

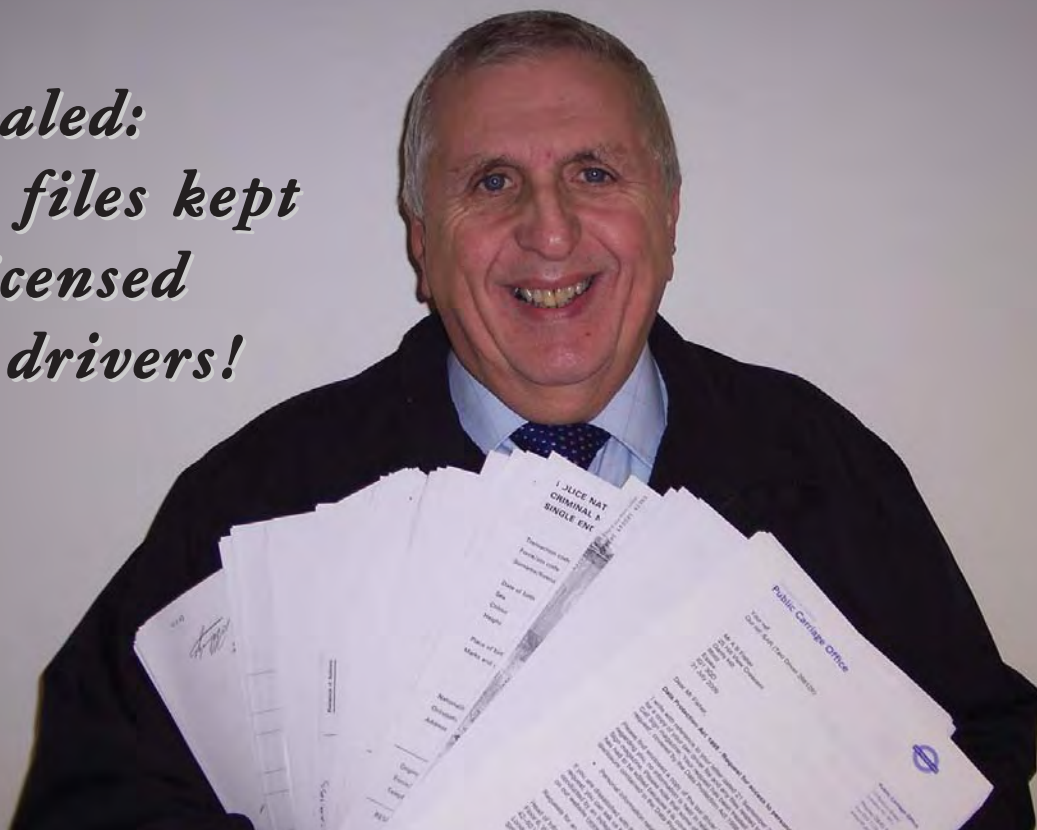
January 2010



Call Sign

From the home of Dial-a-Cab International

*Revealed:
PCO files kept
on licensed
taxi drivers!*



The end of an era for the licensed taxi business



NASH'S NUMBERS

From Alan Nash (A95)

Eurostar timetable valid 13 December 2009 to 3 July 2010 – unless as usual they change it!

From	Time	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Train No.
Brussels	07:55		■	■	■	■		■	9109
Paris	07:58		■	■ 1	■ 1	■ 1	■		9005
Paris	08:28		■	■	■	■	■	■	9007
Brussels	08:56						■		9113
Brussels	08:56		■	■	■	■		■	9113
Paris	09:36	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	9011
Brussels	09:56	■ 5							9117
Brussels	10:26		■	■	■	■	■	■	9119
Paris	10:34	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	9015
Paris	11:28	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	9019
Paris	12:29	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	9023
Brussels	12:33	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	9181
Paris	13:28	■	■	■ 1	■ 1	■ 1	■	■ 8	9027
Paris	14:31	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	9031
Brussels	15:03	■						■	9137
Brussels	15:26		■	■	■	■	■		9139
Paris	15:29	■					■	■	9035
Brussels	15:56	■							9141
Paris	16:36	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	9039
Brussels	17:03						■		9145
Paris	17:34	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	9043
Paris	17:59	■							9045
Brussels	18:05	■	■	■	■	■	■		9149
Paris	18:29		■	■	■	■	■	■	9047
Paris	18:34	■							9047
Paris	18:59	■							9049
Brussels	19:03	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	9153
Paris	19:29	■							9051
Paris	19:34		■	■	■	■	■		9051
Brussels	19:56	■	■	■	■	■	■		9157
Paris	20:06		■	■	■	■	■		9053
Paris	20:34	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	9055
Brussels	21:03							■	9161
Paris	21:29		■	■	■	■	■		9059
Brussels	21:33	■	■	■	■	■	■		9163
Paris	21:36	■						■	9059
Paris	21:59	■							9061
Paris	22:29	■						■	9063
Paris	22:34		■	■	■	■	■		9063
Note 1 = Does not arrive between 5/1/2010 to 4/02/2010 Note 5 = Does not arrive after 03/01/2010 Note 8 = Does not arrive after 02/01/2010									

For those of you on the internet, visit www.nashsnumbers.co.uk and avail yourself of *What's On in January*, the latest *Heathrow Terminals* list and a simple way to sign up for a 70+ page download of useful information. Also visit www.pointsoflondon.co.uk for a simple search engine to over 20,000 points, ideal for your broadband mobile.

from the editor's desk

Police goodwill?

This season of goodwill is now on its way out and no doubt I'll have put back on all the weight I'd previously shed in order to leave some space for the good things in life – ie chocolates, nuts, the occasional glass of red wine and then a few more chocolates!

But it began with very little goodwill, at least so far as I was concerned. If you discount the really serious things that happen to everyone as they progress through life, then you're left with just the items that tend to irritate – the ones that make you fume at the time but don't seem quite so bad by the next day.

Brian Rice has a sensible philosophy in that if something has annoyed or upset you, wait 24 hours before you make a response. If you still feel irritated or upset, then you know that any response you make will be genuine rather than just showing annoyance at something that doesn't seem quite so bad the following day.

Well, I tried that on Tuesday 1 December – a day I may eventually forget, but of which there was little chance of happening within 24 hours. In fact I'm writing this two weeks after and the incident still irritates me. So what was it?

Well, on that Tuesday Linda and I paid a visit to the land of the Westminster TaxiCard – ie St Johns Wood – to take Linda's sister out for lunch. We don't get the chance to see Daphne that often and usually take a leisurely lunch to catch up on all the gossip. We finally left her in Abbey Road just before 3pm with the plan being that I'd drop Linda off at home, jump into the cab and shoot out to work. By 3.15 we'd almost reached Finsbury Park. Then the traffic just stopped. After 10 minutes of not moving, I decided to continue the journey eastwards by going down to Lea Bridge Road. That was no better, so I made for the Marshes and the A12 – big, BIG mistake!

By now it was almost three hours since leaving Abbey Road and whichever way we went, nothing was moving. The radio traffic reports said a police incident had closed the A12, but by then it was too late for us to try another route because everywhere was totally solid.

At 7pm, we entered Homerton High Street. Two hours later we still hadn't reached the end of that road in order to join the obvious jam there! At 9pm we reached where the entrance to the A12, which was still shut. A journey that should have taken no longer than 45 minutes with moderate daytime traffic had taken us over six hours and we were still in traffic.

Bernie Silver (G08) phoned to say that his wife had been stuck in a terrible traffic hold-up around Hackney Marshes. I tried to sound sympathetic! In the meantime, this past mile or so had taken two hours with much of the time spent sitting with the engine switched off, the only movement being when the occasional vehicle turned round to try another way. There wasn't any, a quick listen to traffic reports said the whole area was gridlocked.

But you may be surprised to know that this appalling traffic hold-up – as bad as it was – is not the reason I wrote at the beginning of this piece about how irritated I was. That irritation – no, that annoyance – came from the fact that while we sat for all those hours without moving, there wasn't the remotest sight of a single policeman walking alongside to see if everyone was ok. In that never-ending stationery queue, there must have been



women on their own, pregnant women, men or women with young children or those who had to get home to take their medication.

As a diabetic, Linda falls into that latter group. She gives herself booster insulin shots before meals and always has that with her even if we just pop out for just 30 minutes. However, she also has an insulin jab at around 10pm every night and because we expected to be home by 4pm, she never took it with her. Even a 2-hour delay would still have only taken us to 6pm.

Heading past the Olympic Park on the opposite side, it was now 9.15 and we were still not really moving and neither had we seen sight or sound of the police – not one. The sound of silence where thousands of cars are in a huge hold-up with their engines switched off added to the eerie feel of the evening. We'd now been making our way home for well over 6 hours and suddenly that 10pm marker became very real and for the first time, I began to feel real irritation at our "wonderful" police. In my mind I could see them with their hairdryers checking speeds on both sides of the Euston underpass or Cromwell Road or the police motorcyclists that now ride up and down the A12 itself while the temporary 30mph speed limit remains in force. I was tempted to dial 999 and explain about Linda's situation, but I could imagine the response: *"This line is for emergencies only. Please call your local police station."* I started up the car and became the driver that everyone hates – ie driving in a manner that under normal circumstances could be considered dangerous. I went on the offside of the traffic, weaving in and out of those who would probably have tried to stop me but couldn't restart their engines quickly enough! I was praying that a policeman would suddenly appear to do his 'ello, ello' bit. But no, they had all vanished off the face of the earth.

We finally got home at around 9.45, almost 7 hours since leaving NW8.

We later heard that the hold-up had been caused by someone who had gone onto a rooftop and sat there for 9 hours playing the saxophone. He was also said to be throwing bricks and tiles down. Because of that, the police in their wisdom closed the A12 between Bow and Leytonstone for 9 hours, causing some of the worst jams ever seen in London. Yet not one member of the constabulary could be found to explain what was going on or more importantly, enquire if everyone was ok.

By the next day, I was still as annoyed as I'd been whilst in the traffic and when a police car

forcing its way through South Ken with blue lights flashing came up behind my taxi, I made no attempt to move over. A stupid protest and certainly not something I'd have done had it been an ambulance, but it made me feel better! As the car eventually reached my offside, the police inside it stared at me with the uniformed passenger pointing to his ears as if to ask if I was deaf! I was tempted to say that I didn't know it was the police as I couldn't remember what they looked like after the dearth of their ilk the previous day, but I kept my mouth shut and just returned their stare. Then they were away into the distance, but it left me feeling just a tad better...

Goodwill 2???

Having probably spoiled your preparations for the New Year's Eve party you are getting ready to go to with the above story, can I attempt to make you feel even worse!

Call Sign recently had cause to know the exact number of private hire drivers who were currently licensed. The figure of almost 60,000 arriving from TfL's press office, didn't surprise me and that was the answer I expected. I decided to ask, more out of curiosity than for an article, if they could send me figures for the past 5 years showing the numbers of private hire and taxi drivers that had been licensed. To say the answer absolutely horrified me would be an understatement and has made me concerned about whether we actually have a future. In my mind I could see a dodo standing on the bonnet of an FX3.

I decided that it was too important to keep to myself and you can read all about it within this issue. I do hope that on reading it, you will feel as shocked and concerned as I was when I first saw the figures. No doubt the same old faces will turn round and say that it's nothing to worry about and that it's too quiet out there to worry about anything other than taking a day's money. No doubt those 60,000 private hire drivers are all saying the same thing, yet 85,000 of us in total are now taking money from those passengers who are looking for us.

We have allowed that to happen by worrying purely about ourselves and totally discarding any thoughts about the future of our business. John and Liam Griffin's Addison Lee are probably as big as Dial-a-Cab and still growing. And still we moan but do nothing about it...

And finally...

I always dislike the January issue of the mag because I lose a week with the closure of the printing works, which always takes off the week between Xmas and the New Year. I become concerned as to whether I'll manage to fill the issue up, knowing that there is usually nothing else to read at this time with the other trade papers taking a publication rest.

Hopefully my Editorial won't have distressed you too much and that 2010 is going to be a good one for you all, with excellent health and an improvement in work. And if you spot an incorrect year at the top of any page, please forgive me; I'm finding it difficult coming to grips with the year 2010! Even so, I wish you all the happiest of New Years...

Alan Fisher
Callsignmag@aol.com

reflections of the chairman

Christmas coverage

I am writing this in the first week of December due to the Editor wanting everything in early, thanks to the Christmas holidays and the extended closure of most businesses - including our printers.

The problem I have is that it is only just over a week since the December edition of **Call Sign** appeared and I believe this year (when you read this, still probably 2009) is the first time over the past thirteen years that I have not had to appeal to everyone regarding the coverage in the run up to Christmas. At the time of writing, everything is going quite well - except for the traffic, which has been horrendous.

Contract extensions

You would have read in past issues that several of our largest contracts are due to go to tender, something that is quite normal and which generally happens every two or three years. However, I am very pleased to report that two of our largest accounts, which were due to go to tender last year, have extended their contracts. They have both written to me and extended the extension until the middle of 2010, which is good news especially during the current climate. Whilst the service we give to both clients is excellent, there is always someone that is prepared to 'buy' the work during an economic downturn, so any delay to a tender or extension of a contract is quite comforting.

2012 Olympics

Call Sign has had letters in the past about the 2012 Olympics and there is one in this issue's *Mailsbot* as well. It comes from **Roy Martin (R42)**, who asks some questions and I must say that I totally agree with Roy's sentiments.

I have recently attended two meetings and there are more scheduled for the future with both - yes two - Olympic committees!

The first is with the **Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA)** and the second with **London Organising Committee Olympic Games (LOCOG)**. They are two different organisations and as their names suggests, one has to organise the Games while the other makes sure that everything gets built and delivered. Transport comes under the ODA.

While the meetings were very enlightening, they were also quite disappointing from the taxi industry's point of view. However it did give us the opportunity to put our suggestions to both committees, which they say they will consider.

You may be aware that there will be a high-speed train travelling from St Pancras to the Olympic Park, which I believe is called the Javelin. The journey time between the two stations will be seven minutes and I suspect that many people will opt for this mode of transport. However, I suspect St Pancras will be extremely busy when the public returns from the Olympic Park and we have suggested there should be taxi marshals there as there are currently at Paddington and Euston. The numbers involved are quite incredible; an estimated 800,000 people per day attending in three sessions in a 24hr period, 25,000 from



the media, 18,000 from the Olympic family and 6,000 from the Paralympic family!

I have also been informed that there will be tens of thousands of unpaid volunteers working at the Games and on the periphery. There will be 3,000 volunteers driving a fleet of BMWs for transporting competitors and officials to and from the Olympic Park and these will be the only vehicles permitted to use the Olympic Route Network (ORN).

Of course we objected to this, especially regarding the Paralympic Games, as prob-

ably many spectators will be disabled in some way and require our taxis.

Regarding the Olympic routes themselves, there will be certain times of the day when only the official Olympic traffic will be allowed in these lanes. I must say I was quite surprised to find out these routes/lanes will be on the offside of any dual carriageway, including places such as the Marylebone Road. If I can be a little more explicit, if there were three lanes, slow, fast and overtaking lane, then the Olympic Route will be the overtaking lane, so nothing else will be allowed in that lane during certain times - what can I say? There will be more meetings and hopefully these will take some of the taxi industry's suggestions on board, but it does seem at the moment that they have pretty set views on how things will work.

As a personal opinion, I believe it may be almost impossible to persuade the ODA to allow taxis to use the Olympic routes - but we will see! It certainly won't be for the lack of trying.

Finally, I would like to wish everyone a healthy New Year and hopefully a little more prosperous one than 2009.

Brian Rice
Chairman
Dial-a-Cab

Old Street Marshalled Taxi Rank

A new marshalled taxi rank has been launched in Shoreditch and between 22:00 and 03:00 on Friday and Saturday evenings, the new rank (Old Street near the 333 nightclub, opposite the town hall), will be marshalled.

This scheme is a partnership between Transport for London, Hackney Council and the police. Licensed taxi drivers are encouraged to support this scheme, use the taxi rank and help get people home safely.

The new taxi rank is in operation seven days a week between 22:00 and 04:00.

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THE MIRACLE CALLED SID GOLD!

At the tail end of 2007, one of **Dial-a-Cab's** longest-ever serving drivers, **Sid Gold (ex-E20)**, finally called it a day having been a driver with the Society for 42 years. At 86, Sid was already London's oldest driver and although he regularly passed his PCO medicals with flying colours, he decided that driving a radio taxi carried too much responsibility for someone of his advanced years. As he walked out of the doors at East Road for the last time, he told **Call Sign**:

"Dial-a-Cab has been a big part of my life and I am so sad to let it go, but that time had to come one day. I still go out occasionally to work the streets, so I won't starve!"

Sid began driving in 1939, but never passed a test as there were none then. During the war, he was in the RAF - although he never flew a plane. He went onto the Knowledge in the early 1960s and came to DaC in 1965 under the Chairmanship of the late **Jack Russell**.

In 2003, we thought he showed what he was made of when at the age of 82 he was left lying on the floor after two yobs - one of whom held a gun to Sid's head - attempted to rob him of his takings. He refused, the two thugs gave up and Sid was back at work the following night!

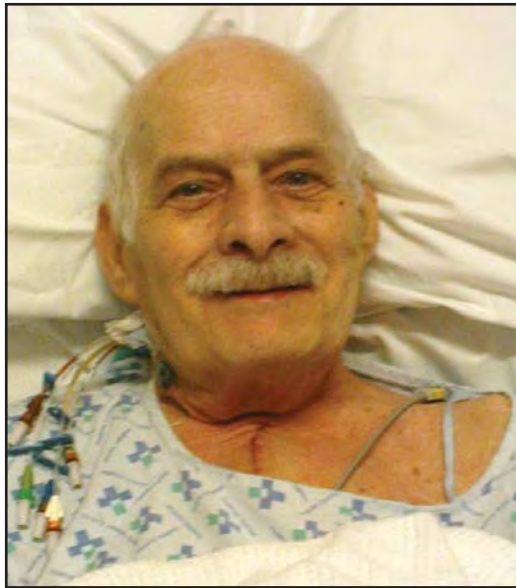
But we knew absolutely nothing. The Sid Gold miracle hadn't even got off the ground yet! Read on to see what this man is made of...

On 8 October, Sid's son Larry gave **Call Sign** the sad news that his father was close to dying. He had been taken into hospital due to excessive water retention, as he hadn't taken his water tablets following too much peeing. It was considered a minor problem, but a few short days later Sid collapsed in the ward with a cardiac arrest. He was dead for 10 minutes, but with a final attempt doctors finally brought Sid back to life. Larry was told to expect brain damage in his father due to the excessive time that his heart had stopped. Sid was still unconscious and put onto a ventilator. His condition was described as very bad and medical opinion suggested that even if a miracle happened and his heart (and kidneys) recovered, he could be facing the future as a vegetable. But they hadn't had Sid Gold for 42 years as Dial-a-Cab had. Miracles are commonplace for him!

Several days later and Sid had pulled completely round. His tubes were taken away and he walked unaided to the shower - but not before asking one of the younger nurses if she could help wash his back! However, his looks belied him and his medical team discovered a leaky valve in his heart. Larry was advised to stay for the night, as Sid wasn't quite as well as he looked. But he pulled through once again. Then following further tests, three badly clogged arteries in his heart were discovered. The only real option for that is open-heart surgery. But at 88 years of age? Miracle man Sid told Larry not to worry, but his son feared the worst purely because of his dad's advanced years. The surgical team weren't too sure either, but went ahead because of the incredible strength of Sid. There was also concern about possible post-op complications, but without the op it would probably be curtains even for a miracle man.

He was moved to Barts, but the op was delayed when Sid was diagnosed with angina. Tests showed it wasn't too bad although they did show Sid to be slightly anaemic and he was given a blood transfusion.

Then around six weeks after being admitted, Sid underwent the bypass and an op to repair a leaky Mitral valve. It was deemed a success by astonished surgeons who couldn't believe what an 88 year old man could go through - especially as to all intents and purposes, Sid had



Sid recovering in Barts

died once already. Sid was recovering as well as can be expected, but his ordeal wasn't yet over. His heart rate began dropping to 30 beats per minute and there was talk of a pacemaker. Sid came round and unsurprisingly was very depressed, but soon cheered up when he saw that the nurses had taken to him. Well, they hadn't seen many real miracle men in the ward! In fact, the nurse looking after him in ICU told Larry that when she saw Sid's date of birth, she couldn't believe it. She thought he was in his early 70's and added that she had seen much younger guys looking in worse shape after heart ops!

Sid isn't out of the woods yet, but having now survived a cardiac arrest with ten minutes not breathing and a major heart op, there isn't much left that he needs to be

afraid of! He recently underwent a minor op to successfully have a pacemaker fitted and is now talking about a return to taxi driving! Even for a miracle man, that might not be such a good idea! However, we have no doubt that if he wanted to, he could! Son Larry told **Call Sign**:

"If I could be half the man my dad is, I would be very happy. He truly is one in a billion."

From everyone at **Dial-a-Cab** and **Call Sign**, our best wishes for a speedy recovery to Mr Miracle man, **Sid Gold...**

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Jerys World



"Ok, so 2009 wasn't the best year we've ever 'ad, but look on the bright side... at least 2010 can't be any worse!!!"

PCO COUNTER SERVICE TIMES REDUCED

But more staff now available to answer phone calls and emails...

If you have ever had need to phone the PCO at Penton Street, you'll know how time consuming it can be. However, **John Mason**, TfL Director Taxi and Private Hire, has now announced changes to opening hours at the PCO that should improve that situation.

From the 4 January 2010, **counter services** at the PCO will no longer be available on Monday or Friday, but only Tuesday to Thursday from 10am to 3pm.

John Mason told **Call Sign**: "When I was appointed, I said I wanted to improve the level of service provided to both drivers and operators. In order to achieve this, we need to focus our staff on areas of the service that needs to be improved. By revising the counter opening hours, we hope to improve licensing services and enable applications to be dealt with more quickly and to answer more telephone calls during peak periods. We will monitor the impact of these changes in the early weeks of next year and identify further changes that can be made to improve the service we provide our customers." TfL added that the new arrangements were



Brian Rice welcoming John Mason to the trade several months ago

being introduced to improve licensing services and enable applications and related services to be dealt with more quickly and effectively by telephone, email and post. Due to the high demand for telephone services, these changes will result in increased staff availability for handling calls, especially during peak periods.

Hopefully, the difficulty of making that phone call will now be greatly eased as John Mason continues making a name for himself within the cab trade as someone with common sense. All we need now is for

him to tell Mr Griffin and his Addison Lee cars to get out of the M4 bus lane and to show who is in charge!

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In 1906 the word *suffragette* first appeared, describing women that were campaigning for the right to vote and still under *suffrage*. This followed the launch of a movement for women's votes when **Emmeline Pankhurst** and her two daughters - **Christabel** and **Sylvia** - founded the **Women's Social and Political Union** some three years earlier.

In June 1913, **Emily Davison** threw herself under the King's horse at the Epsom Derby and was killed. She was the only suffragette to die for the cause. Then in 1918, an act was passed giving women the vote if they were over the age of 30 and either owned property or rented for at least £5 per year - or they were the wife of someone who did. But the period was not one that came anywhere close to today's equality with full voting rights for women.

However, in 1922 and from premises in **Lincoln's Inn Fields**, none of the above could stop **Carrie Morrison** from becoming the first woman solicitor to practice in the UK.

Having graduated from Girton College, Cambridge, with First Class Honours, the university authorities still refused to award Carrie - or any other women in a similar position - with

The DaC Client and the First Woman Solicitor

their degrees because they were women! There was no problem with them being allowed to study, attend lectures or sit exams; it's just that women could not hold degrees!

But in 1922 she was admitted as a solicitor and five years later, she married Ambrose Appelbe. If you think you know that name but just can't think from where, it's either because you have at some time or other needed a solicitor, or more likely because

you've picked up a passenger from the Ambrose Appelbe account premises at 7 New Square, Lincoln's Inn.

Carrie Morrison practised her profession there, but many years later Ambrose Appelbe himself became newsworthy as the person who guided **Mandy Rice-Davies** through the **John Profumo / Christine Keeler** affair. He also represented **John Christie**, who murdered six women - one of whom was his wife - at **10 Rillington Place**, Notting Hill. Humorously,

before Christie was executed, he bequeathed his reading glasses to Ambrose. Ambrose got to know his clients well, so he could help them better.

Ambrose Appelbe also represented **Ingrid Bergman** and campaigned with **Bernard Shaw** against foul smells - no connection between those last two!

Although Carrie's marriage to Ambrose ended in divorce, the two continued working alongside each other from the Lincoln's Inn office and she began specialising in family law, always taking a keen interest with the independence of women. Whilst married to Ambrose Appelbe, she always refused to use his name and omitted any reference to her married status, preferring to be known as just Carrie Morrison.

She practiced up to her death in 1950 at the age of 62 and died at the account address in New Square. Ambrose Appelbe died in 1999 at the age of 95...

Ambrose's son, **Felix Appelbe**, now carries on the Practice, looking after private clients from all walks of life. He even remembers washing his father's Vauxhall in order to take Ingrid Bergman to her wedding, which Ambrose was to organise in secret from the public!












To hear more tales, call in at 7 New Square next time you are picking up or setting down a passenger. You will probably be offered a coffee or a chat!



Carrie was the first woman solicitor and practiced from DaC Client Ambrose Appelbe in Lincoln's Inn

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With the use of computers increasing in the 1970s, many people began to show concern about records being kept and how that affected the privacy of the individual.

At the 1981 *Council of Europe* convention, it was agreed that standards among member countries should be maintained to ensure the free flow of information, but without infringing on personal privacy. In 1984, the UK introduced its first *Data Protection Act*. The Act stated that both public and private organisations with access to computer-held personal data, should register their interest to the Data Protection Registrar – the organisation responsible for enforcing the Act.

However, there was no explicit recognition to the individual's right to privacy, so in 1998, that led to an updated version of the Act. This version built on an EC directive from 1995 whose aim was the protection to the right to privacy.

The Act states that information should be kept for *no longer than necessary*, but doesn't specify how long *no longer than necessary* actually means. In PCO terms, that means, approximately, for ever!

Over the years since the 1998 Act, there have been anomalies. The most famous involved child murderer Ian Huntley, who was convicted of the murders of Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman in 2003. It was later revealed that Humberside police had deleted records about previous allegations of sexual allegations against him because they believed it was in accordance with the Act. Sir John Stevens, the Met Police Commissioner at the time, then said the Act required urgent clarification due to confusion with the interpretation of the Act.

We are left with an Act that supposedly has several key principles that those handling data must apply by. Among those are that the data should be fairly and lawfully processed, it should be adequate, relevant but not excessive and not kept for longer than is necessary.

In the case of **Dial-a-Cab**, that would apply to drivers complaint files, dates of joining the Society and bank details so drivers can be paid – a noble cause indeed! The DaC rulebook contains a guide as to what we do and don't keep. According to Company Secretary **Howard Pears**, we keep the minimum that we are asked to do by law.

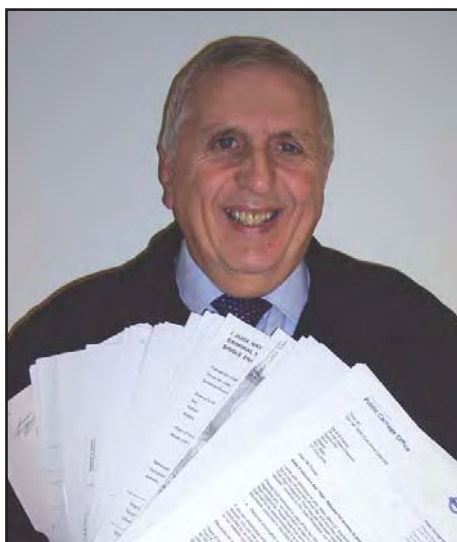
Several months ago, Call Sign Editor Alan Fisher decided under the Data Protection Act, to apply to the PCO for copies of all his files. Having signed onto the Knowledge in 1969, he wondered how far back his files would go, but never dreamed they would leave his KoL application far behind as he strolled back to those bygone days of May 1964! This was the same time as The Beatles first went to the USA, Cassius Clay beat Sonny Liston for the World title and just months after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

According to Alan, he received a huge bundle of papers and wasn't particularly bothered about the contents and the length of time they had been kept. In fact, he commented to us that he found the whole exercise fascinating, although he also added that 45 years of back files on him – considering he had only been driving a taxi for 39 of them – seemed excessive.

"As I have nothing to hide, it didn't bother me too much and in fact seeing my taxi licence photos going back to 1971 told me what I already knew – I still look the same!"

The Data Protection Act and the PCO

And 45 years of files on Call Sign's Ed!



Alan shows some of the many pages of files kept on him by the PCO

We decided not to follow-up on that statement! However, we did ask for his permission in giving some of the secret info stored on him and Alan said yes straightaway.

Out of several hundred sheets, we picked just a small selection beginning with May 1964 when he applied for a licence to act as a bus conductor and then, other than a report on losing his badge, it was followed in January 1967 with an application to drive a London bus. Two weeks training followed and he was then given a PSV licence for being proficient "to drive a doubled deck bus." He also had to submit a cheque for 5/6 (27p) and attend a police station to hand in his conductor's badge and report that he was then a bus driver. Why that needed to be kept is not known, but of interest - at least to Alan!

On the Knowledge

More interesting was that in June 1969, he applied to go on the **Knowledge**. Then just 8 weeks later, he attended Penton Street for a talk on what the KoL would entail. That Knowledge was to last around 15 months in total, with 10 monthly visits, 3 lots of 21 days, 2 periods of 2 weeks and then the suburbs. Perhaps the most surprising thing was that there were no comments written against his *appearances*, just the occasional *run* or dropped *points*. Alan told us he was rather disappointed in that because he had waited 39 years to see what **Mr Finlay** had written about him, but there was nothing!

After all that, Alan went and failed his drive. According to the files wording, he was found to be incompetent! Some 10 days later, his compe-

tency returned and after paying 3/- (15p), he was given his first 3-year taxi licence – badge no 18499 – which he promptly went and lost and had to pay yet another 2/6 (12.5p) to replace!

But the files also show Alan's dark side! In June 1975, he was caught picking up a passenger at Heathrow without having gone through the feeder park. He was convicted and fined £25 at Uxbridge Magistrates Court after pleading guilty by letter, while just 2 weeks later he was fined £10 for a speeding offence! Soon after, his cab was broken into and while not much money went missing, his moneybag containing his driving and taxi licences went walkies. Bang went another 15p! 1975 wasn't his best year!

Then a mystery occurrence. According to his files but in unintelligible writing (most pages are hand-written), in April 1977 he did something that "he failed to admit." Whatever that was, he was warned for it!

Then came the 80s and a quiet time for our esteemed Editor. The only thing of note was that taxi licence renewals were still priced at 15p! However, 1990 started on the wrong foot when Alan was warned for an unauthorised pick-up at Gatwick. His excuse that the passenger had waited for a London taxi to set down because they couldn't afford the fares from the Crawley Cabs rank and thought he would get a cheaper fare from someone who was going back empty anyway, was rejected and he was sent a warning letter from the police informing him that if he "re-offended" he could be banned from the airport!

Sadly for this **Call Sign** article, for the past 20 years Alan has kept clear of any trouble, even though the files show several referrals to the *Police National Computer* – no doubt linking up to licence renewals. The only notable thing about that was that on the first referral, the computer could find no trace of his existence - yet a licence was still issued!

We asked Alan what it was about the files that stuck in his memory and his answer surprised us. It was nothing to do with the two airport misdemeanours over 30 years ago, it was because the files during his time as a bus conductor and driver always referred to him as Mr Fisher, yet since his days on the KoL from 1969, his files only refer to him as Fisher.

"A bit like teacher and pupil," was Alan's last comment.

Our thanks to Alan for agreeing to share the files...

Ron Yarborough
Call Sign online

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call centre chat

2010???

Another year over, where does the time go? From a business point of view, personally I'm glad its over! In all my years, I have never experienced a time when the economy has had such an impact on the Society's business. The *Annual Report* will soon be sent to you and it's very clear to see the downturn in the work for 2008/9. But, it's the bottom line that really tells the story. For any business to suffer such a large drop in turnover, yet only show a small loss is quite an achievement. When you read the Chairman in the *Annual Report*, you will understand why, simply put, had we the Board not taken such drastic action in reducing the expenditure of the Society, you wouldn't need to be a mathematician to see that our loss could have been huge. Unfortunately, to achieve these savings meant we had to focus our attention on areas of the business where costs were high.

First was the complement of staff we employed. It was a very difficult time for me because most of the staff came under my jurisdiction and I had to be involved in the whole redundancy process, which I assure you was not a pleasant experience to have to go through. Other members of staff were also very accommodating for the Society by volunteering to reduce their hours or even change their shifts. Sadly for us, the Board had to also decide not to give any salary increases or pay staff a Christmas bonus. The Board also reduced some of their own hours and the annual hourly increase that is permitted in line with the fare increase, was not taken. A decision not to present drivers with a Christmas gift was also taken and my view on this was



that if you cannot give something fairly substantial, then do not give anything because it may well offend.

What is going to happen in the New Year? Well, due to the BoM not being clairvoyant and able to predict the future - although some would have you believe differently - all we can do when setting budgets is to fall back on our experience and speculate how the year will transpire. So far, the current trading year trends are demonstrating that we are in line with previous years.

By this I mean that September, October and November are the busier months and have already helped us to show a marginal trading profit. December, which is only a three-week month, is normally not as profitable as we'd like because of the increased staffing costs we incur, usually caused by covering the extra shifts worked over the holiday period.

We hope that by the end of December, we will show a small profit; but a small loss

would not come as a surprise. January takes a couple of weeks to recover from the festive period and is not normally a month for showing huge profit. If we can get to the end of January and still show at least a break-even figure, then the slightly busier months of February and March should start to help us to get through April - another tight month due to the Easter Holidays.

If we are still in the black by this time of the year and if the trading trends stay the same, June and July should set us up well to handle August, which as we all know is a very quiet month. So, unless there is a total downturn in our work, we should be in a good position by the end of August 2010 to show a respectable yearly trading profit.

But the important point for us all to remember is this. The Society is in the service industry and if we are to have a successful year, then our service must be more than the normal excellent service we provide. If we just maintain this, our clients will do no more than just accept that that's what they are paying for. If we give poor service, the chances are everyone will know about it. But the only chance we have of receiving that pat on the back or that all-important compliment is for us all to go the extra mile and not take our foot off the pedal.

If we all remember that, then I believe 2010 will be much better for us all. And on that note, I'd like to wish you all and your families a very happy and prosperous New Year...

Keith Cain

Call Centre Manager

Driver Operations Manager

WCHCD Liverymen's Dinner

The 6th annual Liverymen's Dinner was held on 25 November at the magnificent Cutlers Hall. The Master of The Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers, **Michael Davies**, together with his Wardens, welcomed Liverymen, Freemen and their guests. Shortly before dinner, two new Freemen, **Robert Hogg** and **Stephen Plumb**, were welcomed to the WCHCD.

Guest speaker at the Dinner was **Dr William Beaver**, who writes speeches for the Lord Mayor of London. As well as keeping guests amused with his speech, he also proposed a toast to the Company. After dinner, Past Master **Alan Parker** presented the **Hitch Award**. This is a prestigious award for bravery, which has been given this year to **Robert Taylor**.

The award is named after **Private Fredrick Hitch**, of 'B' Company, 24th Regiment of Foot, South Wales Borderers. Hitch was a Rifleman who was awarded the Victoria Cross during the Zulu War for valour following the battle of Rorkes Drift in South Africa. Hitch later went on to become a London taxi driver. The Award is only given to those few drivers who have shown outstanding courage above and beyond that expected from their normal duties of driving a taxi.

Robert, a Freeman of the WCHCD, is a ComCab driver. In 2007, he was working in his cab when he witnessed a gang of youths chasing another group through the streets and into a take-away restaurant. A violent attack involving several people then took place inside the restaurant, during which several people were seriously assaulted and one man, who was not a gang member but had been dragged into the melee, was viciously attacked and killed after suffering over 30 stab wounds.

Robert witnessed the incident and took down the registration number of one of the vehicles leaving the scene. His fast thinking not only led to the attackers being apprehended, but his testimony in court was also vital to the prosecution of those involved. Four men were convicted of murder in addition to actual bodily harm and grievous bodily harm to two other individuals. The men received life sentences.

In court, the Judge praised Robert Taylor for his diligence and bravery in coming forward and commented that his actions had not only secured the arrest of the men involved, but had also ensured justice was served.

Photo shows ComCab's Malcolm Paice with award winner Robert Taylor and his wife Jane.



Sandie Goodwin
For Call Sign

People, it is said, are creatures of habit, often performing the same routine day after day and to a regular time schedule, almost like clockwork. Well, for the driver who rents one of the cabs of **Alfie Harp (T57)**, this daily ritual recently had a surprising turn of events...

Alfie told **Call Sign** that the driver starts work promptly at 06.30 each morning, and stops off briefly at his local newsagent to pick up his daily read.

"He has been doing this for years," Alfie said, **"it's just around the corner from home and only takes seconds to grab the paper and return to his cab. But with the engine barely started up and still cold, it's easier to leave the engine running while he momentarily nips into the shop."**

However, on this particular early morning stop, the driver was astounded when leaving the shop, newspaper under his arm, to discover that his cab was not where he had left it at the roadside moments earlier! Indeed, it was not anywhere to be seen up or down the road, having completely disappeared in those few short seconds.

Realising that it must have been stolen, probably by someone who had observed his creature of habit daily routine and opportunistically commandeered the cab, the driver raised the alarm and a general message was duly sent out across the entire **Dial-a-Cab** driver's mobile terminal network, to look out for the errant 'R' registration taxicab!

During the course of the day, all eyes were peeled for the lost cab and then a report came in

A Creature of Habit?



Even creatures of habit shouldn't leave the cab with the engine running. You never know who is watching...

to the Call Centre that the missing cab had been spotted parked up outside the popular Piccolo Bar in Gresham Street, in the heart of the City! Two DaC drivers in the area immediately made their way to Gresham Street and surrounded the suspect taxi, blocking it in to prevent further escape. They duly reported their 'find' to the Call Centre and described the action they had taken to secure the vehicle.

Imagine then the consternation of the true owner of said 'found' taxi, when he burst out of the Piccolo Bar demanding to know what all the fuss was about! He did eventually convince the

curious DaC drivers of his innocence... It was a case of mistaken identity!

Alfie admitted later that in his confusion he had given the Call Centre the wrong cab registration number, resulting in some embarrassment and inconvenience to the two DaC drivers and probably high blood pressure to the owner of the surrounded cab!

"But seriously," said Alfie, **"I would really like to apologise to everyone concerned for the upheaval I caused by giving the wrong cab number. I'd also like to thank everyone for their help, especially the two DaC drivers who went out of their way to assist and the guys/gals up in the Call Centre for relaying the info. By the way, my story ends happily because while the cab was stolen early in the morning, it was found later the same day parked in George Lane, South Woodford and handed in to the police. £105 was taken from the cab, but thankfully nothing else was missing. The driver's Badge and Bill were found by a member of the public on Hermon Hill, close to George Lane. The police are investigating where the cab might have been during the hours it went missing, but so far nothing conclusive has been established."**

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MARK'S BACK TO WORK!

The name of **Mark Stansbury (M94)** has probably become quite well known to **Call Sign** readers following articles about him in both the **October** and **November 2009** issues.

The first one (*A Vito Good Read*) told of his new **Mercedes Vito** and how impressed Mark was - not just with the vehicle, but also with the accompanying driver's handbook!

Mark added that even though he had only owned the vehicle for two days, he felt very comfortable driving it.



Mark Stansbury is back to work after his appalling accident

Then the following month, the article was in a far less light-hearted mood after we heard that Mark had been in a collision with a much older taxi in Bond Street (*DaC Driver's Miraculous Escape*). He had only had the cab a few short weeks when he told **Call Sign**:

"I was really very lucky to have survived and I am eternally grateful for that. I could have easily been killed. It appears that another cab was travelling along Brook Street and entered the junction with Bond Street at the same time as I did and collided into the offside of my Vito, spinning me around and actually flipping me over - such was the force of the impact! My only real memory was staggering away from my overturned cab afterwards."

Mark's Vito, after just those few weeks, had to be completely written off.

But that was then! On Friday 5 December, Mark went to KPM to pick up his brand new Vito. Whilst his insurance company quibbled over the value of a new, albeit used, Vito - the tax element obviously being the first thing to go - Mark told us how grateful he was to KPM Chairman **Peter DaCosta** who reduced the price of the cab to ease Mark's insurance problems. The **Dial-a-Cab** driver was also surprised when asked if he would mind being photographed with the new cab, thinking that it was linked to the accident.

"But it wasn't that at all," said a beaming Mark, **"it was a publicity shoot to celebrate KPM's sale of their 500th Vito. It looks like I'm going to make the taxi newspapers for something rather more pleasant than smashing the cab up!"**

Mark added that physically he was fully recovered from the accident and even though the first day back began with him feeling rather nervous, he soon got back into the swing of

things. All that was left to irritate him were the actions of his insurance company...

"But as everyone keeps telling me, the most important thing is that I'm ok and I guess that's true. So can I also take this opportunity to thank everyone that enquired after me following the smash. It helps to know that people are thinking of you..."

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The name 'Coley Allen' is steeped in East End cab trade lore, going back far longer than any current cab drivers can remember. The company, trading as **North Eastern Motors**, was established in **Dunbridge Street E2** in 1932 by **Coleman Allen**, who had gained his cab driving licence in 1929. There were six brothers, all of them drove cabs. There was also a sister who married a cab driver, so the term *keeping it in the family* took on a whole new meaning with that kind of history behind it! But the end of an era is nigh...

When **Call Sign** recently heard a rumour that the garage was to close its doors forever, we decided that even though it wasn't a **Dial-a-Cab** story, they must have helped out thousands of DaC drivers over the years and that just for the history involved, it made it worth reporting on. And history is certainly what you encounter as you step into the cosy office that is the hub of this garage with 77 years of heritage to its name. High up on a wall hangs a portrait of the founder, Coleman, an approving look in his eyes as he gazes down on his sons **Jimmy and Harvey Allen**, who together have run the operation for many years.

On another wall is a faded portrait of Coleman's father Judea (Jack), proudly sitting in his 1906 Unic taxi, while finally, in a long wooden frame is displayed the Hackney Carriage licence granted to Jimmy and Harvey's great-grandfather on October 22nd 1857, that was during the reign of Queen Victoria and is truly history with a capital H!

Call Sign was shown a ledger book dating from the 1940s, listing the names of drivers and their cab rental payments, all neatly entered by hand in blue ink (see cover photo).

"Drivers worked on a percentage of the clock in those days as very few - if any - could afford to buy and maintain their own taxi," Jimmy explained, adding that the meters would register the number of trips completed and the distance travelled. The driver then paid the garage accordingly. Like today, there would be a dayman and a nightman, so the meter was read before and after each shift so that every driver knew how much to pay into the garage.

"Cab driving back in the 50s and 60s was a good living," Jimmy's brother Harvey added. "I remember a postman working for us part-time then. He drove the cab on a Saturday night and could take as much as his weekly wage from the PO. Mind you, he did have to go at it!"

Taxicab prices were also rather different from those of today. **Call Sign** saw an invoice for a 1950 taxi costing £732! The total 'on the road' price was around £997 in today's decimal currency, but certainly not today's prices! To make your mouth water, in addition to the cost of the cab, road tax for the year was £10, meter rental £9 and the insurance cost for the 12-month period was £35!

The company enjoyed its heyday in the late 1970s and into the early 1980s, when it ran about 180 cabs and supported a staff of around 40 people, offering a full range of services to its' clientele. Slowly, as margins became squeezed, the fleet diminished to its present size of 55 cabs and 6 staff.

Jimmy Allen continued the North Eastern Motors story: "Over the years, wages, materials

Coley Allen:

The End of a Taxicab era...



Harvey (standing) and Jimmy Allen. Inset pic Coley Allen - began the business in 1932

that nowadays - even if you wanted to."

After 73 years in Dunbridge Street, North Eastern Motors moved in 2005 to Hadleigh Street E2. Now, after 4 years at that site and due to redevelopment of the area, they are soon to be going back to their roots in Dunbridge Street, when L P Motors will take over responsibility for maintaining the cab fleet, but the garage itself will fade into history.

However, the name of Coley Allen will be remembered for many years to come, along with those of Jimmy and Harvey. If they can keep away, then we wish them a happy retirement along

with grateful thanks from a taxi trade that appreciates the fact that with all the comings and goings of garages in this trade, the name of Coley Allen's North Eastern Motors was an ever-present...

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It's the year 2010 already – isn't that a little creepy? When I was a boy, the year 2010 seemed like some far-flung time in a futuristic world where everyone would spend their lives in front of computers and ride around in flying cars. Well, we may not have the flying cars yet, but a lot of us do spend most of our lives in front of computers of one type or another. Which brings me on to my latest gadget...



I recently bought a **32GB iPod Touch (3rd generation)**, which has been the most surprising purchase I've ever made! You see, I have always been against **Apple** products since the days of **MacOS 8**, which was a clunky and ugly interface running on a proprietary brick of a computer. So when two of my colleagues in DaC IT (Jason and Benjamin) bought an iPod Touch each, I dismissed their superficial triviality and went about my merry way.

However, my resistance soon proved futile as I began to realise that this was more than simply an MP3 player – so much more! The Touch is a powerful handheld computer; similar to the **Apple iPhone**, which allows you to access the Internet via WiFi, play games, watch movies and podcasts, listen to music and much more besides.

The sheer staggering number of "apps" available for this little device is astounding. The Apple store have around 100,000 apps available, many of which are free or ridiculously cheap – as low as 59p!

In the process of playing with my new toy, I stumbled upon **Twitter**. Some months ago in *Call Sign*, I disagreed with a driver and slated

In a world where technology moves at an astounding pace, DaC Network Administrator Jonathon Winterburn takes an occasional look at the latest gadgets...

JON ASKS WHAT'S NEW?

this web application as being dire and simply a means for sad, lonely people to announce to the world what they were doing at every minute of the day. But I was wrong! Due to one exceptional lady – none other than Ms Twitter UK – and her fascinating, inspiring life story that I discovered at <http://rebeccawoodhead.com>, I found myself being drawn in to the world of Twitter. Before I knew it, I was not only reading everything she had to "tweet" about, but I also found myself following many other riveting "tweeters" including the brilliant Stephen Fry himself – **Twitter: @stephenfry**.

Ms Twitter UK is actually known as **Rebecca Woodhead** from the Cotswolds (find her on **Twitter: @rebeccawoodhead**). Rebecca is a novelist, tech pundit and an avid tweeter who is quite simply a breath of literary fresh air. As her writing and Twitter credentials far outstrip my own, I asked her to describe Twitter for *Call Sign*. She told me:

"I grew up in the middle of the countryside on the edge of the Cotswolds, but every birthday from the age of three, I asked my parents to take me to London for a birthday taxi ride – I kid you



not! We would get in the cab and ask the driver to show us London. Sometimes we would see all the tourist spots and sometimes we would tour the East End, but every time, the highlight of the ride was the story. There are no storytellers like London taxi drivers and the budding writer in me loved to listen to them. Twitter is the online equivalent of a taxi ride through London with the perfect cabbie. Its real time search engine is The Knowledge that connects you to ideas being thought around the world at any given second. The people you follow are the ones who drive your twitter story-cab. In fact, Twitter recently introduced **Lists**, which is like having your own fleet of taxis. Hop onto a list called **London** and you have one experience, build a list called **football** and you have another. The more black cab drivers that join Twitter the better, because Twitter is all about the stories – and who has more stories than a London cabbie?"

Thanks Rebecca, I'm never afraid to admit when I am wrong and in this instance I concede to Richard Cudlip (V23) - Twitter: @cab-biescapital - that you were right! Twitter is an excellent tool, there is no doubt about it and I retract my likening the users of it to the proletariat et al.

A prosperous new year to you all, and thanks for reading!

**Jonathon Winterburn
DaC Network Administrator**

Have Barbeque Will Travel!

Now the Ed has a Taster!

Last month's *Call Sign* ran a piece on Oscar and his new **Have Barbeque, Will Travel** business. Simply put, if you are already an expert at making a barbeque, this won't interest you. But if everything you cook in the garden comes out underdone or tasting like rubber – and especially if you don't own barbeque equipment but have always wanted to make a barbeque in your own garden – then listen up, because Oscar is now taking bookings for throughout 2010.

Many of you already know **Oscar**, who for several years has been copying driver's vinyl to CD and videos to DVD. But we bet you didn't know that for generations his family have been master cooks with his great-grandfather's recipe for *kofte* still tasting as delicious now as it did when he first tried it! Oscar is no different and is brilliant at barbequing.

He has now set up in business with **SIZZLES**. He will come to your house, set up safely in your garden and provide you and however many guests you have with sizzling hot delicious food from the charcoal barbie grill, straight onto your plate.

He recently showed his confidence by inviting *Call Sign* Editor, **Alan Fisher**, to try out a lunchtime barbie – although being mid-December, Oscar kindly served it to Alan in the dining room! Already on the table were several different delicious salads, including a vegetable salad with egg and another named after his wife, Ayses, which consisted of shredded carrot and yoghurt, but which Alan said he just loved and actually took some home afterwards! Along with that, Alan tried some of Oscar's *Kofte* – both vegetarian and meat.

"I'm a meat man," Alan told *Call Sign* afterwards, "and it was delicious. But it's nice to know that vegetarians haven't been totally forgotten."

As the *Kofte* slid down, along with pitta bread and onions came mini burgers and chicken wings, all served how they should be – straight off the barbeque and still hot.

Alan's final comment? "I enjoyed it. A Turkish barbeque isn't hugely different from an English one, but there are some delicious, yet subtle flavours that you can't really describe. It's certainly a more rewarding way of spending the afternoon than talking to someone from TfL about bus lanes..."

Oscar gives you two options:

1. He can provide all the food (plus rice, salad and pitta bread) including his self-marinated chicken wings and great grandfathers recipe *kofte*, plus of course mini burgers and bring it all round to you and cook it in your garden or...
2. You can go out and buy whatever barbeque food you want and Oscar will prepare it for you. Whatever you choose to do, Oscar will come with his barbeque equipment and cook perfectly for you.

If you are a fan of charcoal cooked food but can't do it yourself, this could be ideal for you, your friends and family. You can book SIZZLES for birthdays, anniversaries or just any excuse for a party in 2010!

You can get more details on 0208 518 8765 or 07902 246 354. Just ask for Oscar and tell him you're with Dial-a-Cab. He'll give you a great deal...



Vodafone 360 is a new service that is built around the user and works across mobiles and computers. When the product was ready for launching, **Dial-a-Cab** account client and media company **MIG**, were commissioned to promote it. The plan was to coordinate and deliver Vodafone spokespersons to media houses and static positions across London, presenting **Vodafone Now Plus** on the 360 handset. They could then give first hand Vodafone information to influential individuals. Complementing the promotion was the Vodafone Media Bus, which was parked all day in Hanover Square. Vodafone clients were invited on board to chat with members of the sales team.

As we have worked together successfully on other projects, **Dial-a-Cab** was the first point of contact to help put the promotion together and five **Dial-a-Cab** drivers were required to transport Vodafone representatives to various locations in and around London. The DaC taxis had to have **Cabvision** in the rear compartment and a short promotional video was created specially for the project.

DaC taxis visited most of the media outlets in London. Board member, **Mike Son** who was involved in much of the planning, told **Call Sign**:

"The project was a total success and hopefully a nice little earner for the drivers. I'd like to offer my thanks to those drivers involved - **W.Leedham (O27)**, **P.Campbell (W68)**, **B.Devor (W43)**, **T.Felvus (M86)** and

VODAFONE 360 PROMOTION USES DAC



The DaC drivers wait in Hanover Square for their next Vodafone journey

S.Bellinger (L46). I'd also like to thank **Shelagh Adkins** for her help."

Following the event, Mike Son was sent a letter from Vodafone. Showering compliments onto DaC and its drivers, their spokesperson added:

"I have to say it is an absolute pleasure to work with you and nothing is ever a problem. The drivers are a complete credit to Dial-a-Cab and I was really impressed with their can-do

attitude. It is clear that both you and they are full of pride in their work, something which as we know, is hard to find these days."

Mike told **Call Sign** after the event: **"Everything they said was true. The drivers were brilliant and represented the Society in a way that enhanced the already high view Vodafone had of us."**

XMAS GRIDLOCK IN LONDON!



I shall not forget Saturday 5 December 2009 in a hurry! Having had a week over in **New York City**, followed by a few days up in my log cabin in **Scotland** and then a week back at the

vineyard in the south of **France**, I fancied a *l-o-n-g* stint in the saddle to earn some folding gear to give me the chance of dusting off the Christmas shopping!

Boy did I earn my spurs that fateful day! Any **Dial-a-Cab** subscriber that was out in that jungle will know what I am talking about! Yes, I understand why **Oxford Street** was closed to traffic to give shoppers the freedom of the West End, but why, why, why close **Victoria Embankment**, **Northumberland Avenue** and **Trafalgar Square** between 1pm and 6pm just to rub our noses in it? Yes, I do understand roads have to be closed for demos, but why, why, why, my dear **Mayor Boris**, does this have to happen on the same day?

Quite frankly, the day was a total waste of time; continuously stuck in gridlock with punters fuming at the lack of value - and it wasn't as if they could jump on the tube either with half the network down. This is becoming a town that seems to only run public transport for 5 days a week!

Taxi drivers were packing up early, leaving many punters standing around with all the Xmas shopping they had come out to do because they were afforded the freedom of the City! Many rail travellers and hotel guests were left stranded, so much so that many of those must have missed their theatre start times or dinner reservations! What a mad, mad, mad, situation Boris! Where were you geezer - in the country house or something? London became a laughing stock on that day -

let's just hope they get it right next December!

Going back to my New York trip in the last **Call Sign**, I have mentioned many times in this organ about my old mate and **New York Yellow Cab Driver** extraordinaire, **Fred Wrack**. Well this is a picture of the legend just before the start of the New York City Marathon, which we both hobbled round together. Just look at that beard - here is a man who once went five sets with Wimbledon finalist **Chuck McKinley** back in the 60's - I hope Chuck is in as good shape!

In the meantime, can I wish all **Dial-a-Cab** drivers a very happy and successful New Year...



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

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THEATRE REVIEW THEATRE REVIEW

THE DARK ANGEL...

CAMILLE O'SULLIVAN



Pic. Michael Labica

From Tom Whitbread

I was recently invited to the **Apollo Theatre, Shaftsbury Avenue** for the preview of a new show - **The Dark Angel** starring **Camille O'Sullivan**. This experience was shared with a varied audience of press critics, celebrities and cult followers. I took my seat next to the stalls centre aisle with a perfect view of the centre stage.

I had never heard of Camille O'Sullivan, so this was to be a trip into the unknown for me. I hadn't a clue what type of music I was about to hear or even what she looked like. I had previously tried to gain some information regarding Ms O'Sullivan via the internet; the information told of an array of worldwide sell-out concerts and shows!

Entering the auditorium, I was greeted by the sound of circus music with a stage set for five musicians. A table, centre stage, awaited its star patron. The musicians began playing as house lights dimmed until you could barely see...

It was then that I felt an eerie silky cloth touching my ear. I turned suddenly to see a ghostly character in a black dress, carrying a night-light in a glass vase. The ghostly figure had her right hand out, just touching the hair of audience members as she walked down the aisle. The lady opposite was so shocked, I think she shot up a foot into the air!

After this dramatic entrance, Camille launched into two of the loudest songs I have ever heard in the small Apollo Theatre! This distorted her voice and I don't think it was needed - as she was to prove throughout the rest of the show. **Camille O'Sullivan** proved through her performance that she has such a powerful voice, she can captivate any audience even when playing without the aid of her musicians - certainly no mean feat.

Camille, who unsurprisingly considering her name, has Irish / French parentage, obviously has a cult following, going by the cheers and wolf whistles that erupted from certain parts of the audience after each song. I tried to find the category that Camille fitted into; was it jazz, big show or perhaps country? At one point, whilst standing on centre stage with just a single spotlight on her, I had visions of Edith Piaf and I felt I'd been transported to a nightclub on the Paris South Bank.

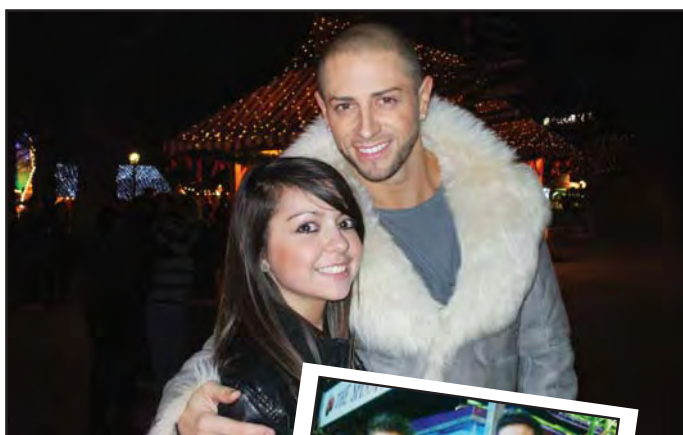
Then the mood changed and I felt I was in a front row seat at Ronnie Scott's in Frith Street as a powerful Cleo Lane jazz voice filled the theatre. And so it went on.

I would obviously recommend the show to all cult followers of Camille O'Sullivan or anyone who looks for a show that is clearly out of the ordinary, starring a strange woman with an incredible voice. Not really a show for children, though.

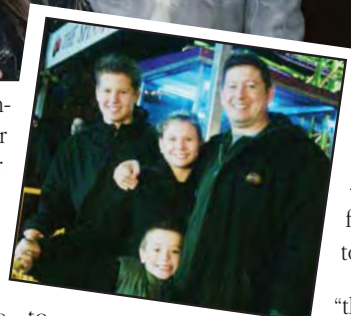
I would also congratulate Paul Sullivan for taking a chance on promoting an extraordinary show, he just loves to take chances!

The Dark Angel, starring the amazing Camille O'Sullivan runs until 16 January...

A Wonderland of Winter Celebs!



Rebecca May with X Factor's Brian Friedman. Inset: A phone pic of Alex Constantinou and his three children at Winter Wonderland



When **Call Sign** ran a competition in the November issue for 100 hot tickets for the celebrity launch night at Hyde Park's **Winter Wonderland**, we expected to take a small space in the December issue to

announce the winners, but not in our wildest dreams did we expect to still be talking about it in the January 2010 issue! Mind you, it was the most successful competition EVER in any taxi trade paper with 524 entries from Dial-a-Cab drivers and quite a few more from non-DaC drivers (whose entries we had to disallow).

But with winning drivers - most of whom claimed the full allocation of 4 tickets to take the family - still writing in telling us how much they enjoyed it, not to mention how much money they saved and which celebrities they met, we felt obligated in paying the amazing site one final visit and publishing a few of their phone-taken pics.

Among those celebs were **Paul (Wherever I lay my Hat) Young**, who was spotted by **Ron Payne (J82)** and family. Then there was **Alex Constantinou (N05)** and three of his four kids - Maria, Jack and Christopher - who said hi to **X-Factor** live finalists **Kandy Rain** and **Big Brother** contestant **Nikki Grahame**, who will forever be remembered for entering the House dressed as a Playgirl Bunny!

Several **DaC** drivers said they had bumped into Conservative party leader, **David Cameron** and his two children Nancy and Arthur. The quote **Call Sign** liked best came from **Salvatore Trupia (F22)** - best remembered from his appearance in this mag standing next to the world's tallest man, 8ft 1inch **Sultan Kosen**. Salvatore pointed out the Tory leader to son Louis, describing Mr Cameron as "the next Prime Minister" - much to David Cameron's obvious amusement. Sal then

wished the Tory leader good luck in the 2010 General Election, to which David replied that he wouldn't need any luck! Just then, Mr Cameron's daughter Nancy tried to push to the front of the queue - past Salvatore and children - for the ride they were all waiting to go on.

"Darling," said David Cameron, "this is a queue, we have to wait our turn."

Quick as a flash, Salvatore responded by saying: "Only till next May!"

With **X Factor** undoubtedly the top TV show at the time, several drivers told **Call Sign** that they had bumped into the show's Dance Director and choreographer, **Brian Friedman**. All said how friendly he was and Rebecca, daughter of **Kevin May (R07)**, actually sent us a photo of her with Brian.

In the meantime, **Doug Vogel (R05)** complained that the ice-skating "reminded me of muscles I'd last used 35 years ago!"

One thing the DaC drivers and their families all told us was that they had a brilliant time! As for **Call Sign**, we promise not to mention **Winter Wonderland** again - well probably not!

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It is with much sadness that I have to report the passing away of former trustees Tommy Smith and Ivor Smer - the latter serving as Chairman over thirty years ago - and Douglas Sherry MBE, one of the taxi trade's true benefactors and good friend to the Fund. Sincere thoughts are with their families, as they are for those trustees, drivers, and supporters who have suffered personal tragedy or ill health during the year.

I have once again been proud to represent The London Taxidriers' Fund for Underprivileged Children during the past year in my capacity as Chairman and I thank my fellow trustees for their hard work over the past twelve months. I also thank their wives and partners, without whose encouragement the Fund would not function so well and as always, the trade press for their continued and loyal interest in reporting all the Fund activities.

It would be very wrong of me to state that 2009 was an anticlimax following such an eventful and successful 80th anniversary year in 2008, but as the saying goes - the show must go on! The annual party at The Grosvenor House - to whom so much is owed for their waiving of all costs - was held in January and once again nearly 600 disadvantaged and 'special needs' children enjoyed a full afternoon of fun, food and entertainment. The presentation of an electric changing bench to Kisharon School also took place in January and I was invited in February to speak at the Highfield Women's Club. Press Officer Ray Levy and his wife Maureen were guests at the Bournemouth Carnival Band Dinner and Dance as a thank-you for allowing them to support a number of Fund events. The Fund has a flourishing web-site at www.thelondon-taxidrierschildrenscharity.co.uk where full reports of all the Fund's functions and events can be found. This is ably managed by Maureen, to whom I am sincerely grateful for all her hard work. I am also indebted to John Anderson and all at the Royal Oak for holding a very successful Easter raffle in favour of the Fund and wish them continued success when they move to their new premises.

The first outing of the year to Woburn Safari Park in May proved to be an unqualified success and even though some of the 100 plus drivers found alternative routes both to and from Woburn, everybody agreed that with the great weather and first class facilities, this venue made an excellent day out. One of the invited groups, Underhill School, later in the year welcomed the committee at a special assembly

Dial-a-Cab's David Lessman (D19), Chairman of the London Taxidriers' Fund for Underprivileged Children gives the...

LTFUC 2009 Chairman's Report

where a generous cheque was given to the Fund. In June, the Hilton Foundation held a fund-raising cycle ride in the Euston Hilton and an extremely inappropriately dressed and unfit Yours Truly took part! Also in June, members of the committee were made welcome at the official opening of the Medical Room at Woodfield School, which had been fully stocked and furnished by the LTFUC.

The regular outing to Southend-on-Sea took place in July and once again I have to thank the many sponsors, the countless army of drivers, helpers and others too numerous to mention who lend their support to make this day possible - and of course the children who are our guests for the day!

The Fund has supported the Metropolitan Police Summer Camp Project (now known as Giving a Child a Break) for many years and their kind invitation to attend the Barbecue and Prize-giving on the last night was well attended by the Committee and their wives. Although the children's activities were severely curtailed this year, an invitation to visit a West End theatre to see Hairspray was greeted with much enthusiasm. In August, I was honoured to represent the LTFUC, together with The Taxi Driver of the Year Charity Fund and

The London Taxi Benevolent Association for War Disabled at a memorial presentation to the Marylebone Diabetic Clinic in memory of the late Doug Sherry MBE.

Following the success of last year's event, the Fund once again held an Open Day at Covent Garden in September and taxi-drivers and public alike were made aware of the Fund's activities. I am most grateful to Doug Cheshire of the LVTA and his 1934 Austin taxi for assisting with the fund-raising.

In conclusion, 2009 has been yet another tremendous year and I look forward to 2010 being equally successful. It must always be remembered that the trustees are working London taxi drivers who not only take no remuneration for their time, but restrict management and administration expenses to below 2% of total income!

The London Taxidriers' Fund for Underprivileged Children is the broker between those who need and those who have and I am proud to join my fellow trustees and many of London's taxi drivers, in bringing a little happiness to so many disadvantaged children of London

**David S. Lessman
(Hon. Chairman)**

The London Taxidriers' Fund

Dial-a-Cab's Sim Yiannikaris (E53) gives the LTFUC Treasurers Report

LTFUC Treasurers Report

I would like to present my second Treasurer's Report by thanking my fellow committee members for their support and hard work in raising funds for the charity in a very difficult year. We also thank the many drivers and helpers, without whom the outings would not be possible and of course our many sponsors as well.

We began the year with our famous Grosvenor House tea party, which cost the fund nearly £4,000. Due to the fact that the entertainers gave their time freely and the gifts and toys were donated, we managed to keep our expenses very low on this event.

Our first outing of the year was to Woburn Safari Park for 300 children, costing the Fund nearly £6,000, but when you see the smiling faces on these children it says it all - worth every penny! Our annual outing to Southend was, as usual, a great success, even though it rained incessantly. The outing's expenditure was greater than usual due to the high cost of hiring the hall and catering needs and this was in excess of £12,000.

Other outings the Fund was involved in included taking children to see the show 'Hairspray' and taking part in the Lord Mayor's Parade. Our float was a huge taxi filled with children and two taxis - one dressed as a pink fur Rabbit and the other as a Bat mobile. This raised the Fund's profile to the many millions of people lining the streets and watching on TV.

Many grants were made to worthwhile causes; equipment to the Kisharon 'special needs' school, the Police Summer Camp for underprivileged children (now known as 'Giving a Child a Break'), special computer equipment for a disabled child and Christmas vouchers for children of taxi drivers who have passed away. We also made a donation towards a Diabetes machine in memory of the late Douglas Sherry MBE, who was a major benefactor to the Fund and the whole taxi industry. He will be sadly missed by us all.

I am very proud of the fact that we have kept our expenditure down to a very respectable 1.7%, That means in layman's terms that for every pound we raised, 97.3 pence went back in to helping disabled and underprivileged children.

Finally I would like to thank those drivers who have taken a collection box to put in their taxis and if there are any other drivers who would like to help, please contact me on my mobile: **07956 516325.**

**Simeos Demetrius Yiannikaris (E53)
(Hon. Treasurer to the LTFUC)**

Oh What

As DaC enjoys the Taxi Drive

While the economic climate has seen the sponsors of the **Taxi Driver of the Year Show** shy away, nothing stops the committee – led by **Russell Poluck MBE (T25) and his wife Barbara** – from putting on one of the best bashes of the year. The TDOTY charity dinner and dance is always good, but by common agreement this year's – held in the new surroundings of the **Holiday Inn Forum**, Cromwell Road – was probably one of the best ever. The food was good, the wine flowed freely and the band – once again sponsored by **Dial-a-Cab** – were absolutely brilliant. **Fraternity** have obviously been together for some considerable time

because they knew exactly how to keep the dancing tastes. With tracks ranging from Glen Miller to An en age in the 1960s and 70s - even those few that listening!

Of course, the whole purpose of the evening charities within the taxi trade – and that was also most there also dug deep to support the raffle, with



Ed's wife Linda with DaC's PA to the Operations Manager, Shelagh Adkins...



Allan Evans and wife Gill dancing the night away!



Russell (T55) and Barbara Poluck stop running around for long enough to have a dance...



Part of the DaC sponsored band swinging!



Gerry Dunn (S84) and Janet take to the floor...



TaxiTalk editor Dave Millward shows how it's done – so now we know!

a Night!!!

er of the Year charity bash...

ce floor full, while catering to everyone's musical
ny Winehouse – but always reverting to that gold-
t didn't get up to boogie, enjoyed just sitting and

is to raise money for charity - in particular those
o a big success. The **Tombola** stand sold out and
h its first prize of an all-expenses trip to New York

(donated by Audrey Sherry in memory of husband Doug). The result was that the five taxi charities
present all received cheques for £1000 each.

**All in all, a great time was had by everyone there and as the Four Seasons and Francesco
Castelluccio – better known as Frankie Valli - would have said and indeed sung on one of
their biggest hits – reprised brilliantly on the night by Fraternity - Oh what a night!!!**

*Russell has asked **Call Sign** to thank for their sponsorship, in addition to DaC and Audrey Sherry,
John Anderson (Royal Oak), KPM, Quotax Insurance and Westminster Insurance.*



Russell Poluck presents the five trade charities with
their cheques...



Mike and Maxine Son dream of faraway places!



and band that kept the party



John Dixon (B67)
and Louise take a
breather!

Happy Birthday Yellow Cabs, Baltimore



to hire female drivers.

Yellow Cabs also provide disabled access as well as supplying some hybrid cabs. But the bottom line to Yellow Cabs of Baltimore is a
very happy 100th birthday from all at Dial-a-Cab...

Call Sign has never been afraid to offer congratulations to anyone within the cab industry,
even if they are in direct competition to **Dial-a-Cab**. On this occasion, the expression "direct
competition" certainly doesn't apply, but the congratulations are still well deserved. They go
to **Yellow Cabs of Baltimore**, USA, who recently celebrated their 100th birthday – an
absolutely astonishing achievement for a taxi company and one that leaves Dial-a-Cab some
way behind in terms of longevity, with 4 January 2010 making 56 years since our first offi-
cial job went out!

The Yellow Cab Company was founded in Baltimore in 1909. Its fleet of 600 vehicles serve
around 5 million people each year and it has achieved some notable firsts, being the first to
hire African American drivers (in the 1950s), a time when the company also became the first

compliance officers update

Hello Ladies & Gents,

It was only a short while ago that I was asked by the Editor to write the last update, but due to the Christmas shutdown at the printers, this article needs to be completed by mid-December.

I hope that the period leading up to Christmas was continually busy for you and the road conditions were not quite as horrendous as they had been due to the increasing difficulty in using any known rat runs to speed up a journey, especially when there are so many road closures and roadworks - I suppose in time we get used to it.

Throughout 2009, with the help of the Call Centre and you the members, I have always tried hard to keep an even playing field. With work not as busy as in previous years, it goes without saying that the monitoring consistently carried out is even more important - and it will be continued throughout 2010. I can't stress highly enough how important it is for us all to work within the procedure rules and it is my responsibility as Compliance Officer to uphold the rules that are in place.



When I was first asked by the Chairman to fulfil this position, in my initial article (July 2007) I explained to you how I saw my role and how the complaints procedure works. My views are still the same; every complaint must be correctly and fairly evaluated from all sides and angles before any decision is taken. I have always been fair and open minded, but if I need to make a difficult judgment, I pride

myself on making the correct one.

As I have already mentioned, it is practically impossible not to hit traffic problems in London. But clients are often regular travellers and used to going certain routes at certain times. It can help prevent any misunderstanding if you ask them if they have a preferred route, especially if traffic congestion is at its worst and it is a longish trip. As you know, when tariff three is in operation, even if you are stationary in traffic the meter increases at a rapid rate and it has recently raised a number of queries of increased meter fares.

All that is left is for me to wish you and your families all a happy, prosperous and healthy New Year. 2010 has a nice ring to it, lets hope that the economic recovery starts to gain momentum and we can then carry on doing what we do best - taking our customers to and from their destinations in a safer and better way than anyone else in the business...

Allan Evans
DaC Compliance Officer

The King of Speed Camera Detectors

Novus Systems receives an award for its new Piccolo

Protecting your licence and livelihood is pretty high up on the agenda of most **Dial-a-Cab** drivers and we all know how easy it is in a "nanny state" to amount 12 points and then have to live on the edge. **The Piccolo** is a gadget that can undoubtedly help...

Not to be confused with the sandwich bar in Gresham Street (!!!), the Piccolo is the lowest cost, smallest, voice based speed camera alert system available in the UK. With a database that is updated constantly, drivers can be assured they are receiving current data regarding fixed, traffic light and possible mobile speed cameras.

Nigel Carter, MD of Novus Systems told **Call Sign**: "At less than the cost of one speeding ticket, this product provides peace of mind at incredible value. We also decided at the planning stage that we would not charge a subscription fee for database updates for this product and this has proven a strong strategy. Retailers choose our product because of the excellent value for money and the free lifetime updates - which are truly exceptional."

Novus Systems Ltd has won numerous awards from *Auto Express* for its speed camera alert systems, the most recent of which is the **M.E.N Gold Award**.

"This was fantastic news for the team who developed the Piccolo and shows clear recognition of the impact the products have already made in the UK," Mr Carter added. "M.E.N says the award is in recognition of the quality of the products and the accuracy of the database used in products managed by Novus Systems."

Licensed taxi drivers, especially, don't want to use their SatNav to get from A to B when they already know the route, and as DaC drivers probably know, SatNav databases are not always accurate anyway. The Piccolo, however, can save getting dreaded points on your licence - as well as money. As the vehicle approaches a speed camera, an initial warning is given by the Piccolo: 'Warning speed camera 500 yards ahead, limit 30MPH' If, at 200 yards before the camera the vehicle is exceeding the speed limit, the message 'Reduce speed now' is heard. If you obey the rules of the road, nothing more is heard save a simple chime indicating you have passed through the camera's path.

The system hasn't been designed for you to

speed along, but we all make mistakes and with some of the 30mph cameras flashing at 34, the Piccolo could be an invaluable tool.

The Piccolo is currently on sale at all *Halfords* and *Maplins* stores; it is also available at a range of independent high street retailers. Look out for the unique *Point of Sale* developed by Novus, which demonstrates clearly how the product works.

You can read more about the Piccolo at www.novusgps.com...



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One of **Call Sign's** more observant snitches recently saw an unusual poster displayed on the interior plastic central division of **John Gibbings (M76)** taxi and so Snitch 414 duly reported back to central command for us to chase the story behind the signage.

John told this magazine: "It goes back to the early part of 2009 when I saw a short article in another trade mag about the benefits of biodiesel fuel. I was a little apprehensive at first, because this stuff is 100% biodiesel. So I initially filled up with about half a tank of it, taking at face value the claims of economic and environmental benefits just to see how I got on." Continuing his story, John confided that it was to his great relief that his R reg Nissan engine cab, with around 260,000 miles already under its belt, showed no ill effects whatsoever!

"So I have continued to fill up regularly now," he said, "a tank full at a time. I've done about 10,000 miles so far and all seems to be well!"

John added: "I had my annual overhaul soon after I had gone over to using the bio-fuel full time and the cab passed its' test ok with minimal emissions, just white smoke from the exhaust. So I was pretty chuffed as you can imagine!"

We asked how the cab was running?

"If anything, it seems to run slightly quieter

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

Kupkake's Korner



My 5 minutes with Boris!

I met Mayor Boris Johnson outside the Dorchester Hotel, I offered him a lift home as if I knew him well.

He asked me how is business and offered me his hand, "a little better since September," I said, "but some things are out of hand!"

"The touts are still abundant, the rickshaws drive us mad, the PCO seems redundant ...and your TfL is bad!"

"This cab plan you have for 10-year olds, despite their recent conversions, will leave so many in the cold... despite all your assertions."

"We voted you in, over Ken because we all believed, now we feel that we've been conned... in fact we feel deceived."

He shook his head as if to say: "Sorry, that's just life," then jumped on his bike and sped away... back home to his wife!

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A Dial-a-Cab Biodiesel Fan!



John Gibbings and his biodiesel sticker

and a bit smoother, but the point of my using the 100% biodiesel fuel in the first place was the fact it is supposed to be environmentally friendlier - and at 90p a litre, *yup that's 90p a litre*, there are serious economic savings to be made as well," he added with a huge beaming smile!

"Using the site in SE1 regularly now, I see all sorts of cabs stopping there - Fairways, TXs and more recently, even Merc Vitos are pulling in. Nigel, the site owner, reckons about 100 cabs a week are filling up there, but there is only one fuel pump, so you may have to wait your turn," John added, "but I believe Nigel is looking for a larger site that will accommodate more pumps."

Call Sign understands that the waste vegetable oil (WVO) is collected from numerous restaurants and other outlets around London, processed to eliminate the nasty bits and then sold as 100% biodiesel fuel. However, we also believe that LTI have a policy of only a 5% bio-fuel mix, so it might be wise to check with your garage before you fill up in case you violate your warrantee conditions. As it says on the bottle - Always read the label...

Uptown Oil Ltd. 2 King James Court, SE1 ODH (off King James Street).

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Charlie takes a nap before the big match in his QPR outfit!

The last issue of Call Sign told of Dial-a-Cab Chairman Brian Rice becoming a grandfather for the first time, after Billy and Sam produced a 7lb 2oz bundle of joy named Charles William – now known as Charlie!

Those that know Brian, wife Brenda, daughter Carla and of course son Billy, will also know that the family are passionate sup-



Dad Billy on the QPR promotion bus in 2004 when they gained promotion

porters of West London football team **Queens Park Rangers** and can often be seen at Loftus Road cheering on the *Superhoops* – despite the fact that their team hasn't won much since picking up the League Cup trophy in March

1967. It was then, in one of the most exciting cup finals ever, that QPR – then in the old 3rd division of the Football League – defeated 1st division (equivalent to the Premier League now) West Bromwich Albion at a Wembley Stadium mudbath by 3 – 2, after being 2 – 0 down at half time. It was also the match that shot Rodney Marsh to fame, as he took the ball and ran through the mud to score the equalising second goal before Mark Lazarus finished off WBA with QPR's third goal.

The Rice family are still passionate in their support, with Billy's voice often heard over the Loftus Road PA system. He also used to run the team's website and during his tenure there, made the site the most talked-about in the league!

So *Call Sign* is publishing two photos from our collection to show which way young Charlie is obviously headed!

The 2010 WCHCD Cab Guide Course...

THE ROUTE TO LEARNING AND EARNING MORE!



A new **Cab Guide Course** run by **The Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers** will begin on 15th February 2010. Once you have achieved your Guide Badge and certificate, not only do you have even more knowledge about the great city of London, but it can also be rewarding financially as you impart facts and figures to passengers. **Graham Woodhouse**, a taxi driver, is the course co-ordinator. He told *Call Sign*:

"The aim of the course is to provide drivers with sufficient knowledge to enable them to inform passengers in a clear and concise manner about the historical sites of interest they are passing. It also allows them to give an informative and entertaining tour covering all the major places of interest in and around Central London."

The topics covered are:

- * History and development of the City of London, the City of Westminster and Southwark.
- * Architectural London.

- * London's 'oddities'.
- * The story of the Thames, its docks and their joint impact on London as a trading giant.
- * Palaces, Royalty and Pageantry.
- * Prisons, Asylums and Hospitals. How they helped shape London.
- * The history of the Cab Trade.
- * Customer Care and ideas for a tour.

The course is held at Knowledge Point, 429-431 Caledonian Road, N7 with classes on Monday evenings from 6pm until 8pm. Sunday walks begin at 10:30am from various locations.

For more information and an application pack, contact WCHCD Clerk, Mary Whitworth via email or phone. Her office number is 01494 765922 or email clerk@chcd.fsnet.co.uk.

Have you got a Black Cab Fuel Card yet?

There is a steady flow of applications for the **Black Cab Fuel Card** coming in, but there is still one point that keeps being asked – is it necessary to give a mileage and registration when using the card to fill up at a garage?

The answer is no! The **Fast Fuel Card** has been in use for some time and is used by hundreds of transport companies and fleet operators and naturally they need to know which vehicles the cardholders are putting fuel into and the mileage. They need to track and manage their fuel spend as they do not want their company drivers filling up their private vehicles! Forecourt staff are trained to ask as a service to the business owners – not the drivers.

With the **Black Cab Fuel card** (albeit as the **Fast Fuel Card**) drivers can actually fill up their private cars or cars belonging to other family members with it and no one is really interested in the registration or mileage. Forecourt staff will still ask, but only because they are trained to. Taxi drivers simply have to explain to the person at the forecourt asking for mileage and registration, that it is not necessary. A simple 'no need thanks' is normally sufficient.

For those that don't know, when you fill up at a **Texaco** or **Morrisons**, DaC drivers have the opportunity of saving between 3p and 5p a litre by using a **Black Cab Fuels card** and instead of paying cash or using your own card, just signing for the fuel purchased and the amount will be debited from your bank account 2 weeks after the end of the week via direct debit.

It matters not how much the fuel is advertised at outside the garage, you pay whatever the Black Cab Fuel card rate is for that week – on average around 5p per litre less than many garages. You can also manage your transactions online if you wish by accessing your account details and purchases at any time.

For more information on how to open an account, visit www.blackcabfuels.co.uk or call 0800 987 5701 and speak to John Murphy. Terms/ Conditions apply and are available on request.



Following the last issue of *Call Sign* and the Editor's castigation of the way some cyclists ride their bikes, long-time Dial-a-Cab driver **Mark Tiller (K90)** entered the debate by telling this magazine of an incident that happened to him recently near Canary Wharf.

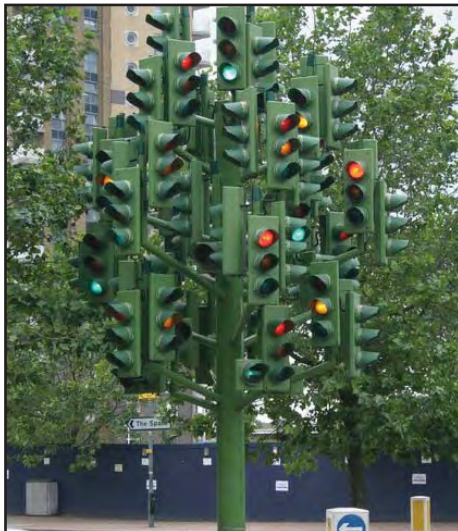
"I was below the Wharf by the 'traffic lights' roundabout that links West Ferry Road and Marsh Wall," said Mark, "when I saw a cyclist deliberately do a 'wheelie' from the road onto the roundabout. It occurred to me that he was just being stupid, when suddenly he jumped off the roundabout, aiming for the road – except that he hit my cab's offside instead!"

Mark was still squirming as he recalled the incident. "They may be lightweight," he said, "but don't believe for a second that they can't do any damage! Much of my offside front, including the doors, was damaged. When I took it into M&O for repair, I was told that the cost of the repairs were £1200. Even with my insurance cover, it cost me my 'no claim bonus' and a £250 excess!"

And what about the cyclist, we asked?

"He tried to make a run for it, but I caught him up and gently 'nudged' him. I asked where he was going and he just said that he was in a hurry! I was about to try to get some details from him, when he mounted the bike and sped off. With quite a bit of traffic around, I couldn't catch him. Even then I hadn't realised the extent of the

CYCLISTS: A PAIN IN THE BACKSIDE (...and also the off-side)!



Was Canary Wharf's traffic lights roundabout really designed for cyclists wheelies!!!

damage the cyclist had caused, but yes, I agree 100% with Alan's Editorial. Many of them just shouldn't be on the road!"

Mark continued by relaying a story he heard from **Courtney Connell** while at M&O dropping his cab off. Courtney is a driver and former Knowledge Examiner at the PCO. He told how a pedicab-type vehicle had gone into the side of his cab, causing significant damage. A policeman who witnessed the incident told Courtney that there was little he could do! However, our caped crusader asked the pedicab rider if he had any money and when he produced some from his pocket, he gently suggested he give it to Courtney! He did and at least Courtney got £100 towards his damage.

Now **Westminster Council** have finally agreed with *Call Sign's* ongoing battle against some of the appalling cyclists riding around and who give such a bad name to the good ones. The council are planning to allow their officials to present on-the-spot fines to cyclists caught going through red lights or riding on the pavement. No mention of the Tour de France speedsters yet, but we quite like the name they use in referring to "lycra louts..."

TfL speak to disability groups about taxi accessibility

Transport for London (TfL) will be speaking to disability groups over the next few months to get their views on the current accessibility of London's licensed taxis. The transport organisation has been advised by lawyers to find out whether there is a case in London for a taxi fleet containing some vehicles that are accessible to disabled people who use larger wheelchairs.

TfL will be speaking to disability groups, reviewing existing research and considering views from the Department for Transport and other authorities. Whatever the outcome of the research, TfL is committed to maintaining the features which make London's taxis unique: their yellow light, accessibility, availability, safety and most importantly, the expert knowledge of London's taxi drivers.

John Mason, TfL's Director of Taxi & Private Hire, told *Call Sign*:

"Following legal advice, we will be undertaking research into how users of larger wheelchairs want to get around the city and whether London's taxi fleet meets their requirements. We will carry out this process by the end of March 2010."

Dial-a-Cab are already experts, having dealt with Westminster TaxiCard passengers for many years. While this magazine has no problem with a few taxis having wider door frames for accessing larger wheelchairs, we would assume that any costs will be picked up by TfL. We are also nervous that following the legal decision allowing the Peugeot E7 to operate in both Liverpool and Norwich that TfL are now contemplating a reduction in the Conditions of Fitness, which will then allow the E7 access into the London taxi market.



Will the door frames have to be widened or...?

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email topsltd2009@googlemail.com

Or call Alan Fleming on 07831 092123 or Dave on 07956 894701

Then...

Those older folks such as myself will remember when the first minicabs hit the streets of London in the spring of 1961, although the first operator was not **Welbeck Motors** as is often claimed. Although Welbeck was formed in the 1940s, it did not begin its minicab operation until June 1961. A company called **Carline** began operating minicabs in Wimbledon on 6 March that year and in the same month, Pimlico-based **Sylvester Car Hire**, run by **Tom Sylvester**, took its first bookings. Nevertheless, it was Welbeck that became the most high profile of the early minicab pioneers.

The company was well funded, enabling an initial fleet of 400 **Renault Dauphines**, making it the biggest of the early minicab companies. The fleet was highly visible with vehicles carrying third party advertising and the Welbeck minicab became something of a format for mobile advertising.

For a few months, Welbeck's boss **Michael Gotla** was the media's face of minicabs. There were many conflicts between taxi drivers and minicabs, which the media labeled 'minicab wars'. The new mode of transport generated a lot of publicity in these early days. There were debates on television and in the House of Commons about what it could mean for the black taxi trade - and whose fears were soon realised. A journalist from *The Times* went across Wimbledon with Carline and reported the smartly dressed driver to be *efficient and polite*, with the fare *about two-thirds of the black taxi*. Other incidents in these minicab wars followed and included cases of willful damage to minicabs and violence against drivers. Some of the offending taxi drivers and their associates eventually received jail sentences, but in most cases there was a lack of evidence. Meanwhile, taxi drivers complained that some minicab drivers had been illegally plying for hire and in 1961 the Metropolitan Police secured 24 convictions for this offence. No change there then!

Minicabs could only legally be booked by telephone but this led to things quickly turning sour. Within a short time, there were hundreds of bogus requests for cars. On one occasion, taxi drivers hemmed in a minicab for around an hour in Belgrave Square. After the driver radioed for help, police eventually arrived to sort things out.

By and large, the new mode of transport was welcomed by the public. *The Times* leader column of 20 June said: *"The reaction of the bard-done-by traveling public to the coming of minicabs is - the more the merrier!"* In another editorial two months later under the headline *What the Public Wants*, the paper said: "It is fairly obvious that for many people in London, finding a taxi has become too chancy and paying for it too stiff."

Meanwhile, the minicab pioneers said it was difficult to find good drivers, taking on only three from 181 interviewees in one recruitment drive. At the same time, Michael Gotla felt his profile could be harmful to the business, so he stepped down in November 1961. As he stepped down, one of the defiant comments he made was: "The London cabdrivers may have won the battle, but they haven't won the war!" Well he was right there!

And now...

You may wonder why I am writing about this distant history of our trade. As you know, much of our work has gone to car hire firms, however, what you are also aware of is that we do support some of these car companies when they cannot service their clients. I have no problem with that;

Mike Son gives a personal view and asks...

How Can We Win Back Our Work?



The Welbeck minicab

it makes commercial and financial sense and not withstanding that, within the rules of ODRTS it says that a **Dial-a-Cab** Board's job is to provide work for its drivers.

As we know, much account and cash work that we took for granted has moved away from cabs and into car companies. The question we must ask ourselves is what car companies offer that we don't? Is it cost effectiveness? Well we know that in the main that could be true.

Prior to the recession, clients within reason would pay for a good taxi service, because the taxi driver knew where he or she was going. However, since the arrival of SatNavs, the **Knowledge** doesn't seem to be so much of an issue with the customer. In addition, customers felt safe in that the London taxi is purpose built with both the passenger and driver's security and safety in mind. The majority of vehicles used by car companies are MPVs and again the passenger seems quite happy to travel in them. In fact the taxi industry are now using them! The customer is now demanding lower charges, comparable to car companies, plus the taxi should be outside the pickup address at a time of their choosing, rather than the passenger having to wait for the cab. As I have been told on numerous occasions by passengers: "If I have to wait for the cab and pay the extra charge for the privilege, I might as well go out in the street and flag a cab down or phone for a minicab/car company. I know what I am going to pay for the journey and the car will be outside waiting."

Although I believe the London cab driver is now more courteous and helpful, plus I have noticed drivers are dressing a little smarter than in the past, perhaps the realisation is that we have to compete with the opposition. It is also important to consider that when account clients look for cheaper alternative transport requirements and find it, that doesn't mean they close their accounts with us. In the main, they just reduce the usage. So how do we win back our valued clients?

And the answer...?

We already offer fixed rates, which sometimes help - especially when clients are reviewing expenditure and forthcoming budgets. Some of our concerned drivers have asked why the Board doesn't reduce administration fees? Well this not realistic. The Society has to continue to maintain itself financially, while creating new and innovative technologies in an effort to try and keep ahead of the markets. So how does the minicab company offer cheaper prices to their customers? I do believe they offload many account charges to their drivers, by charging exorbitant rental/subscription rates. I'm sure our drivers

wouldn't take too kindly to that course of action. I'm sure most drivers would agree that even though account rides are not as plentiful as they were prior to the recession, our subscriptions are still extremely good value. Customers are still demanding more interactive technologies and these can change week on week! I can categorically say that Dial-a-Cab is extremely lucky to have a forward thinking and dedicated IT team. They must be the best in the taxi industry and for that matter, the private hire industry too.

Our Administration and Account Management Team offer everything the client requires, the Control Centre and all our departments and staff are the envy of other organisations. Nevertheless, with all these support services that we provide, what the passenger really wants to know is how long will the cab be and how much will it cost?

So what can we do? I think that reducing administration charges is a bit radical and wouldn't do anyone any good - certainly not Dial-a-Cab. The customer will always demand lower charges no matter how much the supplier reduces them. Also, it then becomes very difficult to increase charges back up when times get back to some acceptable level, assuming they ever do.

What I'd like DaC members to consider about the service we provide is how to offer more added value to it, especially when allocating the taxis. **One understandable grievance customers have is knowing that drivers can refuse jobs for whatever reason.** Perhaps if we consider increasing the A/D format from, say, 6am to midnight, that may improve the perception customers have of our service. **As Directed jobs are already in system from 6am until 10am, which does not seem to be a problem at this time. I would also like you to consider non-rejectable trip offers or at least having a time element attached, similar to A/D, when trips are dispatched.** Again, non-rejectable trips are already in the dispatch system, but only used if a client has a VIP status account or the controllers are having a serious problem dispatching a particular trip.

As a driver, do I like this idea? Well, no, not particularly. I realise that this sounds contradictory as I am promoting the idea, however, both as a member driver and Board member even though Sales are doing their best to placate customer issues and keep the account clients happy let alone attracting new business, I do know that we have to do something radical to win back work. I must emphasise that due to prudent financial management by the BoM, Dial-a-Cab is still in a financially stable position.

I must also make it quite clear that the above is my personal opinion and most certainly not Board policy. Our in-house publication Call Sign is the forum, so I can offer personal opinions and thoughts should I wish to do so. Nevertheless, I would be interested in your comments and ideas on what would be acceptable and what choices you would give up - if any - or any other suggestions you may have to increase our market share. After all, Dial-a-Cab is your Society.

Mike Son
DaC Special Projects

Call Sign often gets calls from drivers who query something or other. More often than not we manage to get an answer, but when **Jon Robinson (E88)** phoned mid-December about a minicab he'd seen, we were stumped.

Jon told us he had just seen a licensed private hire vehicle that had a partition in it. Like Jon, we had previously believed that they were not allowed to have one. What was even stranger was that Jon took the details of the vehicle with a registration number of **SF08 HMX** and noted the make – a **TW200**... and that's where the real mystery comes in.

The TW200 is made purely as a taxi (out of London only, as it does not pass our *Conditions of Fitness*). This vehicle has similarities to the Vito, but is a much cheaper version. Jon claimed that he had never heard of the TW200, so the chances of him mistakenly writing down that make are rather remote to put it mildly. The vehicle also had the usual PH roundel sticker on the rear windscreen.

According to TfL's Surface Transport Panel, TfL supports private hire having partitions as "it improves the safety of passengers and drivers."

It then says: "TfL has passed on advice from the British standards Institute and the Vehicle

Jon and the PH Partition Mystery!



An early version of the TW200

Certification Agency regarding the installation of driver shields in private hire vehicles to the manufacturer to help them obtain approval. TfL is advised that approval has not yet been received. In the meantime, there is a choice of

licensed vehicle types in London (Mercedes Eurocab, Fiat Scudo and the Peugeot Partner), which allow optional factory fitted shields."

We spoke to several fellow trade magazine editors, none of whom knew that private hire vehicles could have shields. **Call Sign** then spoke to TfL and they confirmed that if the partition was factory fitted, then it would be passed but it cannot currently be fitted to a PH cab after purchase. TfL also traced the registration number Jon Robinson had given us. They said it belonged to a Fiat Scudo, which can have a factory fitted shield if required. So where did Jon get the TW200 name, which can only be a taxi?

If you see the above registration vehicle, please do not approach the driver but just take a note as to whether it is a Fiat Scudo or a TW200 and help solve a mystery..

2010 AND A NEW START FOR THE DAC CREDIT UNION

Ah well, another year has gone and off we go again; hopefully better than the last one and we see a vast improvement in the work.



In my last article, I told you about any credit card debts that you are struggling to pay. Well the **DaC Credit Union** could be your answer; we will pay off your credit cards and you can repay that loan with payments that you can honestly repay. Amounts of up to £30,000 will be considered, so if you are having financial difficulties, don't be shy - come in and see us. We are here to help and everything you say is treated as strictly confidential.

We currently have members who are struggling to pay via their credit work. You may not know, but we take cheques, cash and also standing orders, so please give us a call to talk things through and I'm sure we can work out

what we think is best for you. Don't be an ostrich and bury your head, give us a call. This is YOUR Credit Union. Talk to us...

By the time you read this, we will be well and truly ensconced in our new premises. Being in Hackney Road, there is now no excuse for not coming in to see us! The new address is:

Unit 14, Peterley Business centre, 472 Hackney Road, London E2 9EO.

The tyre sales and repairs+ should also be up and running and hopefully you will have paid a visit for all your tyre needs. Don't forget, *Tiger Tyre and Wheel* are giving discounts to all DaC Credit Union members and drivers, so if you are just a driver still, you can come up the stairs and sign up - perhaps you can take out a loan for your new tyres at the same time! We look forward to your company.

Since opening the 7% high interest account, we have increased our membership by around the hundred mark, which is great news for us all. Hopefully our Auditor will give us a nice dividend this year. We'll be letting you know via your terminals the date of our AGM and are hoping to have it in our new premises.

AND for a 3-month trial period, we will be opening on Thursdays as well. So no excuses!

I think that's all for now; it only leaves me to wish you a great New Year and be lucky; but above all, be careful out there...

John Riley (K38)

DACCU Vice-President

Unit 14, Peterley Business Centre, 472

Hackney Road, London E2 9EO

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Call Sign

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Continued from December...

Last month I wrote about some of the strange jobs we undertook and especially one at the **Bank of England**, from where we collected sackloads of money to deliver to other City banks - until a robbery by an impostor cab driver. That was the beginning of security outfits.

But that wasn't the only odd job. I can't remember when this one took place, other than it was the Sunday of a bank holiday weekend.

Under the House

I had just come around Parliament Square and was heading up Parliament Street when I was hailed. The gentlemen asked to be taken to the House of Commons. I politely told him it was just across the Square and not worth taking a cab. He said he was fully aware of that and I should just do as I was told. He then climbed into the cab. So I did a U-turn and headed for the House. At the gate, the policeman looked into the back and with a smart 'Good morning sir' waved me in. The fare told me to drive alongside Bridge Street until we reached the large black painted doors at the end. These were open. I was then told to drive through and down the ramp beneath the House and to turn right at the bottom. This I did. It was very narrow, just wide enough for the cab, with a cobbled, uneven road surface and very dark - a better description would be black - even though it was lit by flickering gaslights. Not very happy with my new FX3 just missing the stone walls either side, I crept along until we came to a set of double doors made of old oak. These were also open and a couple of blokes were waiting for me there. They loaded in cardboard cases, informed me of my eventual destination and told me to drive to the end and keep turning right until I came back to the ramp and then to turn left up it. I must admit I was rather unhappy at having to undertake such tight turns with the thought of scratching my new toy. I was very glad to get back into the daylight again and equally delighted to see my cab was still in one piece! I must admit my memory fails me here and I cannot remember to which government department I delivered the cases. Sadly, these amazing tunnels no longer exist - that area is now the Member's car park.

Four PCO passing stations...

So far as I know, there were only about 5,000 cab drivers to cover the whole of the

At the age of 81, DaC driver John Edwardes (H05) had to suddenly retire following a heart problem. Now he has written about his life as a taxi driver. Call Sign is serialising it...

John Edwardes: *My Life as a Taxi Driver*

Metropolitan London Police district in those days, but under police control there were four passing stations - Roman Way at the junction with Caledonian Road, the police station in Harvist Road, Heckford Place and the Carriage Office in Penton Street.

The area stretched from this side of Slough in the West to Romford in the East, from South Mimms in the North to Hooley in the South. Most of the jobs we had were from the wealthy.

I found that on the whole, they were generous and tipped well so long as you did your job and kept your mouth shut. Many of these people used the same cab ranks every day and sometimes more than once in the day. If they used a rank often, you would get to recognise them and sometimes they would recognise you. One thing you had to remember though, as an old driver once told me, the only time you made money was when there was a bum on the back seat. So if you took a job out to, say, Streatham, after you were paid off what should you do then? Well you had two choices - drive back empty or 'put on' one of the local ranks. Your first problem was in knowing if the Streatham rank was a yellow badge rank only? If so, then forget it. If it was an open rank, your next question was what time of day it was? If about five in the after-

noon, then the chances were good on the Drewstead Road rank. Quite a few potential passengers coming out of Streatham Hill Station just round the corner, although there was always the chance that it might just not be your day!

Out he would come: "I took the wrong train driver, would you take me to Long Lane, Norbury?" That was a job you might not want, but had no choice but to take. He was taking you into foreign badlands, where not only did you not know if the ranks were yellow or green badge, but not even where they were! The best bet was to drop him off as quickly as possible and then head back to civilisation.

Night time...

After 10pm at night, you would add on the extras, which I think were about threepence - just over 1p in today's currency. At around thirty minutes after midnight, the streetlights in many residential areas were turned out and were even dimmed on some of the main roads. Very few buildings were floodlit as they are today. This made the night drivers job that much harder, especially if the fare did not know the district they were going to. The extras were well deserved...

Continued next month

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Ever since the UK went into what was originally referred to as a *slowdown* before officially becoming a *recession*, taxi drivers have spoken of the need to keep our numbers down. Some writers in trade papers have come up with the phrase *Quickie Knowledge* and inferred that some within the hierarchy of our business had recommended it. Well certainly no one from Dial-a-Cab has suggested that, although **Call Sign** has been castigated in the past for suggesting that KoL applicants should not be held back if they are ready. Few pass out in 15 months anymore, but if they are good enough, why shouldn't they? By the same token, if the applicants just can't get to grips with it, then tough. We have an image of being the best and that must be maintained. But our view has always been that our numbers are dwindling too rapidly compared to private hire.

What **Call Sign** has been concerned about over the years was that in not increasing our numbers by any significant number, while private hire goes through the roof, we could be overrun and become purely tourist attractions. If that happens, who would want to go on the Knowledge, because the same scenario would undoubtedly lead to open house on London's streets. PH would eventually pick up street work legally.

Yes, the more taxi drivers we have, the harder it would be at present. But we have to look to the future and have some sort of plan, because we are standing still and eventually our numbers will begin to decrease. That can only lead to a lingering death.

We asked Transport for London to provide us with figures and we will allow you, our readers, to make up your minds on whether we should stay as we are or look for another way to keep in the forefront of taxi transportation.

A TfL spokesperson told **Call Sign**:

"London's taxi drivers are famous world-wide and we always encourage and seek to support anyone who is interested in becoming

Call Sign looks at taxis and private hire and asks the question

Are Taxis Being Swamped out of Existence?



An FX3 and the Dodo bird. Anything in common with today?



a taxi driver to take the Knowledge and join the ranks. In recent years we have been particularly focused on increasing the diversity of drivers and encouraging more women to enter the trade."

While we do not disbelieve TfL, the figures tell a different story.

In 2001, there were 100 licensed PH operators, no drivers had yet been licensed. In that year, there were 23,500 taxi drivers. By 2009, the number of licensed operators has reached 2752.

In 2004, the first licensed PH drivers were coming through and the official number for that year showed 7,000 of them. In that same year, there were 24,000 licensed taxi drivers. Within 12 months the figure for PH had risen

from 7,000 to 19,000 while we had gone from 24,000 to 24,700.

2006 and PH were still going up. They increased from 19,000 to 31,100. We remained at 24,700. 2007 saw PH reach 38,000 while our numbers actually dropped to 24,600. 12 months on and PH added yet another 10,000+ drivers to their ranks (up to 48,300) while the taxi side returned to 24,700.

So that takes us to 2009. We have added another 137 drivers (24,837) while the opposition – and that's what they are – added yet another 10,000+ and reached a staggering 58,904 drivers.

In plain figures, since 2004 private hire have increased from 7,000 up to today's 58,904 drivers while licensed taxis have gone from 2004's 24,000 up to 24,837.

Is there anyone out there who can see why I am worried? Your letters for publication – agree or disagree – are welcome, because the word *Dodo* is currently springing to mind.

My thanks to TfL for providing the numbers...

Alan Fisher
Editor

DAC'S LEE LEAVES BEDFONT GREEN

Just months after helping **Bedfont Green** to make history when they were crowned Combined Counties League Champions following a 4-2 win over title rivals Epsom & Ewel, the love affair ended when **Lee Pearce (J71)** told **Call Sign** that he was moving on.

He had previously lost his place after one poor match, but when his replacement began shipping goals yet Lee wasn't recalled, he guessed all wasn't well. When Combined Counties team, **Egham**, enquired whether he'd be interested in playing for them, Lee jumped at the chance of first team football again. On top of that, Lee has also been asked to help train the goalkeepers at Ryman Premier division team, **Hendon**.

"I'm really excited about the future," Lee told us. "Not only do I get to play with a young side, but I'm also involved with one of non-leagues biggest teams, Hendon. Perhaps even better, both managers value my opinion and that means a lot to me."

Good luck Lee...



In his DaC t-shirt, Lee holds up the championship cup Bedfont Green won last season

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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 flashback

DIAL-A-CAB FLASHBACK

Flashback
1999

This month's Flashback goes back 10 years and the onset of a new millennium. Call Sign had asked DaC's Eddie Lambert (V27) to take a peep into the future - to December 2009 - ie now! He wrote three versions; one in which the PCO bowed to laissez faire pressures and took the easy options (Black Future); an optimistic one in which the PCO took bold radical and courageous decisions (White Future) and the nightmare scenario of the 'O' licence, which could make even the Black Future picture seem bright.

The Black and White futures appeared in last month's Flashback. This month sees the third option - the 'O' licence...



From Call Sign, December 1999 THE 'O' LICENCE...

What is the 'O' licence and why is it so dangerous to not only the Hackney trade, but also those Private Hire companies that wished to comply fully with the recent legislation passed in Parliament?

The 'O' licences are a product of the last government's headlong rush into deregulation at any price. When buses were deregulated, there was a concern that some remote areas, particularly on the west coast of Scotland, could be left without a service of any sort as it would not be economical to run services that affected shareholder's returns on their investments. The government, seeking a way of providing a service for these remote areas without having to pay (if possible) any subsidies, came up with the idea that vehicles such as those from the Royal Mail, which were being used on regular routes in areas affected, could carry fare-paying passengers in vehicles fitted with eight passenger seats or less. These passengers would each pay separate fares. The necessary acts were incorporated in the 1985 Transport Act under section 12.

Why did Chelmsford go 'O'?

In 1995, the Chelmsford Cab Company, which until then had its vehicles licensed as Private

Hire with Chelmsford Borough Council, started to operate its fleet on a PSV Operators Licence (the 'O' licence). These vehicles are known as Taxi/Buses and operate on registered bus routes, but then deviate to the passengers requested destinations. Stansted Airport Cars are part of this group and if you see any of their vehicles in town, you will be able to see that they are not plated. The advantages that company's proprietor, Owen Ephram, gains from this move are many; most of them may ring a few bells with many of you.

There is no requirement for any driver to have a criminal record check, so recruitment is easy. Local knowledge is not required. The drivers do not have to pass a secondary driving test to whatever standard the local authority requires. The vehicles are driven on normal car licences so there is no requirement for the driver to have a medical to ensure that they are fit enough to drive fare-paying passengers. The vehicles do not have to be four-door. This means that two door Coupes or Minis can be used. There is no age control, no wheelchair commitment and no plating - just an annual MOT like any other vehicle. Because there is no Local Council control over these vehicles, there is also no control over the fares, enabling the company to under-cut local Hackney companies who have had to invest in wheelchair compliant vehicles.

Can they be stopped?

I have asked several people about what form of insurance these vehicles use, but no one has been able to give me an absolute answer, although the T&G area organiser for Chelmsford, Richard Ridgewell, told me that Mr Ephram actually started out as an Insurance broker!

All in all, what we have here is actually something worse than the minicab tout - whom we have had to endure due to a lack of commitment to enforcement from the powers-that-be. Make no mistake, this pestilence is going to spread if the law is not changed to put an end to it. Bristol Airport went 'O' licence this January and, I believe, so did Cambridge Station.

In the Autumn of 1998, Owen Ephram and Labour Life Peer, Lord Randell, approached Brighton Council with plans to set up a company in Brighton called Polybus, which they were going to run under 'O' Licence legislation. They claimed that by using a state-of-the-art Satellite Navigation System invented by Mr Ephram, they could be anywhere in Brighton within three minutes of the telephone booking being made.

An alliance was formed in the area with all the local taxi companies, local council, bus operators, T&G and other interested parties all telling Lord Randell that his business was not welcome in Brighton. Furthermore, the Alliance would do all in its power to stop it.

It would appear that taking a direct hard-line approach to any attempt to set up one of these companies in your area is the one to take. Any pussyfooting about will only let them get a foothold and then they will be extremely difficult to dislodge. Local Taxi/PH enforcement officers are very concerned about the issue; as Ken Grey (Peterborough) confirmed in a recent conversation:

"The safety of the travelling public is put at risk with these operators and Peterborough, for one, will bring charges against anyone in the area trying to run this sort of operation without Plates and Licences issued by Peterborough Town Hall."

Is there a plot?

The Local Government Enforcement Officers' Association has made several submissions to the Department of Transport about this issue, as have the T&G. The LCDC have drawn up a list of questions that they want to put before Council on this matter.

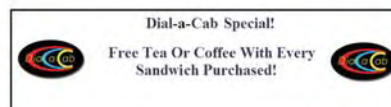
Two worrying questions remain to be asked: Lord Randell claims to have had the go-ahead from the Department of Transport, yet when the T&G approached the DoT about this, they got a categorical denial that they are backing Lord Randell. Obviously, someone is not telling the whole truth - we need to know who.

The other question, which is possibly more relevant to London, is this: Was Lord Randell told not to make any waves with Polybus until the London Private Hire Bill 1998 was safely through Parliament? Time will tell - something we do not have a great deal of...

Eddie Lambert (V27)

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Richard Potter (T51) has written many articles for Call Sign. In this one he gives his view of Dial-a-Cab's Concierge system...

CONCIERGE AND DAC...

work, but simply replace them with a private hire company that can cover the work - even though we do cover some work for them when it snows, tube strikes etc.

We might not like it, but we've lost this work on the grounds of cost and the only way we could get it back would be by lowering our prices, something that is unpopular with both Board members and drivers alike. Or we could force the PH industry's costs upwards.

Concierge also gives the account more control of its employee's usage. A few years ago I did a Wimbledon tennis pick up to Herne Hill. What made it a better job was that the young lady went via Great Portland St to pick up her boyfriend! But when I do a job on a Sunday from Cannon St Road to London Wall and the lady has baggage, I know I'm taking her there so she can get a car to LAP. These accounts have business rules to save money and protect themselves. It's their money and they are entitled to spend it how they wish. In a Utopia, that lady would probably prefer DaC to take her direct to Heathrow and avoid all the hassle, but she probably can't. It's a simple fact of today that companies expect their employees to get themselves to work and home again

when it's personal usage. Also, deals are struck where the client does not pay taxi costs. When wages were much lower, employees were persuaded to work for companies with incentives such as cab rides home. Who remembers that one-time incentive, Luncheon Vouchers? With today's bonuses and multi-million pound contracts in the City, the thought of LVs seems quite preposterous, however I can remember the stickers on shop windows - *LVs accepted here*.

But DaC members and the Board have been painted by some sections of our trade as villains for using Concierge. I would remind people that it's not DaC who set the meter rate via the cost index, TfL do. Even though we've lost some long distance and airport work to PH, we are all making a living by doing shorter journeys at an enhanced rate. Concierge allowed DaC to increase its account work share from other taxi companies, which must be a good thing. In my eyes, we have to change with the times and give the accounts what they want and that's something DaC are very good at.

May I wish you all a very Happy New Year...

Richard Potter (T51)

Changing Sloane Square; After 20 years C&W council tell Mark O'Brien

You're not Licensed, you have to go...!

In the September 2005 *Call Sign*, we wrote of a disturbing situation where **Kensington and Chelsea Council** were looking at making alterations to **Sloane Square** that would not only have involved the local residents, but also us as Licensed taxi drivers. At that time, K&C were contemplating a central crossroads and two large paved areas in front of the Royal Court Theatre and the total destruction of the Square itself with the **Peter Jones** store replacing it. As for us, the plan was to move the taxi rank to Symons Street and Cliveden Place - neither of which would hold a candle to the current one. In addition, a Symons Street feed would also double-up as a Peter Jones loading bay! The Council were also going to close Holbein Place permanently.

A Chelsea-based pressure group - Save Sloane Square - called on Dial-a-Cab drivers to support their campaign by asking all cab drivers to oppose K&C Council's plans.

The offensive against the Council seemed to have worked. Holbein Place now has "equality" for vehicles and pedestrians, but it remains open as an important cut-through for taxi drivers - at least for now. And of course, the rank remains where it has always been - at least for now. But the Council are on the move again.

Mark O'Brien has sold newspapers to locals, visitors and to numerous **Dial-a-Cab** and other taxi drivers wanting something to read during quieter periods on the rank, for almost thirty years. Like many of the old time newspaper vendors, he also spends much time giving directions and recommending a taxi from the rank for those needing to go that bit further. Mark's forecourt kiosk at Sloane



Square Station was a part of the general scene. But K&C Council has now told him that his pitch is illegal, even though he has been there for 29 years!

The council have confronted Mark with a little used 1990 by-law that says he must have a licence to sell papers to customers who are standing on the pavement in front of his kiosk!

Mark told *Call Sign*: "They've had almost twenty years to ask me for a licence, why are they suddenly doing it now? They say I can stay in my kiosk, but that it will be illegal for me to serve someone who is on the public highway! That is ridiculous. I'm providing a service that I think many people appreciate and have never had any issues about customers buying from my pitch. I just can't understand it."

Replacing the **Save Sloane Square** group, a large group of local residents under the banner of the **Residents First** campaign, recently went into action waving banners outside the station in support of Mark O'Brien and against the perceived bullying of the Council.

Mark O'Brien surrounded by local residents demanding that his pitch is saved

Speaking on behalf of the group, **Justin Downes** told us: "Mark O'Brien has been a fixture here for decades and there is absolutely no reason why the council should suddenly persecute him in this way. It's just another example of a local Town Hall that has too much money and not enough to do."

Critics of the council are laying the blame on planning supremo, **Councillor Daniel Moylan**, who they claim is targeting the Kings Road and Sloane Square area for unnecessary changes to street furniture and pavements. Daniel Moylan is closely associated with streetscape "improvements" to Kensington High Street and the plans to change Exhibition Road. He was elected in 2008 as an Honorary Fellow of the *Royal Institute of British Architects*.

As for Mark O'Brien, a council spokesman said: "Following a review of the legal status of traders on Sloane Square, the Council concluded that the street trading on the forecourt of Sloane Square underground station was unlicensed and therefore unlawful in its current form. The Council has written to the trader about this and he has responded. We are listening to what he and others have to say about the matter."

The story will go on and on because judging by the *Call Sign* article back in 2005, the Council won't forget, they'll just let us believe that they have shelved plans. But they will come back... they always do...



Jon and polished cab - it changed colour to white when the xmas lights went on!

"I was less than impressed," **Jon Robinson (E88)** growled to *Call Sign* when we met up

It's Snow Joke!

Says DaC's Jon as he is bombarded with fake Bond Street snow!

with him recently. "Anyone who knows me is aware that I keep a *very* clean cab, so having it all messed up with that fake snow stuff, is just not my idea of fun!"

Still obviously annoyed, Jon continued while glaring at our shaking reporter: "I was travelling towards New Bond Street just as they were switching on the Christmas lights in early December. Well whoopee and all that, but I've seen it all before and just continued along my merry way."

Before *Call Sign* could ask what the problem was, as our readers are a busy bunch and probably wouldn't be that interested in a tale about some overgrown light bulbs, Jon burst into top volume and told us how suddenly, as a form of celebratory switch-on with the lights, a snow machine churned out faux snow into the air.

"It may have been very seasonal," said Jon,

"but why did it have to land all over my immaculate taxi? It left a sticky, spotty, smeary mess on the cab's paintwork that took quite some effort to get off. If I had realised it was suddenly going to snow without any warning, I'd have probably taken another route! It really was *s'no joke*," he said, allowing himself the merest hint of a smile! And almost breaking into a laugh, Jon added that had he known he would be driving into a snowstorm - even if it was man-made - he would not have bothered to wash and polish the cab that very same morning!

"I'll know for next year to steer clear of the area, or put my snow chains on and race through the 'storm' at double speed," he said before finally seeing the funny side to burst out laughing!

©Call Sign Magazine MM10



Have You Enjoyed Hairspray as a Freebie?

Many Dial-a-Cab drivers have enjoyed free west end shows thanks to **Tom Whitbread's** theatrical contacts. Now one of them is asking for a DaC driver's favour in return.

Hairspray is undoubtedly one of London's biggest hits and many of our drivers and their families have now seen it for free.

What they would like is for all those DaC drivers (and any members of their families who accompanied them) to vote in the prestigious 2010 **Whatsonstage.com Awards**. These awards cover the best of the 2009 theatregoing year and all you need to do is fill in the form on the website below. You can vote in as many or as few categories as you like, but be sure to give your email address at the end if you want to be entered into a prize draw to win a year's free theatregoing.

Brian Conley is nominated for Best Takeover in a role and Hairspray is nominated for Best West End Show. That's your clue!

The link is: <http://www.whatsonstage.com/surveys/fillsurvey.php?sid=29>

We can show our appreciation by voting and if you are lucky enough to win the draw, you will get two top-price theatre tickets per month to any West End show you wish to attend (subject to availability). For the avoidance of doubt, a "West End Show" refers to a show in one of the main London Theatres owned by Really Useful Group, Ambassador Theatre Group, Delfont Mackintosh and select other venues.

We often take the tickets, now is our chance to put something back...

DaC 2009 AGM

All members should by now have received the **Notice of Annual General Meeting 2009** advising that the meeting will again be held at **The Brewery, Chiswell Street, London EC1** on **Sunday, 7th February 2010 at 11:00hrs**.

The meeting this year will consider an agenda **excluding** the election of officers, but would normally **include** any proposed Rule Changes and Propositions that had been received at Dial-a-Cab House before 09:00hrs on Friday 4th December 2009. However, none were received by that date.

Howard Pears
Company Secretary

SIZZLES

The barbeque that comes to your home!

Sizzles comes to your home to prepare a sizzling hot charcoal barbeque in your garden using our own equipment.

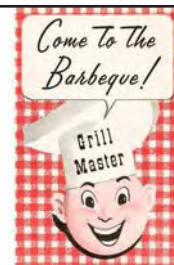
Sizzles can provide all the food and salads or we can cook your own food. The decision is up to you.

We can barbeque for any number of guests, so book now for your next party. Bookings being accepted for 2010 now!

If you are a fan of charcoal cooked barbeques but want someone else to do the hard work, call Oscar now!

Bookings and information at Sizzles:

0208 518 8765 or 07902 246 354





Regular *Call Sign* readers will remember the successful appeal by **Dial-a-Cab** driver **Howard Flavin (A18)** in the November issue, when he had a PCN for stopping in a yellow box junction by the Olympic Park rescinded because the box was too large. As taxi drivers, we – by the very nature of our jobs – inadvertently break some rules of the road. After all, if our passengers had all day to get somewhere, our work would vanish, so inevitably we are often in a hurry. We also have to wait where we shouldn't, even though we are experienced enough to know how not to cause a traffic hold up. If we felt that all PCNs were always fairly issued and undoubtedly deserved, we would be more likely to hold our hands up and pay. But that is rarely the case, so when receiving a PCN that we know there is no point in appealing against, it is always worth looking for loopholes that will provide a way of not paying councils that seem to use us purely as revenue providers.

The undoubted expert in that field is the man who successfully assists with DaC drivers PCN appeals, Barrie Segal – the founder of www.AppealNow.com.

Barrie has now told *Call Sign* about some invalid Penalty Charge Notices issued by **Westminster, Camden, Lambeth and Hammersmith & Fulham**. So, if you have received a PCN for a moving traffic contravention from any of the above, then it is quite possible that they are invalid. They are sent by post and issued under the *London Local Authorities Acts 1990 to 2003* but could be unenforceable because the PCN claims that the 28 days to pay or appeal commences with the date of the PCN. **This is incorrect, as legally the time limit commences with the date you have received it.** It means the above councils have shortened the legal period you have to pay (or appeal) and as a consequence, the PCN is unenforceable. **Barrie went on to confirm that scenario via a recent Parking Adjudication case - *Graham William Stubbs v Westminster City Council* (case no. 2090397156).**

Barrie's advice to *Call Sign* readers is that if you have received a PCN by post from the above councils - or indeed any council - check the calculation of the payment and appeal dates. If you are still **within the 28 days of service** that you are allowed to lodge an appeal and have not paid the PCN, then appeal immediately to the local authority on the grounds that no contravention took place AND that there has been a procedural impropriety. The appeal letter should be worded as below:

Invalid PCN's

Barrie Segal gets his claws into local councils!



"We'll get you next time son!"

APPEAL LETTER

Dear Sirs,

Re PCN ***** VEHICLE *****

Please accept this as an appeal against the above PCN on the grounds that

1. no contravention took place AND

2. that there has been a procedural impropriety.

Your council's PCN is invalid because you have calculated the date for payment and the period to appeal from the date of the PCN, whereas Paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 1 to the London Local Authorities and Transport for London Act 2003 requires the date to be calculated based on the date of service.

**I have in the meantime paid the amount of £xx in error and would ask that this be refunded immediately.*

Yours faithfully

*Delete that sentence if you have not paid.

If you **have** paid but are **outside the 28 days based on the date of service**, then Barrie suggests you write to the council as follows:

Dear Sirs

Re PCN ***** VEHICLE *****

Your PCN is invalid because you have calculated the date for payment and the period to appeal from the date of the PCN, whereas under Paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 1 to the London Local Authorities and Transport for London Act 2003 requires the date to be calculated based on the date of service. I was misled by you into making a payment and have paid the amount of £xx in error and would ask that this be refunded immediately.

Yours faithfully

PCN payment via credit card...

In addition to the above, Barrie also asked *Call Sign* to point out to DaC drivers that if you have received a PCN, Notice to Owner or Notice of Rejection from **Camden, Harrow, Kingston or Merton** councils

which state there is a 1.3% admin surcharge if payment is made by credit card, the PCN and Notice to Owner are unenforceable. Parking Adjudicators have held that this additional charge is an unlawful demand and the PCNs cannot be enforced. A review of the issue by the Chief Adjudicator upheld that view.

Camden Council have since said they have commenced procedures to take the matter to the High Court for a judicial review. In the meantime, all of the affected PCNs should not be enforced by the councils and should be put on hold if you have an open appeal, although Camden Council have pursued these appeals with the adjudicator as late as 24th November 2009. They lost on the latest case Barrie Segal had with them on that point.

If you have paid a PCN with that defect, than Barrie recommends you write to the council concerned as follows:

Dear Sirs

(Reference details here)

Your PCN / Notice to Owner / Notice of Rejection (delete as required) contains an unlawful demand, namely the 1.3% administration charge to use a credit card. The Chief Parking Adjudicator has held that such PCNs are invalid and unenforceable and I must ask that you refund the amount of £xx that I have paid.

Yours faithfully...

As the founder of www.AppealNow.com, Barrie Segal has saved motorists - in addition to DaC - vast amounts of money through his appeal procedure. Reading the above, you can see why he is probably top of local councils "hate" lists! Take a look at his website.

You can read of other PCNs Barrie is investigating at www.AppealNow.com/news.



Fiona with her hand-made Disney cross stitch picture

SMILE

A local charity office realised that it had never received a donation from the town's most successful - albeit notoriously mean - businessman. The charity called the businessman and its' director tried to persuade him to contribute...



"Our research shows that out of a yearly income of at least £12million, you give not a penny to charity. Wouldn't you like to give back to the community in some way?"

The businessman mulled this over for a moment and then replied: "Firstly, did your research also show that my mother is dying after a long illness and has medical bills that are several times her annual income?"

Embarrassed, the charity director mumbled embarrassingly that he hadn't. The businessman continued: "Or that my disabled war veteran brother is blind and confined to a wheelchair?"

The stricken charity worker began to stammer out yet another apology, but was interrupted again: "...or that my sister's husband died in a traffic accident, leaving her penniless with three young children to look after?"

The humiliated charity director, completely beaten, said simply: "I had no idea..."

On a roll, the businessman cut him off once again: "...and so, if I don't give any money to them, why should I give any money to you?"

DaC's Fiona and the Magical Taxi Tour

If you have been in the taxi business for more than 10 minutes, you'll have heard of the **Children's Magical Taxi Tour** that is organised by the **Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers**. Each year it takes around 200 children - many of whom suffer with life-threatening illnesses - to the **Disneyland Resort, Paris**. Many of the volunteer drivers, in addition to the organisers, are from **Dial-a-Cab**.

The next trip will be between 24th- 26th September 2010 and continuing with the DaC theme, one of our Customer Service Representatives, **Fiona Mclachlan**, spoke to WCHCD's **Jim Rainbird (T25)** and said she wanted to do something that could help. She obviously couldn't drive a cab over that weekend, but she came up with another idea.

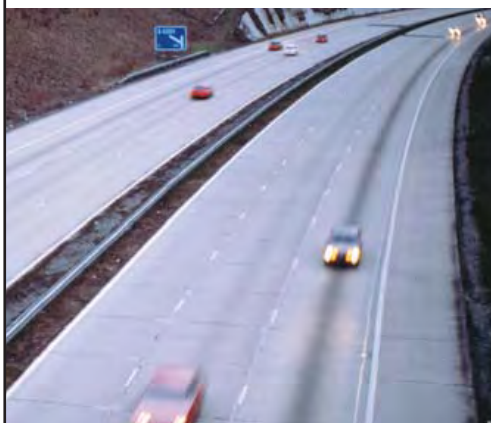
Fiona, who is well known to many drivers that work at Cabot Square during the evenings when, as a DaC Marshal, she takes bookings for the **Citigroup** rolling rank, decided to hand-make a **Disney** cross stitch picture of Mickey, Minnie and Pluto and then donate it to the Disney trip. It was auctioned at the recent WCHCD Christmas Gala at the Marriott Hotel West India Quay.

On behalf of **Jim Rainbird** and the Chairman of the Disney Committee, DaC's **Phil Davis (F10)**, a big thank you to Fiona because her cross stitch raised an amazing £270 in a bidding war! On one side was a lady on the **M&O** table, whilst the opposition was no less than DaC Chairman **Brian Rice** who wanted it for new grandson Charlie - and Brian finally won the bid! The total raised on the night was over £2000 and both Phil and Bob asked **Call Sign** to thank everyone who either bid for items or who bought raffle tickets...



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We've all seen them and wondered how they get away with it - advertisements selling the wares of private hire / minicab companies, while describing themselves as taxis. The company in the ad with this article - using the online-minicabs website - happens to be **Liberty Cars** whose base is not far from that of **Dial-a-Cab** - however, that is where the similarity ends.

Liberty Cars may well be a respectable private hire company and their ads proudly proclaim that they are licensed by the PCO / TfL, but they are NOT a taxi company and we should say next that they never will be. However, those last few words do not seem to be cast in stone as much as they once would have been, just as Liberty Cars are by no means the only guilty company.

For years and years, telephone directories such as **Thompsons** have done whatever they liked, just as private hire companies like **Addison Lee** have too. If Thompsons want to refer to minicabs as taxis, who is there to stop them? If AL's **John** or **Liam Griffin** want to use the M4 bus lane, who is there to stop them? When they put signs across the rear windcreens of their minicabs, but felt the wiper blades spoiled the look, they didn't remove the signs, they removed the wiper blades! What if *Call Sign* hadn't gone out and photographed numerous Addison Lee cars without the wiper blades, would the PCO have ever acted? What if the **T&G** cab section hadn't photographed AL cars breaking the rules by using the M4 bus lane, would anyone have taken any notice? We have to assume that either the PCO don't have the time, or they are too busy making sure we don't have unauthorised signs on our

Call Sign Comment

Eddie Goes After Minicab Ads!



Look at the 'Taxi' banner at the top - does that suggest a minicab company?

taxis.

The only sign of hope we can see is the new *Director of Taxis and Private Hire*, **John Mason**. It is quite some considerable time since we can say someone has impressed us, but some of John Mason's utterings have shown something previously not expounded from Penton Street - common sense. And unlike some at the

PCO who think that an appearance at private hire's annual soirée - but certainly never at the Taxi Driver of the Year dinner - means you are doing your job; *Call Sign* believes that John Mason is showing signs of wanting to be fair. So this magazine hopes he will pick up the cudgels of the piece below and try to act on it. Because as the ad says, if he can't, we bet he knows a man who can!

Now **Dial-a-Cab** driver and Chair of the RMT Taxi section, **Eddie Lambert (V27)**, has sent one of Thompsons Phone Directory minicab ads from under the 'Taxi' banner to John Mason at the PCO and also to Islington Trading Standards, as Liberty Cars are in their borough.

According to Eddie, the RMT "...would like to see all phone companies list Taxis and Private Hire under their own headings and not together, thereby removing the misrepresentation that listing together inevitably brings about." Eddie also added that companies outside the Met areas, who run mixed fleets, should have two separate entries given by directories providing the private hire entry does not use the words taxi or cab in the company name.

Call Sign Comment couldn't agree more.

E3 TAXIS LTD

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Reduced servicing prices to help all our customers get through this difficult period...

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TX4: 10,000 £120... 20,000 £135... 30,000 £160... 40,000 £260

50,000 £140... 60,000 £170... 70,000 £535 Prices inclusive of VAT

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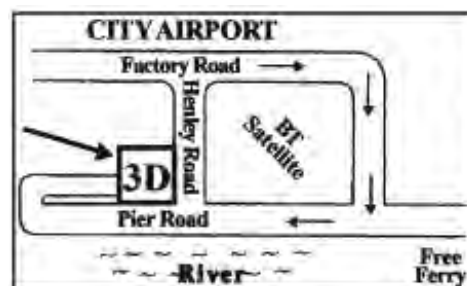
- * Overhauls * Tracking/4 wheel alignment * MOT testing on Class 4 vehicles * Smoke test
- * TXII timing chains/belts * TXII heater control valves * TX4 servicing * Tyres supplied/fitted

We can service your cab from new without affecting your warrantee

And we will advise on any warrantee work needed

To book: Ring Christine on 0207 474 6592

E3 Taxis Unit 3D Standard Industrial Estate, Henley Road, E16 2ES
Open Monday – Friday 8.30am – 5.30pm, Saturday 9am – 1pm



Mailshot

Either write to Call Sign at Dial-a-Cab House or email us at - callsignmag@aol.com

iPhone Applications

Dear Callsign

I was using my *iPhone* today and noticed that Addison Lee are a step ahead of the Licensed London Taxi trade. I felt disappointed when noticing they now have a booking application, which is free to download in the iPhone Application Store. At the moment it looks like the Application is available for account customers only, but it's a big step in the right direction for Addison Lee. The Application takes you to their website in order for you to create an account there and then. The *Add Lee* App is using GPS for customer's location.

I'm writing to *Call Sign* to ask if DaC would be able to have an Application available, so users of the *iPhone* can send in booking requests for account / credit card and cash jobs. To survive, I feel we need to move forward with technology. We work hard to re-claim our work night after night, but in other ways we let ourselves down. So DaC, I'm asking if you would look into this.

I am proud to be a member of Dial-a-Cab, especially after all the work the despatch team have done in the re-claim our work campaign. Lets do something else productive...

Dawn Cooper (C80)

Brian Rice responds: Dawn, it's nice to see you are aware of the latest applications! However, I have met Apple representatives to look at this one in great detail and at the moment it is not good enough for DaC. The application is only for the iPhone and ideally we need an application for all phones, especially the Blackberry. When the client calls up the application and presses the button denoting they require a vehicle, the co-ordinates are passed to the vendor. That tells them roughly - and I repeat roughly - where the customer is and the driver will then have to ring the client and ask for their exact location. So as you can see, it is not a precise science and at the moment, just not good enough for our clients and members. After all, I'm not sure our members would want to cruise up and down the road looking for the customer, or indeed have to ring the client to find out exactly where they are. I believe one big difference is that Addison Lee often cater to a different type of audience than us and that their drivers are prepared to search for the customer, whereas our members have a choice - they can work the street.

Finally Dawn, I am not dismissing this application, but it is still very experimental and I would not be prepared to offer it to our clients and members until it was perfected; that is probably the reason why we are different from the rest!

BBC racism?

I was recently left feeling very disturbed by an item on the BBC's local London news (25 Nov) regarding what they referred to as a Taxi / minicab 'turf war' in Mayfair. The item was centred on the rank outside Nobu in Berkeley Street and several taxi drivers gave brief comments. However, what irritated me was the comment of a minicab driver who alleged that taxi drivers uttered racist comments against him. It irritated me because although several taxi drivers were asked about the 'turf war', none were asked to respond to the racist accusation. Having met many taxi drivers over the years through my connection with the Dial-a-Cab Credit Union, I'd be surprised if the minicab driver's accusation had much truth to it and my belief is that it was the BBC who came out of that particular section as being the racist party.

Barry Epstein

Dial-a-Cab Credit Union

Thanks for that observation, Barry. I saw the piece you refer to and I doubt whether many viewers believed the minicab driver. But you are right, they didn't allow a response on the driver's quote and that was bad - if not surprising - journalism. The real pity was that the Beeb picked a rainy night in Mayfair to shoot the item and as such, the rank was empty. That must have thrilled those "guarding" the front door to Nobu more than the item itself, knowing how much of a fight they put up NOT to get the rank in the first place ...Ed

Olympic Route Network

Dear Alan,

As we approach Olympic year, I start to think what a wonderful advert for London and indeed the country it will be, although I would have preferred it to be somewhere else so that we wouldn't have to foot the bill for the next ten years! At first it was a walnut whip a week for every Londoner, now it seems more like a box of Fortnum's best chocolates a week!

However, now that we are approaching the big date, wouldn't it be the right thing for the authorities to allow the iconic London 'black cab' to be allowed to use the special *Olympic Route Networks* out to the Olympic Park and back into the City of London for all the visitors that will be coming here, not only to see the Games, but to sightsee around our magnificent city with surely the envy of the world, the London black cab and their knowledgeable drivers.

Gathering opinions from most of my cab driving friends, none of them will want to traipse out to the Olympic Park via the congested roads that we will have to use. A fare out there and a traipse back into town to look for another fare could end up costing the driver money. If the fare came to £25, took 90 minutes before you got back into town for another fare, that equals around

£12.50 for 45 minutes less diesel and wear and tear. Not good economics!

Don't get me wrong, I accept whoever hails me and choose my fares, I accept whoever hails me and go north south east or west, but just for once wouldn't it be nice for the London Black cab trade to be recognised for the fast efficient, safe, reliable and utterly trustworthy service that we provide? The use of that ORN out to the Olympic Park would contribute to the success of the games and the visitor attraction to this city of ours...

Roy Martin (R42)

Brian Rice recently attended a meeting re the Olympics. You can read about it on page 4 ...Ed

Grandads and seat rests!

Hi Alan,

On behalf of my family, I thank you for the DaC welcome to the new member of the Lessman clan, and may I add my congratulations to Brenda and Brian Rice and Lorraine Carruthers and their families on their new arrivals. The pleasure, pride and joy of being a grandparent, especially for the first time, can only be understood by personal experience, but I should remind Brian that the 'I can give them back when they cry' bit doesn't always work!

On a more serious note, I read with interest the report in the current issue of TAXI from *The Mole in the Merc*, but I have to pose the following thoughts. Is the removal of the rear centre headrest PCO approved and if it is, why are the owners of TX4s penalised by not only having this fixed obstruction to a clear rear view in the first place, but also being unable to adjust it - even if only to clean the glass without breaking a wrist?

David Lessman (D19)

Call Sign asked M&O General Manager, Peter Rigden, to comment in response to David's letter. He told us:

"This is the relevant extract from the current London Conditions of Fitness: 16.7: Head restraints must be fitted for all (forward and rear facing) seats. The design of headrests should maximise rear sightlines for the driver when any of the passenger seats are not occupied.

The centre division has been accepted by the PCO as the fully compliant head restraint for rear facing passengers in both models of vehicle. However, if my interpretation of the above is correct, then it will not be a PCO approved action to remove the centre-rear head restraint for the forward facing passenger seat position. Furthermore, LTI have



Mailshot

Mailshot continued from page 34

taken into account the full spirit of the above condition as we fit the TX4 with "hollowed-out" head restraints specifically designed to maximise visibility of the unoccupied seat areas. I don't believe the same is true of the alternative vehicle."

Dear Alan

After reading the November issue of *Call Sign*, I came into Dial-a-Cab House to pick up a form for Eurostar tickets and was told at reception that this offer no longer existed. Can you confirm this for me?

Tony Oswald (L72)

Call Sign has been offering these subsidised Eurostar trips since December 2003. Sadly it does appear that Eurostar are pulling the plug. It was great while it lasted and it had to end one day. Sad perhaps, but my thoughts are that we should just say thank you to Eurostar for giving us the cheap rides for almost 8 years. Incidentally, the decision (so I have been told) was nothing to do with the loss of Eurostar taxi account ...Ed

Are coaches the same as buses?

Hi Alan

You may remember my unsuccessful four-year campaign to allow taxis through the

bus lane in Tunnel Avenue by Blackwall Tunnel? You printed the article in *Call Sign* last year.

Since then, I regularly see private coaches drive through the no entry sign that says 'except buses'. The limit for me was recently when I was in heavy traffic on the A102, just passing the exit from the bus lane and I saw three private coaches drive through the 'buses only' no entry sign and get onto the A102 under the very nose of a police officer who was hidden at the exit to catch the likes of we taxi drivers, had we done the same as the coaches. The police just waved them through. Astonishing! I contacted the police and still await their response. What concerns me is the response I got from Greenwich council. It is outlined below:

The traffic order defining the vehicles permitted to use the bus lane states that buses and coaches are permitted to use the bus lane. In the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 2002, buses are defined as vehicles constructed or adapted to carry more than 8 passengers exclusive of the driver. Therefore as coaches have more than 8 seats, they are permitted to use the bus lane.

As with all traffic orders, restrictions contained in the orders shall not apply to anything done with the permission of or at the direction of a police constable in uniform.

You will understand my confusion. Limousines carry more than eight people. Are they allowed to use bus lanes? The police were not acting in extraordinary circumstances where there were roadworks or an

accident, which could possibly require buses to go through. They were hidden to catch illegal vehicles driving through. So why did they allow coaches through? Any assistance or advice you can offer would be appreciated. I want to know if Greenwich council could be correct. I do remember at the site meeting with the PCO, police Greenwich council and TfL I was told only buses are allowed to go through. Any ideas on who I might contact for more confirmation?

Tom Reynolds (O85)

Interesting scenario Tom. However, last year the PCO confirmed to *Call Sign* exactly what Greenwich Council told you - ie that buses or coaches with over 8 seats can use bus lanes. Taxis can only do so when it says taxis on the sign, however, I agree with you that if coaches are allowed, then so should taxis be able to go through.

As for stretch limos, I was told some time ago that they weren't allowed to carry more than 8 passengers regardless of their capacity. However, I'm still not 100% certain about that.

Who to write to? Try the Public Liaison Unit at mayor@london.gov.uk and please let *Call Sign* know how you get on ...Ed



PCN's: Another DaC Driver Socks it to Camden

Dial-a-Cab driver **Jim McClean (N08)** is philosophical about *Penalty Charge Notices*. "If it's down to me, I'll hold my hands up and call it a fair cop. But I don't like it when councils use me as a form of income - and that is exactly what **Camden Council** tried to do. As a result, I fought them all the way to the PATAS (Parking and Traffic appeals services) adjudication service - and I won!"

Jim was travelling south down Bloomsbury Street towards Shaftesbury Avenue. Close to the area where the Shaftesbury Theatre is, you have to cross three yellow box junctions and that's where Jim may have been caught. We say *may have been* reservedly...

"I received a PCN soon after," said Jim, "showing a photo of my cab in a box junction and giving the position as Shaftesbury Avenue, Shaftesbury Avenue. I remember reading in *Call Sign* about the Dial-a-Cab driver whose PCN was cancelled - also in Shaftesbury Avenue - because they didn't specify exactly where the box was. After all, there are quite a few there."

Jim appealed to Camden on those grounds and they threw it back at him saying that he had been caught on camera and that was good enough - £60 please! But Jim wasn't having that.

"I really am peeved off with these councils who treat us as saving accounts for them. They knew they were wrong, yet still refused to back down and forced me to go to the adjudication service at the Angel. I explained the situation - that the council hadn't told me which box I'd been in. After all, if they had told me, I might have remembered and there may have been a reason, giving me grounds to plead special circumstances. In addition, I also told the adjudicator that one of the three boxes at the northern end of Shaftesbury Avenue was the wrong size - that was also in *Call Sign* regarding the yellow box at the Olympic Park. As a result, the adjudicator found in my favour. My only wish is that Camden are made to suffer when they send out PCNs where the person is obviously not guilty. But I know they have probably just moved on to another poor taxi driver. That's why we can't give up the battle..."



Keith Reading
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