their takings. Predictions are that there is unlikely to be any improvement in the near future.

There does not seem to be enough work for green badge drivers in central London, let alone yellow badge drivers going into Central London and taking fares that should be picked up by green badge drivers.

If we have the details of specific yellow badge drivers who are working in Central London, what procedure would we need to follow to report them? We feel very strongly about this and are sure that other green badge drivers would feel the same if they were aware of the problem.

Name and address withheld

I do not usually publish letters with no name and wasn't sure whether I should publish this one. It lacks any explanation as to who it is written to as the address in Southwark rang no bells to me. However, putting the address into Google, up came the London Development Agency who I believe have what they refer to as a 'Whistleblowing Policy'. Former Minister of Transport for London, Steve Norris, is the man responsible for linking the LDA to TfL. I can only assume that the lady who has written the letter knows the name or names of some yellow badge drivers who are illegally working in the green badge zone and intends blowing the whistle on them. If those drivers are reading this online, I suggest they think twice before continuing this activity ...Ed

W101

Bring back W101, it's popular with many drivers and gives an even better service to our customers. Instead of throwing in the towel, why not contact the hotel, explain our concerns and offer to improve on the deal they have with their current suppliers? It's got to be better than driving round in circles empty!

John Smithen (C03)

Thanks for that John. The last issue saw a letter from Pat Keefe (G01) which told of the shenanigans that go on at Edwardian Radisson Mayfair - a situation that you can plainly see while sitting on the rank. I told Keith Cain about Pat's letter, he spoke to the Board and they then agreed to disband the rank. Then I get your letter! I'm not sure I like the sound of your suggestion to "improve on the deal they have with their current suppliers." Are you suggesting we should pay to sit there? Sorry John, if hotel

MAILSHOT

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concierge services were open to the highest offer, then your suggestion would only last until a minicab outbid you. The best chance of fair play at the hotel is to pull your service because when it gets busy again and they can't cover the locals, they'll have to change or be inundated with complaints from clients. In the meantime, you can still book into W1SW and put onto the hotel giving you a shot at both ...Ed

How to make it busy!

Has anyone else noticed it is a tad quiet out on the streets? It is time to start fighting back and I have a couple of suggestions. A large private hire company gave £25,000 to Boris Johnson's campaign when he was standing for election. Now maybe the radio circuits can send donations to the unions who represent bus and tube drivers. This would give them extra reserves, which could be used to enable them to call members out on strike. This invariably creates extra work for us. In Beijing, the authorities diverted clouds away from the opening ceremony to ensure that it remained dry. Business for us often picks up when there are a few showers and the taxi trade organisations could unite to fund weather adjustments in London when

we need some more customers!

On a separate subject, I saw this line on the TfL website advertising for drivers: "Women, put your career in gear and get behind the wheel of a London bus." Nothing exceptional in that and if it works to get the extra needed drivers of the right quality, then fine. But this is not so different from the campaign aimed at 'ethnic minorities' pointing out that the Knowledge is open to them as well as everyone else. Too many pundits in the trade press took offence and expressed their views in an unpleasant manner when there are more important issues facing us. There are certainly sufficient taxis in London at the moment and I am not advocating that there should be more drivers of any particular race, gender or religion. But let's keep things in perspective.

Laurence Kelvin (W88)

Your suggestions on union donations have been noted! For those who wonder what Laurence is on about, Brian Rice recently revealed in his Chairman's Report that Addison Lee had donated 25K to Boris's election fund.

As for your next piece, personally I think you are wrong. Why should anyone advertise for women in a job that either sex can do? And like many others,



I believed that Ken's ethnic Knowledge was just as wrong. But hey, that's why Mailshot is here! ...Ed

Camden rip-off?

I read with interest the article in the Sept **Call Sign** on the Camden rip-off merchants, as I was one of those caught when the new u-turn restriction at the top of Southampton Row started. I still have details and sent off an email to Camden requesting my money back as the signage was now agreed to be inadequate. Needless to say they declined to reimburse me, even though I quoted Bob Stafford's PCN details from the article. Camden state that the charge has been paid in full, so they are not responsible as the charge was not contested at the time. Anyone know where I should go from here? Are there any other drivers who requested their money back and failed, or even succeeded in getting it? Surely if the signage is wrong and agreed to be so, then Camden should be charged with extortion.

Steve Hassan (P95)

Did anyone out there attempt to get their money back? Please let us know ...Ed

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