

March 2010




# Call Sign

From the home of Dial-a-Cab International

A group of people in formal attire (suits and dresses) are gathered outdoors, possibly at a garden party or formal event. They are holding glasses and talking. The background shows green trees.

*As the world talks about the DaC link to the Royal Family, we ask: Is this the moment Brian Rice offered our facilities to Prince Charles?*

Three people are posing for a photo indoors. The man on the left is wearing a white outfit with a red and white checkered headscarf and a blue balloon around his neck. The man in the center is wearing a dark suit with a red shirt and a blue sash. The woman on the right is wearing a white outfit with a floral headscarf and a blue and yellow patterned vest. They are all smiling.

*Why is DaC's Bill Tyzack reverting back to his childhood days!*





# NASH'S NUMBERS

From Alan Nash (A95)

"Hello cabbie, Doyle's Marylebone Hotel, then onto the Gala Lancaster Hotel and finally the Park Plaza in Baker Street please." Confused, well yes, you know all these hotels but it's just that they have been playing reality monopoly again!

## Hotels that have changed owners, names or are new...

Hotel	Address	Previously
Doyle's Marylebone Hotel	47, Welbeck St, W1G 8DN	Clifton Ford
Doyle's Kensington	109-113 Queens Gate, SW7 5LR	Jury's
Doyle's Bloomsbury	16 Gt Russell Street, WC1B 3NN	Jury's
Gala Lancaster	Lancaster Terrace, W2 2TY	Royal Lancaster
Guoman Royal Horseguards	2 Whitehall Court, SW1A 2EJ	Thistle Royal Horseguards
Guoman Charing Cross	Strand, WC2N 5HX	Thistle Charing Cross
Novotel St Pancras	100-110 Euston Road, NW1 2AJ	Novotel Euston
Park Plaza County Hall	Addington Street, London, SE1	New
Park Plaza Westminster	200, Westminster Bridge Rd, SE1	New
Park Plaza Sherlock Holmes	108 Baker Street, W1U 6LJ	Now a Park Plaza
Sheraton Leicester Sq	10, Wardour St, W1D6QF	Opens summer 2010
Thistle Grosvenor	101 Buckingham Palace Road, SW1W 0SJ	Victoria (nee Grosvenor)
Thistle Kinsley	Bloomsbury Way, WC1A 2SD	Bloomsbury (nee Kingsley)
Thistle Royal Trafalgar	Whitcomb St, WC2H 7HG	Trafalgar Square
Pestana Chelsea Bridge	354 Queenstown Rd, SW8 4AE	New in Chelsea Bridge Wharf

## Update on Premier Inn and Travelodges...

TRAVELODGE	Address	TRAVELODGE	Address
Aldgate East	6, Chamber St, E1 8BL	Barking	4 Arboretum Pl. IG11 7RX
Battersea	200 York Road, SW11 3SA	City Airport	Hartmann Road, E16 2BZ
City Road	7-12 City Road, EC1Y 1AE	Covent Garden	10 Drury Lane, High Holborn, WC2B 5RE
Docklands	Coriander Avenue, E14 2AA	Euston	1-11 Grafton Pl. NW1 1DJ
Farringdon	Gwynne Place, WC1X 9QN	Ilford	Clements Road, IG1 1BA
Gants Hill	Beehive Lane, IG4 5DR	Gatwick	Church Road, Lowfield Heath, RH11 0PQ
Kew Bridge	North Rd, High St Brentford	Liverpool Street	1 Harrow Place, E1 7DB
Kings Cross	Grays Inn Road, WC1X 8BH	Kings Cross Royal Scot	100 Kings Cross Road, WC1X 9DT
AAAA MAKE SURE YOU GO TO THE CORRECT KINGS CROSS HOTEL AAA			
Marylebone	Harewood Row, NW1 6SE	Park Royal	614 Western Avenue, W3 0TE
Southwark	202 Union Street, SE1 0LH	Tower Bridge	1 Goodmans Yard, E1 8AT
Waterloo	195 Waterloo Rd, SE1 8UX	Heathrow Heston	Moto Service Area, M4 Motorway,
Heathrow Central	700 Bath Rd, TW5 9SW	Gatwick Airport	Church Rd, Lowfield Heath, RH11 0PQ
Wimbledon Morden	Epsom Road, Morden	Wembley	North Circular Road, NW10 7UG

PREMIER INN	Address	PREMIER INN	Address
Beckton	1, Woolwich Manor Rd., E6 5NT	City	24, Prescott St, E1 8BB
County Hall	Belvedere Rd, SE1 7PB	Docklands Excel	Festoon Way, E16 1RH (by Connaught Bldg)
Euston	1 Dukes Road, Euston Road, WC1H	Gatwick Central	Longbridge Way, Crawley, RH6 0NX
Gatwick South	London Road, Crawley, RH10 9ST	Hammersmith	255 King Street, W6 9LU
Hampstead	215 Haverstock Hill, NW3 4RB	Heathrow Bath Road	15 Bath Road, Hounslow, TW6 2AB
Heathrow M4/J4	Shepiston Lane, UB3 1RW	Kensington	11 Knaresborough Place, SW5 0TJ
Kings Cross/St Pancras	26-30 York Way, N1 9AA	Putney	3 Putney Bridge Approach, SW6 3JD
Slough	76, Uxbridge Rd., SL1 1SU	South Mimms	Swanland Road, South Mimms, EN6 3NH
Southwark	34, Park St, SE1 9EF	Thurrock West	Stonehouse Lane, West Thurrock, RM19 1NS
Tower Bridge	159, Tower Bridge Road, SE1 3LP	Victoria	82, Eccleston Sq, SW1V 1PS

For a more comprehensive list, sign up for the free document at [www.nashsnumbers.co.uk](http://www.nashsnumbers.co.uk) and click on "Free 70+ page info."

For What's On in March also go to [www.nashsnumbers.co.uk...](http://www.nashsnumbers.co.uk...)

# from the editor's desk

## Martin Cox and Call Sign...

When I published Martin Cox's letter in the last issue of *Call Sign* as a response to the previous issue in which Mike Son had written an interesting article on how we could win back work from private hire, I was unsure whether anyone would take umbrage. It didn't take long before the question was answered!

For two solid days, my phone never stopped ringing. Some congratulated me, understanding the reason I had decided to publish a letter that I knew would be controversial. After all, Martin Cox may well have been a green badge driver and on the Radio Taxis Board for several years leading up to their demutualisation, but for many years now, he had been on the private hire side of the line.

Others said that I shouldn't have published it, with yet others saying they were pleased I had published his views because it showed how dangerous that opposition could be – however, they felt I had been too polite towards him. I make no apology for that. Yes, as several pointed out, I have no problem in answering back and yes, I knew exactly where Martin Cox was coming from and what he was trying to do. But it was a polite letter and deserved a similar response. Most – but not all – callers seemed to understand where I was coming from.

My position is difficult because I dislike our connections to private hire, yet I know that without Concierge our workload would have probably evaporated by now and you wouldn't see any taxis at all outside either of our corporate London Wall accounts.

Many callers mentioned the "core business" of taxis, but I have always thought of that as referring to street hails, because whether you or I like it or not, corporate clients are saying that taxis dispatched via radio are too expensive and they want to use PH – preferably with taxis as well – but if necessary they would pick them over us.

Some drivers believe – and it is their right – that without Concierge we would be better off. But would our corporate accounts then not have the capability of phoning LD or any of the other PH companies by themselves? DaC didn't introduce them, although we admittedly made it more convenient for them, but in return there was a large slice of their work for DaC taxis.

There was a time when our sheer size meant that large accounts couldn't go anywhere else, but look at Addison Lee now – their size is comparable to a taxi circuit, but because they can only pick up radio work (legally), in reality it means they can cover more work than most circuits that don't have street work interfering! And as much as my view on John Griffin is not too pleasant, I honestly believe him when he claims that he does not want any of his drivers to pick up in the streets. He wants a fleet that is prepared to wait however long it takes to get a radio job. He wants 100% account coverage because he knows that leads to more account work. Most taxi drivers just couldn't afford to work that way with John and son Liam Griffin knowing that only too well.

If you or I phoned AL for a quote, they probably wouldn't sound that cheap, but their pricing is different for account clients from the account address – and that's what customers seem to go by.



Since we last went to print, Martin Cox has sold his share of Chauffeur First to London Executive, who will now be that much bigger and who will no doubt continue to expand until someone buys them. That is how it's going and what we are up against. Telling the client that we are not prepared to change and that they must take us as just we are, is just not going to work anymore.

Private hire fill their ranks with drivers who see their minicab stint as a way of getting quick money and who will work far cheaper than we can, whereas their bosses are earning money from driver's monthly rentals – which are far more expensive than ours.

As a consequence, I'm afraid that talking about our "core business" is meaningless whilst we sit and watch everyone in the private hire business march past us.

I truly believe that publishing Martin Cox's letter will help to show exactly what we are up against. Mr Cox is one of only a few people who have worked as a licensed taxi driver and a private hire executive. His letter – especially the polite smugness of it – shows exactly what we are up against.

There is also a blogsite that inferred I was 'set up' to prime drivers into getting ready for demutualisation by allowing Martin Cox the space to write in *Call Sign*. It forwarded the article link onto me. Well, for those that bother reading *The Nissen Hut*, I have never met or even spoken to Martin Cox about the topic on the phone. I print articles that are interesting and not for ulterior motives. I rarely look at internet blogs, not for any reason other than I rarely have the time and in any case, find the views of someone like "Russell Wilson," who is afraid to publish his real name, as being pretty close to worthless. But if I do have a few minutes to spare, I think *The Anderson Shelter* seems to contain more interesting material. At least "Thomas the Tank" isn't afraid to give out his real name when necessary – even if they do (so I'm told) often have a go at *Call Sign* or me. And they also allow you to respond – which is more than *The Nissen Hut* apparently does.

Either way, why I'm bothering to respond to a blogsite, I really don't know!

## Blackwall Tunnel and the Olympics...?

All the trade press published a press release

from TfL about the current closure of the Blackwall Tunnel for southbound traffic after 9pm on most evenings, however, I am surprised that when publishing the piece, not one mentioned the fact that a three year closure is going to have a serious effect on the Olympic Games in 2.5 years from now.

*Call Sign's* Richard Potter has written an article inside this issue and I believe his view that the reason TfL never aligned the closure with the 2012 Games is so that whilst the Olympics are on, they will be able to reopen the Tunnel for those taking part as an *Olympic Route Network*.

*Call Sign* wondered aloud last month when publishing an article called *What will happen to the Blackwall Tunnel*, just how the ORN would operate, bearing in mind that the stadium and Olympic Village were on the A12 northside, while the O2 will have gymnastics and shooting, with horses tearing up the Greenwich Park grass on the southside of the Tunnel.

You would have to ask TfL why they began a 3-year closure plan 2.5 years before the Games commence. The Mayor's office promised *Call Sign* an answer, but sadly it isn't election time at City Hall, so the response failed to arrive.

But the news isn't all bad! I have now had offers from two MPs, who, with a General Election imminent, have offered *Call Sign* the opportunity of interviewing them. Sorry chaps, I don't have the time... perhaps after the election? You might be too busy? Just like me now...

## AGM

While the 2009 Dial-a-Cab AGM was held in a very friendly way with many questions answered and as little protocol as possible getting in the way, I still find it sad that more drivers don't make the yearly journey to the City to take part. I knew that it was always going to be quiet with no elections, propositions or rule changes and the Chelsea v Arsenal match being shown live on TV, but hey, there was always the free cup of tea / coffee! Life can be such a mystery at times...

## A new daughter-in-law for the Chairman...

I can't let this issue go without congratulating Brian and Brenda Rice on gaining a new daughter-in-law in the shape of the gorgeous Sam when she and Billy tied the knot, just three months after baby Charlie turned the Rice duo into grandparents.

The bad news is that with a stunning daughter still at home, Brian may well need to keep his bank manager sweet!

## PC repair

There is an ad in this issue from PC repairman, Bob Crabtree. Bob is based in Wanstead and all I can say is that my PC was running so slow that I could make myself a coffee, drink it and some files would still not have come through! That was before I discovered Bob. If you live east and have PC problems, it might be worth giving Bob a call...

Alan Fisher  
Callsignmag@aol.com

# reflections of the chairman

## Taxi vigilantes...

Every taxi driver who works at night knows that the touting that occurs from the licensed and unlicensed minicab fraternity is reaching epidemic proportions. This occurs mainly outside clubs and restaurants and the touts are quite blatant regarding their activities, as they know the chances of them being apprehended are practically nil.

Many venues have their own minicab satellite offices, which are usually manned by a *Clipboard Johnnie* who ushers members of the public into these minicabs that are illegally ranked outside the building. However, in recent times some members of our trade have been fighting back by targeting different venues on different nights of the week and supplying that venue with a constant stream of taxis. This has become much easier in recent times with the advent of the internet and email and the improvement in communication between individuals that this brings.

Needless to say the touts are none too happy about this situation as they look on these premises as 'theirs' and in their view the licensed taxi trade have no business encroaching on 'their' territory.

A couple of years ago when business was extremely buoyant, the touts had these venues to themselves. However, now that business for taxis is not so bright, the licensed taxi industry wants to give a service to their legitimate customers without any fear of intimidation and threats from any of these touts.

There is no point in me preaching to any night man regarding the current situation, as they are probably more aware than I of how things are, however, to any day man, I can assure you that the atmosphere outside these venues leaves much to be desired and the scene is like any you would find in a third world country. As you can imagine, tempers are running extremely high on both sides and there have been cases of taxis being damaged and taxi drivers being assaulted, with one taxi driver having fingers broken.

There is not any question the law is not being enforced by the authorities and there is also a distinct lack of awareness for taxi driver's safety. Neither is there any question in my mind that the blame lies with TfL and the Police for not protecting licensed taxi drivers as they go about their legitimate business, with the majority of that blame lying with TfL as they should insist the police enforce the law.

We have had platitudes from them for years on what they intend to do and yet they do hardly anything except tour the 'hotspots' to see what is going on (all the regimes have done this), yet hardly anything is resolved – just what should a taxi driver expect from TfL in return for the fee he pays to renew his licence every three years?

Things have become so bad that one trade organisation is paying for Marshals to attend various venues for a short time, because obviously the cost would be prohibitive for the long-term. The strange thing is that none of these Marshals are taxi drivers, the reason being – according to the trade organisation – is just in case there is any confrontation and physical



violence, the Marshal would not be in a position to lose his Bill as he would not possess one.

What a remarkable state of affairs TfL has allowed to happen when they play into the hands of those within our industry that would welcome confrontation. I have every sympathy with taxi drivers that feel intimidated by these touts and taxi drivers are rightly angry that they are not being protected by the very authority that seek to govern us. What message are we sending out to the public when we employ – as another trade organisation called them – 'thugs' onto the streets of London? I can appreciate the sense of frustration, but this is clearly not the way. The Mayor was keen to court the taxi trade when he was seeking our support for the last Mayoral elections, so it is now up to him to give instructions to TfL to ensure the law is enforced and the safety of taxi drivers remains paramount!

At a recent meeting at the PCO, I was informed that they had been advised by counsel that it was quite legitimate for minicabs to wait in a rank (line) whilst they were waiting to be allocated a trip. In all my years in this trade, many others and myself were always under the impression that minicabs could not form a rank in view of the public and it would appear this has always been accepted. I am now informed by the PCO that their advice is the former. I just wonder if that was the first advice they obtained or did they have to 'shop around' until they received the advice they wanted?

There is not any doubt in my mind that the taxi industry believes the minicab industry are the favourites with TfL and receive preferential treatment. No doubt the PCO would deny this, but they have to start giving something back to this trade instead of keep taking. Enforcing the law and giving taxi drivers a safe environment in which to work would be a start!

## DaC AGM

I believe there is a report elsewhere in the magazine regarding the AGM. I must say it was a pleasure to attend as everyone was impeccably behaved and everyone present was eager to hear what I had to say. Members were there because they wanted to be and I believe the proceedings were conducted in a very lighthearted manner – I must say I really enjoyed the day!

**Brian Rice**  
Chairman  
Dial-a-Cab

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# No Wonder Touts Prosper!

## Just ask DaC driver Marc Turner why!!!

For some time now, *Call Sign* has been waiting on a meeting that Dial-a-Cab driver **Marc Turner (R97)** was due to have with the Carriage Office officials at Welwyn Garden City.

The story begins on 19 July last year at around 02.30am when Marc was waiting by Swallow Street for a pre-booked DaC job. As Marc told us, the area was teeming with obvious touts but just one caught his eye. The car – yes car – directly behind Marc had its *For Hire* sign brightly lit! Even with several types of London taxis flying around, Marc knew that none of them looked like saloon cars!

He got out and looked at the rear of the car to see that it was a licensed taxi all right – but licensed in Welwyn Garden City! Marc approached the driver – whose name we have but now cannot publish – and told him he could not ply for hire in London. The driver first said that taxis could work anywhere and then said it was a pre-booked job. To “prove” it, he made a phone call to someone and after saying a few words, gave Marc the phone. A woman, who Marc said sounded as though she had just been woken up, said it was pre-booked. The driver then threatened to hit Marc, so the DaC driver immediately phoned the police.



Marc Turner

Astonishingly for someone with a legitimate “pre-booked job.” The Welwyn cabbie drove off – not northwards, as you’d expect, but towards Piccadilly Circus.

Marc noted his details and reported the incident to the Welwyn PCO and was later asked to attend a complaints meeting up there – set up by an outside source and not their PCO. Marc told *Call Sign* that he was happy to go if it meant getting rid of another tout. But the verdict was that there wasn’t enough proof!

The Welwyn Garden City committee should be ashamed of themselves, because this particular driver has a record of misbehaving and yet they have let him just carry on. As for their PCO, well they obviously serve no purpose whatsoever, even though Marc said he felt sorry for them as their hands were tied.

**Marc’s final word was that perhaps the tout might have learned a lesson, but he doubted that to be the case. But well done Marc, at least you put your money where your mouth was and did your best...**

## “First Registration” Tax Comes in April 1

*If you are buying a new cab, the price will have to go up...*



**Alistair Darling’s budget tax against the motorist also put up the price of a new cab from next month**

LTI Sales Director, **Rob Laidler** has warned drivers that if they want to grab a new cab and avoid the latest Governmental price increase, then it has to be before the end of March.

In the 2009 budget, **Alistair Darling** announced an increase in *first registration* tax to come into effect on the 1 April 2010 and which will see all new vehicle prices increase. The effect of the tax is to substantially increase the cost of a new vehicle for the first year only. It is for this reason that some pundits have dubbed it a *showroom tax*.

According to Mr Laidler, LTI will also be increasing the base vehicle price to cover movements in the cost of raw materials and exchange rates. These increases will be compounded by the new tax rate coming into force.

He told *Call Sign*: “If drivers want to avoid the price rise, then they need to go out and bag themselves a “10” plate bargain and take delivery before the end of March. “This is not an early April fool to get drivers in the showroom,” he added, “this is a very real warning to drivers not to wait and cost themselves money. The price of a new TX4 will be going up due to the increase in costs and to cover the tax rise. We don’t want to do it, but we have to pass the increases on to the customer. But if drivers buy now for delivery in March, they won’t get charged.”

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# Jerys World



Look Bert, didn't I tell ya that the bus and underground would make no difference to us! The worst that will happen when Crossrail comes is that we'll do a couple o' extra hours in the feeder..

## TAXI FARES UP 2.3% FROM APRIL

The TfL Board has approved an average taxi fare increase of 2.3 per cent for the 2010/11 financial year, the lowest since 2004. TfL told **Call Sign** that the meter increase aims to find a balance between maintaining income levels for drivers, who face disproportionately higher costs in order to work than average Londoners, while ensuring passengers still get a fair price for the high quality and unique service provided by London's taxi drivers.

City Hall agreed the new fares following consultation with the taxi trade and others, including London TravelWatch passenger watchdog, the London Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The increase is calculated using an established T&G formula originating from 1981 and will help drivers cover rising operating costs. The Board also approved a new deal on licence and testing fees for taxi and private hire drivers, including a freeze on some fees.

The Mayor of London, **Boris Johnson**, said: "The Capital is blessed with wonderful cabbies and we've deliberated long and hard to come up with an increase we think is fair to everyone during these tough economic times. I hope this increase will allow cabbies to meet the annual increases in insurance and fuel costs. But also help those with older cabs bring their vehicles in line with our desire to improve the air we all breathe in this great city, by driving the type of clean, green taxis that will achieve that aim."

**John Mason**, Director of Taxi and Private Hire at TfL, added: "The new fares take into



**Mayor Johnson. "This will help those with older cabs bring their vehicles into line..."**

account an agreed increase in the costs of running a black cab and balances this with setting a fair price for those who want to travel by taxi. We are trying to work with the drivers and operators to help keep them out on the road and providing Londoners with the excellent service they are renowned for around the world."

The 2.3 per cent increase for the next financial year includes a 1.9 per cent increase based on the 2010 cost index, which takes into account the rise in average national earnings and an increase in insurance rates which have risen 19.5 per cent on last year; plus a one-off 0.4 per cent to remedy a calculation error from 2007 which the taxi trade chose not to introduce last year due to the economic downturn.

A Tariff 1 average fare will increase from £10.16 to £10.39, while on the same journey Tariff 2 will go up by 27p and Tariff 3 by 32p. The new fares come in on April 1...

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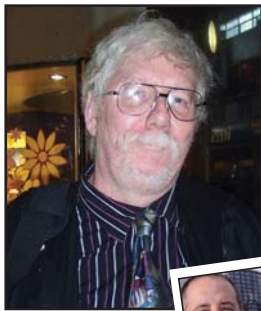


Following the recent scare concerning **Toyota** accelerator pedals sticking and their recall, **Dial-a-Cab** driver **Eddie Lambert (V27)** has written in his official capacity as Chair of the **RMT** London taxi branch to the **Director of Taxis and PH** at **TfL, John Mason**.

In the letter, Eddie asked that TfL/PCO issue a stop notice to all PHVs that are affected by the safety recall notices "...that several manufactures, including **Toyota**, are issuing. We would expect that TfL/PCO carry this out in the same manner they did with the **TX4** fire issue. That is all vehicles affected by this issue and are licensed by the **PCO** as **PHVs**, are taken off the road until the owners are able to produce a certificate from the manufactures franchised and registered factory service agents showing the necessary work has been carried out to ensure the problem has been removed from said vehicle."

Eddie, together with RMT secretary **David Vidgen** and Vice Chair **John Kennedy**, added in the letter that as with the **TX4**, that this was a matter of safety for both the travelling public in the affected vehicles and other vehicles close to them and of course the public in general.

Via a press release from TfL, John Mason said that given current information, TfL did not believe it to be appropriate or necessary to



**Eddie Lambert wrote to the PCO**  
**Inset: Mark Saylor and his family all died when the accelerator pedal jammed**



place a *stop* notice on affected models, but that it was imperative that anyone using the affected models as private hire vehicles were aware of the issue and took appropriate action. Mr Mason added that TfL/PCO would continue to monitor the situation closely and take further action if necessary.

Mr Mason's statement went on to "strongly recommend all drivers /owners of private hire vehicles licensed by TfL to either make contact with your local Toyota dealership or the Toyota Customer Relations line."

**Call Sign has to ask how many PH drivers get to see press releases compared to the taxi trade, where most read a trade paper?**

Offering advice to PH drivers with Toyotas, TfL add: "Drivers will not suddenly find that they have a sticking accelerator. It may become heavier to press or shudder. If the accelerator does stick when driving you should press firmly on the brake – instead of pumping it, put the car into neutral and pull over when safe." The press release ends by saying:

**"Should you experience any of these conditions, you are advised not to operate your vehicle until it has been checked by a quali-**

**Toyota brake sticking scare...**

## PCO refuse to take PH off the road

**fied Toyota technician at a Toyota approved service centre."**

It would appear to be the height of prejudice against the London taxi trade should private hire – with what seems to be a far wider "safety" outbreak – are allowed to carry on driving these vehicles.












The incident that brought the matter to light occurred last August when California Highway Patrol Officer, Mark Saylor and his family, were on their way to their daughter's soccer practice. They were driving a **Lexus ES 350** – which is made by **Toyota**. Millions were shocked when a phone recording from one of the passengers in the car was played on media outlets. It said the car was going at 125mph with the accelerator pedal stuck down. The voice then added that they were headed towards a busy intersection but could not stop. They were then heard praying before the line went dead. That crash sparked a recall of over 4million Toyota and Lexus vehicles throughout the US.

In a totally separate development, **Toyota's Prius** is being recalled to repair a software programme for the anti-lock braking system designed to prevent skidding. All of the hybrids manufactured before January have the fault. Several PH companies use this *green* car.

This magazine would ask Mr Mason to think again, because if just one private hire vehicle out of the many Toyotas crash due to the accelerator pedal sticking or their brakes locking, repercussions for the PCO would be enormous...

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**Sunday 7 February 2010 saw the 2009 Dial-a-Cab AGM, held once again at the Brewery in Chiswell Street.**

*What follows are not the official minutes, but an unofficial record of the meeting as captured by Call Sign Editor Alan Fisher. It is not a full record and neither should it be taken as including every word said or indeed the exact wording spoken. Some paragraph grammar has been sacrificed in order to make the report as compact as possible. The official attendance was put at 51...*

The meeting opened at 11.00 with Chairman **Brian Rice** asking for the traditional one-minute silence to remember those members that had passed away during the past 12 months. Approval for the presence of a sound engineer, **Mike Tovey** from DaC Accountants Chantrey Vellacott and two young ladies from DaC was given.

#### Minutes of the 2008 meeting:

They were accepted as true and correct...

#### Matters arising:

**Russell Poluck (T55)** said that last year under AOB he had brought up the subject of work being dispatched in bad weather conditions. This year, he said, the weather was even worse and he asked whether in those conditions all trips could be shown with a destination rather than *As Directed*? Russell added that in the north west of London, conditions at times were atrocious and sending cabs to an area where traffic couldn't move was ridiculous.



**Russell Poluck**

**Brian Rice** responded that he agreed with Russell and that there was no way they would want taxis to get stuck. The problem though was what you used as criteria? Should it be two centimetres of snow? Three centimetres? Brian added that as everyone knew, in the centre of town the conditions were not too bad. It was the side streets that were bad and some in Fulham could have been as bad as the side streets in Bishops Stortford! In fact for those first few days, the side streets were bad everywhere. But we did have to bear coverage in mind.

In fact, Brian continued, besides many account customers not even managing to get into work, quite a number of **Dial-a-Cab** drivers didn't make it in either! He thought what we had to do was to leave it to the discretion of those in the call centre to use some logic - unless we issued them with a tape measure and told them to wait until it was three centimetres deep! We know that snow during the day isn't so much of a problem as it is when it comes down at 3 or 4 in the morning. So he was sure that if a driver was given a job, say to Milton Keynes, and he didn't want to do it through believing conditions were bad, the dispatcher would recover it. The last thing DaC wanted to do was to get drivers stuck in the ice, but it was difficult to put that down in black and white.

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**Photos Alan Green (E52)**

Russell then came back and asked the Chairman whether dispatchers could be instructed as such? Brian said that yes, it had never been any different. **Keith Cain**, who runs the call centre, nodded in agreement. Brian went on to say that **John Connor (Y11)** was in the hall and that besides being a cab driver, he also worked in the call centre and that he would confirm that they had almost *carte blanche* to do whatever they thought necessary and that it was left entirely to their discretion. John confirmed that to be the case with a smart and extremely respectable "yes sir!" To laughter and with a broad grin, Brian responded: "Thank you, you'll go a long way!"



**John Connor**

**Roy Hayden (I38)** came onto the lectern next and told Brian Rice that he had spoken to our Auditor Mike Tovey at last year's meeting about DaC paying corporation tax and had asked why we were paying tax if friendly mutual societies were exempt? He also added that he had heard on the BBC Gordon Brown announce a tax reduction for large corporates "such as Merrill Lynch."



**Roy Hayden**

Brian responded by saying that Dial-a-Cab were a substantial sized company and that the taxman had been after us for years to pay tax on our profits. "With the exception of last year when we lost £112,000, if you add up the previous four years you'll see that we made somewhere in the region of £4.5million and we paid no tax on that. But there was a further enquiry into the way we pay at the end of last year and we did have to give way a little bit more and agree to pay corporation tax on any interest we have from capital in the bank. And that's what we did, however, if my memory serves me correct, we got £27K back off the taxman this year!"

Brian went on to add that he felt we were on "borrowed time" and that at some time in the future the taxman would catch up with us, but that it was a lengthy process. It did also mean that we had to employ real specialists from within **Chantrey Vellacott** to assist us. He added that they were extremely expensive but that it was money well spent. The last comment brought a "who me" smile from Mike Tovey! Brian confirmed to Roy that we were not paying tax other than on unearned income - that being bank interest only - but

added that as shown in our figures, bank interest was currently very little because rates were so low. He also said that we had £3million in a special higher interest account - bringing laughter when he said it was called the Rice account!

Roy Hayden came back saying that for the past year he had been looking online and grilling passengers on the subject and that he had come to the conclusion that it doesn't say anywhere that mutual trading companies should pay any tax. Brian came back and said that before Radio Taxis demutualised, they always paid income tax but that we were fighting the taxman. Roy asked if there was some law that said we had to pay and while Brian responded that there was no law as such, he passed the microphone over to **Mike Tovey** for a response.

Mike said that over the years we had managed to convince HMRC that most of the profits DaC make arose from trading between ourselves - ie mutual trading. He said there was a long-established principle that says that form of trading is not taxable. For some reason over the years, Radio Taxis (Mountview) were not able to convince the taxman of the same argument. However, HMRC had come back to us every five or six years and challenged the principles on which mutuality is based. Whilst they couldn't manage to succeed, they do manage to chip away a little bit more each time and on each of those occasions, we have to agree that the surplus that is generated by the business is derived from our trading with customers and not with ourselves. Therefore it becomes a negotiation between how much is taxable and how much isn't. Mike added that there was no new law or tax code, that there was no point looking on the internet because he wouldn't find it. Roy came back saying that he had mentioned the subject to passengers, but Mike came straight back in by saying that they wouldn't know about the long-established principles of mutuality because there was nothing new here. Every time HMRC came back to them at **Chantrey Vellacott** and made a further attack each five or six years, they put up a defence. But Mike then went on to confirm what Brian had said and that in his judgement HMRC would say that more and more of DaC's surplus was taxable. But in the meantime we would take full advantage of our current circumstances because one day in the future - when we are back into full profitability - **HMRC** would come back and say that they wanted 28% of them! Roy again asked if we had paid that and Mike confirmed that's what we would have paid had HMRC been



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successful. But because they hadn't been, we had paid nothing and over the years, that was on a total of around £12million! Mike did add though that this wasn't due to "some fancy footwork" or ducking and diving, it was based on long-established principles correctly argued and negotiated with the Revenue. However, that didn't mean they liked it, because all they want is 28% of DaC's profits and they would keep coming back until they got more and more.

Brian then came back and added that no one wanted to pay tax, but there wasn't a lot of choice involved. He made the point that if a driver received a tax bill for £4000, that person could turn round and say that he wasn't going to pay it, but eventually they would have to pay although like DaC, they could fight them. He also said we had a specialist in **Colin Heath** who fights it for DaC and that Colin, Howard Pears and Brian had all been to see Counsel on this and had taken expensive advice, which had cost the Society a lot of money. However, in the words of the Chairman, it had saved us fortunes. He said that we would continue to fight HMRC and that in his view, eventually we'd have to start paying tax, but when that would be no one knew. "It could be 10 years, 20 years – we have absolutely no idea," said Brian adding that the HMRC would always keep chipping away and that this time they had managed to get us to pay tax on our bank interest. Mike Tovey came back saying that he thought the situation would change when the Inland Revenue could successfully argue that our mutual business was incidental to our other business. Currently we had been able to argue that the trade with clients was incidental to our mutual business, but when the balance changed and the Revenue claimed that whilst they accepted we are a mutual, that was only "on the edges" and what we really are is a successful organisation doing profitable business with major banks, then they would succeed in getting more and more of those profits. Roy asked whether there would have to be a law confirming what Mike had said, but our auditor responded by again saying there was no law needed and that negotiations were purely based on those long-established principles that had been around for many years. Roy thanked Mike and Brian and promised not to bring it up again! Brian assured him they were pleased to answer questions and that it was important that members knew DaC didn't just sit round waiting for things to happen, but were always proactive. To laughter, Brian then said that Mike needed to leave the meeting early as he was flying to Portugal "to play golf on the strength of the money we pay him!" Quick as a flash, Mike responded by saying to an even bigger laugh that he would be stopping off in Geneva first to pay in the £3million!" **Call Sign** assumed that both were joking!

**The Chairman then asked for a vote on accepting the minutes and the meeting then moved on.**

### The Chairman's Report on the Financial statements ending 31 August 2009

Brian began by saying that it didn't really need

him to tell us how tough it had been out there, particularly in the corporate sector and that older drivers could probably still remember the last downturn. The

Chairman was then stopped in mid-flow when the **Call Sign** editor walked to the stage to tell Brian that re the minutes, he hadn't called for any votes against! To a chorus of laughs, all that those in the hall heard was the Chairman asking the editor if he liked his job! Then Brian said: "From our recent past editor of **Call Sign**: Is there anyone against accepting the minutes!" No doubt to spite the editor, not one hand was raised and the Chairman then asked Mr Fisher if he was satisfied with that! The editor slunk away slowly – a quietly spoken "thank you for that" from Mr Rice helping to take some of the redness out of the ed's embarrassed face!

Brian then continued with his report and compared this recession with the one from the early 1990s. He said that he felt this one was worse because this latest one hit the banking sector – many of whom are our biggest customers and all had cut back on taxi usage dramatically – adding that the situation was beginning to ease a bit. He said that suddenly last year (up to 31 August), DaC was hit with a 32% downturn in our turnover, down from £49m to £33m. Brian told the DaC drivers listening intently, that they obviously had to do something and had looked at the Society's biggest expense – the wage bill – and from May 2008 stopped recruiting new staff in addition to making some redundancies. "That was a very tough thing to have to do," said the Chairman. As a result, our operating costs were cut by £750,000 last year with staff numbers dropping from around 240 down to 160 and although the bottom line showed a loss of £112,000, Brian said that under the circumstances, that wasn't too bad.

He went on to explain that the £750,000 saved costs did not all come into the same financial year and said that you couldn't just go round picking on staff and saying you are redundant although he sadly added the aside "...but in Alan Fisher's case I may make an exception!"

He went on to explain about the consultation process that has to be gone through in order to make redundancies and said that the £750,000 saved last year would become £1.25m saved on overheads this year. Simplifying the matter, Brian explained that when you suffer a sudden and huge 32% drop in income from clients, you have to do something and they felt there were just two choices. One was to get more money from members and they didn't want to do that. The other choice was to look at DaC's overheads as regards to staff costs. They also decided that for that period, when members left, they would not replace them and DaC's driver numbers dropped by just over 200 – but that meant another double whammy as we were hit by the loss of those members subscriptions in addition to customer's service charges. But he said that DaC had to be fair and didn't want drivers



Brian Rice

to be the ones that made up the shortfall from the drop in customer usage. He added that DaC had fitted the occasional new driver, so if anyone couldn't understand why they had heard of someone joining recently, it was probably true. However, the numbers had fallen because of the policy of generally not recruiting. He added that the Board did not want the number of drivers to drop any further now and we were replacing those that left.

Cheering the situation up, Brian then said that things were definitely picking up, so much so that from the first quarter of DaC's trading year (1 September to 31 December), we were once again in the black and that "black" represented well into six figures. He added that hopefully, if the situation remained as it was, then DaC would once again become a profitable organisation. Updating the cash situation, at the end of August we had £6.1m sitting in the bank whereas of the Friday before the AGM, that figure had dropped slightly to £5.9m. The Chairman went on to add that had the bank's interest rates not been so low, even in such a bad year for the trade and with the £112,000 loss, we would still have been in the black. He also pointed out that the companies struggling most were those with debts and that in the current situation, cash was "king," explaining that the current low 0.5 interest rates did not apply to those needing to borrow – who were usually quoted as 2% over Libor, which is the rate at which banks lend money among themselves. Brian went on to say that it was because DaC had been looked after year on year, that we were not in serious trouble today – as many companies were. He reminded older drivers of the early 1990s when DaC barely survived and it was literally touch and go as to whether we survived and added that now, in 2010, the Society was in excellent financial shape.

**With that, the Chairman asked if there were any questions...**

### Chairman's Report – Matters arising

**Pat Keefe (G01)** was first up. He asked Brian why in the Annual Report it said that staff costs had gone down by 10% whereas the staff numbers had dropped by 30%? The Chairman explained that these things



Pat Keefe

don't happen straight away and that even though staff were no longer employed, the savings on their wages did not come into play until after Christmas. He went on to add that the £750,000 savings from last year would probably become £1.25m this year. The savings Pat was reading about in the report were only a part of them, Brian said. Trying to explain it in a simpler way, Brian added that had DaC's year been from January 1 to December 31 and we had made staff savings of £1m, by the June those savings would still only have been a half million. The full financial savings would not show until the following full financial year. So the savings that Brian estimated to be around £1.25m would not show in full until the current financial year

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ended. Pat asked about BoM costs and Brian told him they were down by around £70K - £80K.

**Pat Sheehan (W54)**

spoke next. He asked Brian about the £5.9m we had on account and how it was invested? Brian reiterated what he had said earlier in that we had £3m in a special higher interest account that we had to leave in for



Pat Sheehan

12 months. We did that knowing we had almost £3m still to play with should it be needed. Pre-empting the question, Brian added that if we were to make some large capital expenditure, we would know more than 12 months in advance that we would be needing the money. He also said that we had another £2m on a higher interest account, but this one was on an overnight basis. Pat then asked whether we should consider putting £3m in a long-term account or into gilts so that we could claim the associated tax advantages? Brian reiterated about the £3m in a 12-month deposit account and also explained that in a good week we might have to pay out DaC drivers to the tune of around £1m – or now that we pay fortnightly, around £2m of driver payments. Brian then explained that in the not-too distant future, we would be needing money. Itemising that need, the Chairman spoke of a new accounting system, new call taker's screens, a new on-line booking system for customers, then a new dispatching system followed by new driver terminals and said that we wanted not to have to borrow money in order to do all that.

Ending with a smile, Pat asked whether we had considered opening an office in Jersey!

**Laurence Kelvin (W88)**

stepped up to the lectern next and asked why, according to the Annual Report, DaC employed two firms of solicitors – one in the West End and one in Mayfair? Brian's retort was that it was a good question



Laurence Kelvin

and that he would try to keep the answer brief – leading to the editor putting a new tape into his aging machine and keeping another one handy! Brian started by telling of a solicitor from *Fladgate Fielder* working for us for 35 years by the name of Stuart Tilling. (Ed's note: *He first acted for ODRTS in 1969 when this company was led by Jack Russell as Chairman and Bill Broun as Secretary. He had acted continuously, whenever needed, even though he became a Partner in Fladgate Fielder along the way. Stuart retired in November 2004.*) The Chairman went on to describe Stuart as having been an excellent solicitor who knew everything there was to know about friendly and mutual trading societies. As a consequence of Stuart's retirement, we had a new solicitor at *Fladgate Fielder* working for us. While a very nice young man, his experience of friendly and mutual trading societies was very limited. He would certainly have learned over the years from experience, but in the meantime Brian met a solicitor from *Field*

*Fisher Waterhouse* at a function, who he described as a top man in a top company. He also said that this solicitor knew Mike Tovey as Brian had introduced them. The Chairman continued that it soon became obvious to him that this solicitor was very knowledgeable about friendly and mutual trading societies as well as co-operatives. He was also the solicitor who dealt with the RTG demutualisation, so his knowledge of friendly societies was second to none. Brian also emphasised that we had not discarded *Fladgate Fielder*, but that now we went to whichever firm we felt would be suitable for a given problem.

Someone from the *floor* asked if we paid a retainer to either and Brian said that we didn't.

**Ray Sorene (A53)** stood up next and asked Brian whether debtors to the Society were small business or large ones going under? Brian replied that we had been hit by the Icelandic banks collapse and a few others that had gone under.



Ray Sorene

He went on to explain about our credit control system, which he described as excellent and gave the example of an account that spent £100K a month. He said the company would use DaC in January and spend £100K. We then billed them on February 1 but they had 30 days to pay the money, which meant that they had until the end of February to pay their January taxi usage bill. But then they didn't pay it, while in the meantime they had run up another £100K bill for February. We then become aware of the situation and begin pressing them for the money, but it could be another two or three weeks before we realise that we aren't going to be paid – by which time we are looking at a bill of almost £300K. He explained that there was always a risk involved but that we did not open any accounts before doing a full credit check on the prospective client. We always try to keep bad debts to a minimum, Brian said, but in this economic climate there will always be some. We have a few and there could be more, but the time difference between usage and paying is a risk we have to take. Ray accepted the explanation and went exit stage left. There were no further questions on the report...

### Auditor's Report on the Balance Sheet

**Mike Tovey** of Dial-a-Cab Auditors, **Chantrey**

**Vellacott DFK LLP**, spoke next going through the income and expenditure accounts for the year ending 31 August 2009 and explaining the figures given in the End of Year Annual Report...



Mike Tovey

However, as Mike put it, before giving the official version wearing his auditor's cap, Mike wanted to give his view of the Society as someone who had worked for DaC for many years. He said that there were many businesses out there that could not and did not survive in the last year's financial conditions, but that despite a sharp drop in income, we had done well considering the circumstances. But while

not wishing to sound complacent, even the loss we suffered could almost be considered a success compared to many other businesses. He also pointed out that while the previous year's profits had been very good, they had been somewhat flattered due to the sale of Brunswick House, so that had to be taken into consideration. Without that, said Mike, it would have left us with a surplus of around £300K, so we had gone from that to a loss of £100K. He then added that the loss of £100K out of reserves of £12.5m was not something to get concerned about. He also said that while no loss is good and that the next year's accounts haven't been audited, it certainly looked as though DaC would at least break even and more probably go into profit again. "That is a situation you should be reasonably satisfied to see," he said.

He then picked up on Ray Sorene's question re bad debts. He said they had increased three-fold from £12,000 to £49,000 but said that having bad debts of £49K out of a turnover of £33.5m was a drop in the Ocean. He then went on to look at some of the companies that went under, such as former DaC client **Lehman Brothers**. "Imagine if they had still been a client of yours!" He then said that many companies would be delighted to have figures such as those of DaC. His only concern was that private hire were obviously on the march and he pointed out Addison Lee as a company we should be aware of. Mike then took questions...

### Auditor's Report – Matters arising

**Ray Sorene (A53)** returned to the lectern and asked if any of the three taxi companies had been hit by the Lehman Brothers collapse? The answer was that cars took the biggest hit with WestOne and Burgundy losing most and to a lesser extent, Radio Taxis. Ray then asked if we serviced **Bear Stearns**? The answer was that we did to a small extent, but they used cars far more than taxis and in their case it had been Brunel Carriage that had suffered. Brian added that besides good management, you also needed luck. After all, he said, who'd have thought a bank such as Lehman Brothers would collapse. Had they been with us, it could have cost us £750K. Ending, Mike said that our performance as compared to RTG was excellent, adding that he was not saying that to gloat, but that it was always good to compare your progress against that of your competitors.

**Laurence Kelvin (W88)** got up to speak again and asked Mike if he could just for a moment imagine himself at DaC House on Monday morning, not as an auditor but as a management consultant, what advice would he give the Board? Mike considered that there wasn't too much to criticise in the way we worked, but the big challenge was the one we faced from private hire. Laurence asked whether we should bring in consultants? Mike said he didn't think that would help too much but agreed with Laurence that a suggestion from a previous AGM about replacing Board members with professionals could be a good idea. Mike said that our Board had done well over the years, including the appointment of some professionals already, but that it could be



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advantageous if the Board just brought in over-all strategy and allowed professionals to put that into motion and delivering it day to day.

**Joe Brazil (K16)** then stepped up and commended the Board on reducing their emoluments by £69K. He described it as a colossal amount to save in what was a very hard year. He also wanted to ask what the net cash inflow from operating activities was made up of? The answer concerning what monies came in and what went out was too long and complicated to put it all down here, but Joe accepted it! He then brought up Addison Lee and said that he noticed on their website that they had recently purchased Express Cars, adding that they expected their turnover this year to be £118m. Joe added to Mike Tovey's earlier statement of being aware of Addison Lee and said we should be afraid! **Brian Rice** then entered the conversation talking of PH companies buying up each other and how they were getting bigger. Brian added that whatever we did, we would never be able to compete with them on price. He said that their drivers rightly expected to earn less than us and that a section of the public had grown up with that and expected to pay less for a car with a satnav because as Mike had said earlier, cash was king and everybody was looking at saving money.

The Chairman then sent a few ripples of shock around the hall when telling members that we had recently retained a major city account because we supplied their ground transportation, adding quickly that contrary to rumours spouted by some who wished to discredit DaC, our job distribution engine was brought in to protect our work and to make sure we kept a foothold in these accounts. This particular account was huge and they told Brian that the bank's new policy meant that any trip going to a London postal district would go in a **Toyota Prius** because it was green and London taxis weren't. It was a shock! Companies like Lewis Day have 250 Prius, while Climate Cars run 80 of them. How could we override bank policy? The next thing you'd hear was that "Ricey was sticking all our work into cars," he said, asking what they were supposed to do as it was bank policy. Brian continued that there was a consultation document that talked of 10 and 15 year old cabs being phased out. These corporate companies were light years ahead of us, he said – they wanted green cars and they wanted them NOW, while we couldn't even decide if we could have 10 or 15 year old taxis. Fortunately, said the Chairman, he managed to argue with the account managers and they had now agreed that any ASAP trips up to 30 minutes – which was 98% of their work – would still go in our cabs. If we hadn't had our job distribution engine and not handled their ground transportation, said Brian, we would not even have known about their decision to put work into the Toyota Prius until it had actually happened. "At least this way, I had the opportunity to try and talk them out of their decision and for the short term I have, but that's the way things are going. Make no



Joe Brazil

mistake, all the major banks will follow them."

Brian confirmed Joe's opinion that we should be worried and that all we could give to the customer was an excellent service. Brian continued by saying that there would always be some people prepared to pay for good service, just as there are those that will eat at La Gavroche and the Savoy, rather than George's Cafe. But even so, said Brian, it was becoming very, very difficult to retain our business and to keep those customers happy because they wanted more and more and then more.

Brian then compared the numbers of private hire with that of taxis and pointed out that they were now three times the size of the combined green and yellow badge taxi fleet. Letting out an unusual glimpse of frustration, the Chairman told the *floor* that the DaC Board were getting fed up with the "nonsense" spouted by those who write to trade papers or message boards claiming that DaC put their work into cars. "What an absolute load of..... nonsense," he said, pointing out that DaC did everything it could, fighting "tooth and nail" to retain that work and that members should be happy that this BoM had the foresight to bring in Concierge in 2004, otherwise we would not have had the accounts with JPMorgan, Deutsche Bank and Citigroup. And what did we get, he asked? Our own drivers attempting to get DaC investigated by the FSA, because these drivers claimed unsuccessfully that we had contravened the rules of the Society. The drivers here today care and know the truth, but there were those out there in our own industry who only wanted to tear down and destroy. Do we get annoyed, he said? Of course we do. Laughter followed a round of applause when Brian added that he felt better with that off his chest! To even more laughter and with smiles all round, Joe Brazil joked that with Brian in such a bad mood, he was almost afraid to ask another question – but he did! That question was whether the BoM had considered reducing the fleet size even further or did Brian consider that things were improving? Brian responded that things were picking up but that it was a balancing act and that if we reduced the fleet too much, it could reflect on our service. DaC also needed the income from subscriptions, he added, and that we could reduce the fleet to 1000 but we'd have to double driver's subs. He also said that they would not want to do that and were very mindful of driver subscription costs. He reminded drivers that subs were not increased last year and he was also hopeful of the *status quo* being maintained this year, although he emphasised that time would tell.

Brian went on to talk about what he jokingly referred to as his pet subject – **Addison Lee**. He spoke of their ashtrays with AL's phone numbers on and said that several drivers had asked why we didn't do something similar. The answer, he said, was because we just wouldn't cover that type of work. If we got a call on 2am Saturday morning from a pub in Walworth Road going to Surrey Quays with four passengers who'd had about 30 pints between them, he gave as an example, we just wouldn't cover it and the ad would become counter-productive. Joe chimed in quickly to more laughs saying that no one would pick them up because he had taken them at 01.30!

**Ray Sorene (A53)** stepped back up to the

lectern again and asked whether those corporate customers of DaC who wanted to use the **Toyota Prius** were aware of the brake recall? Brian responded that they were the first to be told.

**A vote then took place on accepting the report with the Chairman then querying: "Was that all right Mr Fisher?" Mike Tovey then left the meeting to a warm round of applause.**

Because the meeting was progressing in such an orderly way, the Chairman bent protocol somewhat and allowed questions out of their relevant sections. He also went easy on those who threw questions from the floor with **Russell Poluck (T55)** asking when we could expect new terminals and what would they consist of? Brian inferred that had it not been for the recession, we had considered having the new terminals in February 2009, but could see the way business was going and decided as a Board that such a large capital expenditure would not be in the Society's interest. Responding to the second part of Russell's question, Brian said the main difference, other than it obviously being much more modern as the current ones were 10 years old, was that the terminals would be fitted for chip and pin, in addition to having satnav. However, the bottom line was that it would throw you a job that you would either accept or reject. The big difference between 10 years ago and the present day was that we now expected to pay much, much less for new terminals than we did back then. Ten years ago, we were the first taxi company in the world to use a touch screen terminal for drivers. It was totally unique and bespoke. Now, while the cost would be much less, we have other priorities that come first. However, he said that he hoped we'd have something within 2 or 3 years.

Russell also asked whether the system could add the complete postcode when giving drivers a job in case it was in an awkward place and the driver wanted to use his satnav? Brian said that the system couldn't do it unless we were prepared to pay an extra £120 per mobile to upgrade the Geographers map. The Chairman added that it wouldn't be worth it for just 2 or 3 years.

**Joe Skeggs (V34)** enquired (from the *floor*) whether we could possibly do a deal with the mapping company? Brian again said it wouldn't be worth it and also gave his view of satnavs in taxis. He said that while he would always keep one in his cab, he would never keep it on display on the front windscreen as some do. "We try to sell our taxi drivers as being superior to private hire," he said, "then the passenger gets into one of our taxis and sees a satnav in the front! The driver terminals are below the passenger's eyeline and a satnav wouldn't show." The Chairman pointed out the increase in passengers getting into taxis and giving a postcode instead of a destination and said that we had to be above that.

Following complaints that he couldn't be heard, Joe Skeggs then moved onto the lectern. **While Joe made his way there, Brian Rice asked for a vote on re-appoint-**



Joe Skeggs

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ing Chantrey Vellacott...

**Brian then said that as all the votes had been taken, any further questions from that point would come under the Any Other Business category...**

Joe Skeggs then continued on the CabMaster satnav device that he had bought and said was excellent. Brian said that for the £300 Joe had paid, he'd want a new terminal. However, he agreed to speak to CabMaster to see whether they would do any deals for our drivers.

**Bob Ambrose (V13)**, looking well after some health problems, spoke next. He mentioned all those that had written in *Call Sign* – including **Mike Son** and **Keith Cain** – about improving our service. Bob's view was that



**Bob Ambrose**

while service was important, cost was as well and he believed that we could cut some costs without damaging our finances too much. He then asked Brian how he believed we could improve once our service was accepted as being very good? The Chairman said he didn't believe we could compete on price or a green vehicle, so the only thing we could offer was an excellent service with a clean cab arriving on time with a polite driver. If you get to the door with a lower run-in, then that was even better. But we also had one added bonus and that was the licensed London DaC taxi driver. He went on to say that we had accounts where 99% of ordered taxis arrived within 5 minutes and no one could better that kind of service. The problem would come when the work picks up – and it will, he said. But we must not become complacent, he added, because that service is really the only string we have left on our bow. He pointed out that the opposition use cheaper labour and drive cheaper, greener cars, which made our position difficult. But Brian also said that he believed the new TfL Director of taxis and private hire, **John Mason**, was someone we could work with, but Brian still felt the playing field to be uneven.

Bob came back to say that the HoC had a successful fixed price service and why couldn't we extend that to more accounts? The Chairman responded that the policy of the House was to use taxis, but added that banks were more concerned with price. He then told the meeting how much the Society earned as an average on each trip and said that there was very little leeway to cut more, contrary to what some drivers seemed to think. Bob said there had to be something more and Brian told him what DaC COULD do: "We could win work back. There could be a dead clock with no run-in, no driver gratuity, no percentage service charge and a fixed service DaC fee of £2.50, every trip so that all the customer paid would be the meter fare plus £2.50 to DaC. He said he guaranteed we would win work back, but when we got to the Chelsea flower show and it began to get busier, we wouldn't cover the work and we would lose all those accounts anyway. "Why would you run past people with their hands out where you can get full fare, to run for a trip on which you would get

less money? It's easy to cut prices during a downturn," said Brian, "but it's equally difficult to raise them again when business picks up."

He added to applause that he was against cutting prices and believed that there were enough out there who wanted good service and that's what he wanted to sell them. The Chairman added that whilst there would always be radio taxi circuits, he wasn't certain whether there would always be room for three of them. However, he repeated that our financial position was very strong. To show what we were up against, he gave some details of why we were not the preferred supplier to **Eurostar** anymore, just an approved one. He said that following many years of good service to that account, they asked us to supply coaches at St Pancras and Ashford and we had responded saying that we did not operate coaches. As a result, Radio Taxis said they would do it and they won the account. Brian said that there still weren't too many accounts out there like that, but that we were moving to a situation where the larger companies wanted diversification and we would have to decide if we wanted to move that way or just get smaller and smaller.

Bob then suggested we used E14 as a sounding ground by putting in some cut prices because as the zone was physical, drivers could possibly cut their run-ins, but Brian responded by saying that all the companies knew what each were paying and if DaC cut the price of a Canary Wharf company, at the banks next monthly meeting they would all know and all be knocking on our door for the same deal.

Bob's final point was to reiterate what **Mike Son** had written in *Call Sign* – make everything AD to improve coverage even further? Brian's response was that if the BoM brought that in, someone would bring in a proposition at the AGM to bring back destinations and that it would succeed, thereby undermining the Board.

**Paul Duffy (M55)** then climbed the lectern and began by congratulating the Board on the Society's strong financial situation. He also asked a personal question that *Call Sign* feels is unnecessary to go into.

The final speaker should have been **Ray Sorene (A53)** who spoke on the new terminals – when they do come – and asked whether they would work on a zonal system as at present or on GPS? Brian said that a zonal system suited our drivers better as GPS did not take traffic or diversion problems into account, whereas our current system leaves it to the decision of the driver as to whether he or she can reach a pick-up within the allocated time.

As Ray stood down, Brian brought the meeting to a close by saying that it had been a pleasure to conduct it. He said that he realised it was a bone of contention that so few attend nowadays, but he appreciated the fact that drivers asked sensible questions and allowed him to give an answer without trying to scream him down. It had, he said, been constructive, orderly, well-mannered and had given him the opportunity to relay what the DaC Board were trying to do for what Brian called "your Society." He thanked the members because as he said, the meeting had been an enjoyable one.

Just as everyone began getting up to go for either their roast beef and Yorkshire pud or the Sunday footie on TV, **Jim Baptist (E06)** got up and made a quick point about needing more cash work but that the £2 surcharge was getting in the way. Allowing the late question, Brian explained about the costs involved and made the point that it wasn't the £2 that drivers didn't like; it was having to collect it.

Then everyone got up quickly and departed with *Call Sign's* watch showing 12.45...



**Jim Baptist**

### Voting results

**To approve the minutes of the 2008 AGM:**  
99% in favour and 1% against

**To approve the Annual Report for 2009:**  
99% in favour and 1% against

**To reappoint Chantrey Vellacott as auditors:** 98.3% in favour and 1.7% against

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When **Call Sign** recently met **Dan Brown (B16)**, the DaC driver was still fuming over a problem he had experienced with his 15-month-old TX4. We'll let Dan take up the story;

"I had the 40,000 miles service at my LTI dealer on a Thursday and they didn't report any impending trouble, so when the cab gave me grief big time on the following Saturday, I was not impressed," he told us grim-faced.

"I was in the narrow, eastern section of Oxford Street by the roadworks and stuck behind a bus which apparently couldn't shut its doors. I sat there for over an hour with my engine running as the weather was freezing and I assumed we would be moving off any time soon!"

Dan continued with his tale of woe. "Apparently buses cannot move unless the doors are closed securely, it's a safety device – a bit like the motion sensors on a cab. There was a great deal of activity between the bus driver and his mates, who tried to force the doors shut. When I realised things were not going to happen too quickly, I switched off my engine. Eventually the bus doors got sorted and the old Fairway taxi immediately in front of me started up and pulled away, no problem.

"I tried to start my cab and all I heard was a machine-gun like noise from the area of the fuse box and flashing warning lights randomly illuminated on the dash, a bit like a fruit machine! I was holding up the traffic for miles around until someone helped me push the cab onto the pavement and out of the way. I phoned the RAC and their patrolman arrived around 3 hours later! He jump-started my cab through a charger on his van battery. It started, but everything on my cab was dead. He followed me towards home, but the cab failed again and he jump-started me

## Dan gets Stranded – in Oxford Street!



Not a happy bunny - Dan and battery

for a second time. It seemed ok then, so I thought I'd try to work the cab assuming I would be able to charge the battery sufficiently for it to be able to start normally when I needed to work over the weekend.

"Soon after, I had stopped for a wheelchair user, loaded him into the cab and then put the meter on. But it just showed 6666.666! I had no choice but to leave him at the roadside in case we broke down again and I staggered home, realising I had lost the entire weekend's work. At one point on the journey home, I also lost power as if the hand brake was fully applied,

but thankfully that symptom cleared and I got home ok. The RAC re-started me at home on the Monday morning and I crept into my dealership, who diagnosed a faulty battery! It's funny how modern technology can cause such havoc and mayhem. The bus couldn't move because its doors would not close, I couldn't move because my battery failed, yet the old Fairway in front of me simply started up when the road cleared and went on his way!"

"Aaaaaaahhhh," was Dan's plaintive cry as **Call Sign** asked if we could borrow a fiver...!

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## 200 HYDROGEN TX4s IN TIME FOR THE OLYMPICS

According to the *Environmental Transport Association (ETA)*, London will have 200 TX4 taxis powered by hydrogen fuel cells running around town in time for the 2012 London Olympics.

*Intelligent Energy, Lotus, TRW Conekt and LTI* are developing the taxis and in order to allow the vehicles to be properly integrated into the city, five hydrogen filling stations are to be provided in time for the Games.

*Air Products* will launch the mobile trailer-mounted refuelling units, which can be parked on the forecourts of regular fuel stations. By using these mobile systems, the infrastructure for the hydrogen-powered taxis can remain relatively cheap and quick to implement.

Commenting on the ETA's website, a spokesperson from the association explained:

"A TX4 emits 226g CO<sub>2</sub> per km, but the problem with diesel-engined vehicles in urban areas is more about the particulates released in their exhaust. The detrimental effect this has on health makes a strong case for switching to fuel cell technology."

As **Call Sign** revealed last July, the taxis will be able to operate for a full day without refuelling and have a top speed of around 75mph. It is also claimed that the fuel cell power-train will provide even better acceleration than current models.

The taxis will top up their hydrogen tanks at central depots using a refuelling process that takes just a few minutes, whilst even winter will prove to be no problem with the fuel cell system being able to function at temperatures down to -20C. It will fit in the space where the VM engine sits in the current TX4.

The hydrogen fuel cells taxis will emit no emissions during use....



Hydrogen cell TX4s in time for 2012?

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# call centre chat

## Credit cards

The number of times the topic of drivers taking credit cards off the street has been written about in **Call Sign** must run into hundreds! But despite all that has been said, drivers are still not following the correct procedures. So I am bringing this to everyone's attention because we're seeing an increase in the number of refusals to pay by the clearing bank.

When picking up off the street and the passenger wants to pay by credit card, you must take a rubbing of the card and obtain a signature. Even if the card is swiped, you must for security reasons take a rubbing of the card.

It is paramount that every driver carries our own credit card slips, which enable you to do this quite simply. Just place the card under three copies and rub the top copy with a pen or pencil. The card number will then emboss itself through the pages of the credit book. Fill in the amounts and then get the passenger to sign the top copy.

This is the only method that is acceptable to the clearing bank and prevents any problems with payment. Firstly it proves the card was present and secondly you will have a matching signature.

Entering the card details manually is not enough to prove the card was present as well as not getting a signature, which would be ridiculous.

**Those that rely on the receipt from the terminal as proof, this is not enough when picking up off the street. Drivers must use Dial-a-Cab credit card receipts...**



## Nice news!

At a recent meeting with our senior controllers, I raised the issue of driver's performances. How was coverage? Were drivers following procedural rules? How was their general conduct? Well I'm very pleased to report that the controllers only had compliments. Allan Evans has dealt with those one or two who decided to not play the game...

## Making your own contact?

I have recently spoken with drivers regarding the problems they have when receiving call centre instructions for them to make their own contact with passengers. On many occasions drivers have found that because a flat number was not given to them, contact has been impossible.

I listened to a number of recordings and

in most cases the client, when asked for the full pick-up address details, had not given the telephonist a flat number. I have reiterated to all telephonists that for the future, even though they ask for a full-pick up address, when this address is away from the default account address they must ask the caller whether there is a flat number. I have already heard this happening and it has averted the problem. But the question still comes back as to why can't someone give us their full address when asked. I suppose that's what they call being in the service industry and what makes one company better than the rest...

## Cash booking fee...

A point was raised at the AGM regarding the £2 booking fee charge against cash telephone hirings. I would like to confirm that the caller is asked automatically if they would like to listen to the terms and if selected, then a full explanation is given to them. Telephonists also confirm with all cash and credit card callers whether they are aware of our terms and conditions. If they answer no, our telephonist then reads them out and will not proceed with the booking unless the caller wants to continue. The point here being that while some drivers find it difficult to charge the full amount, be reassured that the passengers are fully aware of it and expecting to be charged...

**Keith Cain**

**Call Centre Manager**

**Driver Operations Manager**

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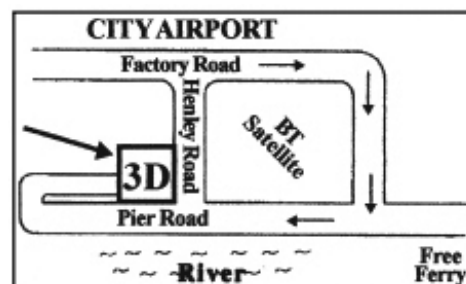
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With rumours among driver's partners that the age of romance had long been overtaken by reports on traffic problems at the Limehouse Link or waiting times at Heathrow, **Call Sign** decided to put it to the test and picked several **Dial-a-Cab** drivers at random to see what surprises they had in store for their other halves on **Valentine's Day**. Several of those we spoke to said they had nothing planned, while one bright spark said he'd been married over 40 years and "...I'm not starting all that business now!" Then there was the driver who told us he had just split up from his wife the previous day and yet another who said he'd had ten wonderful years with his wife "...but the problem is that we've been married for over twenty!"

Feeling rather dejected and wondering whether romance had evaporated like the December snow, **Call Sign's** hack hit the streets determined to find the answer to the question of whether love was alive and flourishing?

We soon met **Phil Butcher (A98)**, who when we asked how long he had been married, had to check the inscription inside his wedding ring for the date!

"Oh yes, 2005," he said fairly convincingly, "so that's 5 years, although sometimes it feels like 10," he grinned. "But I still love her dearly," he said just in case she reads the mag! "We have no plans for the 14th February for several reasons - my wife, **Fran**, is expecting our second child in March and we have a 2-year-old son, which makes baby minding a bit difficult too. Anyway, in the past we've always ended up with some sort of disaster on the *Feast of Romance* so we'll just do our own thing as and when we can. Love is a year round thing, not just for February," he said grinning.

Next we spoke to **Rob Pearson (E28)**, who was taking **Carla**, his girlfriend of three months, for a meal at *The Cricketers* restaurant in Clavering, Essex.

"It's owned by Jamie Oliver's parents. Carla knows we're going out, so that's not a surprise, but she doesn't know where I've booked."

**Alfie Harp (T57)** also planned to take his wife **Tracy** out to lunch. "We celebrate our silver wedding anniversary in April, so 25 years means it needs to be something special," Alfie told **Call**



Who said romance was dead as Call Sign asks...

# What Happened on Valentine's Day?

**Sign**. "I've let her arrange it and we're going to *The Chequers* pub/restaurant near Much Haddam in Essex. Having won awards, it should be somewhere special for someone very special," he told us, almost bringing a tear to our typesetter! "She'll probably guess that I'm bringing home a bouquet of flowers, but she definitely won't be expecting the bottle of her favourite perfume from *Jo Malone*."

We found newcomer to DaC, **John Gibbings (E01)**, next. John has only been on DaC for 1 month and was planning a surprise lunch for wife **Miranda** and their two young sons.

"I'm cooking lamb with all the trimmings from a recipe book so that I get it just right. Of course there will be wine and candles on the table - although the youngsters might not get to drink the vino! And courtesy of Dial-a-Cab's special ticket offers from Tom Whitbread, we'll also be going to the theatre, so I'm doing it properly - the whole business!"

Next into the **Call Sign** equivalent of a court of law's witness box stepped **Michael Kennedy (M30)**. His plan was to buy wife **Liz** a book - "but it's one that she really wanted," he told us. "It's called **The Master** and is written by

Colm Toibin. It's about five years in the life of American author Henry James and will hopefully be a big surprise for her, because I've said absolutely nothing about it." Obviously the practical type, Michael added that an expensive card was nice, but he preferred to buy something she would make use of and keep!

Last in our mini-survey was **Tony Easter (G27)** - another new recruit to DaC, his taxi just being fitted as we spoke to him at Roman Way - and another practical driver!

"We're going out for dinner on the Monday evening - the day after Valentine's," he said, "because I'll be working on the cab on the Sunday and **Lynne**, the lady in my life these past 18 years, is studying for her degree." Then showing **Call Sign** his



logic, he explained that you rarely needed to book a table on Mondays! The romance showed through when he told us that he had let Lynne choose wherever she would like to go - provided it was around the Bexley area! "Mexican, Greek or Italian - I'm easy," he said!

So give or take a bit, it does appear that romance is still in abundance with DaC's finest - even in these straitened times. Cupid obviously still has some arrows in his quiver...

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## ALBERT BRIDGE CLOSED FOR 18 MONTHS

While four others crossings  
only have roadworks!



### Picturesque...but useless

London's most picturesque bridge, Albert, has now closed to all traffic except bicycles for 18 months while a support timber structure is built beneath it, the road surface is renewed and the whole bridge is repainted.

Albert Bridge is not alone with roadworks. Hammersmith has suffered with weekend closures, with Battersea and Waterloo Bridges having daily congestion while maintenance work is undertaken and of course you don't need **Call Sign** to tell you about the Blackwall Tunnel. It used to be said that taxi drivers did not want to go south of the river - now it seems to be more of a case that we can't even get there!

A TfL spokesperson told **Call Sign** that there were only a limited number of Thames crossings and the heavy traffic carried meant that occasional closures were necessary and they did try to coordinate timings with the affected boroughs. The Albert Bridge repairs are estimated to cost around £7million.

It was barely three years ago, in April 2007, following a spate of DaC drivers receiving tickets for crossing Albert Bridge in "overweight vehicles" that **Call Sign** had a meeting with *Kensington and Chelsea* council officials, finally getting them to change to weight restrictions from 2 tonnes up to 2.5 tonnes - meaning that we could use Albert Bridge. It looks as though once again our Chelsea and Battersea passengers taxi bills are going to shoot up...



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# Should Call Sign Have Published THAT Letter (1)...???

This magazine has never won any awards for tact! If we want to ask a question or publish a controversial letter, then we generally go at it full tilt hoping that at the very least it will create a discussion on the subject.

That's what we did when we published a letter in the last issue from Martin Cox, who although he has a green badge and was on the Board at Radio Taxis, has spent the past years on the private hire side of the fence and in direct competition to the licensed taxi business. He was responding to another controversial article – this one in the previous issue, from Board member Mike Son on how we could win back our work.

Following publication, *Call Sign's* phone rang consistently for two days with drivers wanting to talk about it. Several emails were received, but only a few wanted publication although some wanted to go in the magazine but not give their names. Sadly, *Call Sign* has a rule that – except in special circumstances – if you don't want your name published, then we can't put your letter in. We do not want any possibility of readers believing we have made letters up.

We have picked out two letters giving both sides of the argument...



## From Mark Blackett (M16)

How could *Call Sign* have the audacity to publish a letter from Mr Cox? The introduction of cars to *Radio Taxis* was detrimental to the drivers on the circuit at the time and unfortunately, Dial-a-Cab seem to be following that path with Concierge.

It does not matter how you try to sell it to the members, Concierge has opened the corporate doorways for private hire companies to compete and take accounts. We should stick to our core business and not give our accounts to, for example, *Lewis Day* to name but one.

You only have to look outside the London Wall account to see how much damage Concierge has done in giving private hire an opening into DB.

Mr Cox, (a PH proprietor) is now telling us how to win back work, the work PH companies are trying to take from under us! So, do you really believe Mr Cox is giving us ways to win back work, or a smokescreen for him to take work away from us?

Mr Cox stated that he believed in the black cab trade and was trying to help us to win back work, then the question must be asked, as a green badge holder why is he running a private hire company and not working with a Licensed London taxi company to combat private hire? Having had first hand experience of Mr Cox, I would be very wary of his comments.

Finally, Alan, I recommend you should think long and hard about publishing any letters from our competitors in the future.

## BRIAN'S TAXI DRIVING GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

### *Fifty years in the saddle!*

**Brian Abrahams (G91)** recently celebrated 50 years of cab driving after gaining his Green Badge on February 4, 1960. Speaking to *Call Sign*, he told us how he had completed the Knowledge on a push-bike in two years and then worked for the Great Cambridge Garage in Shoreditch on a 1/9d clock – that's 9p to our younger readers!

The son of a cab driver, he recalled how his father gave him 5/- (25p) a week 'subsistence money' for food and drink while out doing his Knowledge runs, while Brian would try to save some of that for pocket money.

"I remember my dad going out in his *Low-loader* taxi, dressed in his army great-coat and muffler during the winter months. The cabs were full of drafts, as you were exposed to the weather and you felt like certain parts of your anatomy were freezing off," Brian said with a smile. "I worked for Great Cambridge for over two years before moving to Ginger Nelson's, which was the garage my father worked for. I bought my first cab - a new FX4 - from M&O in 1965 at a cost of £1100. Things seem to have gone up a bit since!"

Still reminiscing, Brian spoke about his life outside of taxi driving. "After my wife of 45 years, football is my first love. I'm a Spurs fan and have a season ticket, but I do recall the very next morning after I got my Badge, I told the garage night shift manager – obviously not a fan - that I would not be in to work that evening because I was going to a match. He couldn't understand why I would take a night off work so soon after getting my Bill, but Spurs beat Crewe 13 - 2 that evening in a cup replay, so it was worth it to me."

Talking about how things had changed, Brian said that he had seen many changes within the trade over the years. "The cab itself has improved in many ways, but for me, the introduction of power steering and effective heating were the most welcome! My memory keeps returning to my dad in his muffler!"

Brian – who first appeared in *Call Sign* in March 1999 following a one-day trip to Poland to visit the Auschwitz concentration camp – added: "I've been on DaC for 37 years. I think Martin Gellman was the Chairman back then and I've had my own callsign from day one. I've also gone through quite a few new cabs, as I used to change them every two years, but I think I'll keep the one I'm currently driving. I must say, I give all due credit to our current Board of Management for all the work they do, especially in the present economic downturn. And our technology is unbeatable, it eliminates many of the dodgy practices of years gone by," he said. "If only they could also rid us of all those roadworks!"

Finally, *Call Sign* asked Brian a question most of us get asked by non-cab drivers – picked up any famous passengers?

"I once picked up the Duchess of Kent from opposite Harrods and took her to Old Bond Street. As she got out of the cab, I politely enquired - tongue in cheek - if I might then display a Royal Warrant in the windscreen. "Certainly not," she said huffily as she strode off into a shop! I've also had two MPs as passengers who later became Prime Ministers - Jim Callaghan and Gordon Brown."

Congratulations to Brian from all at *Call Sign* and DaC...

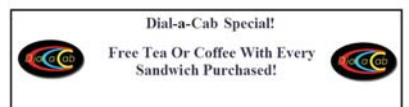
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Brian has been driving taxis for 50 years

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# Should Call Sign Have Published THAT Letter (2)...???

## From Mark Hinds (C50)

February's *Call Sign* was monumental to me as for the first time in 9 years of reading various trade related press, I actually found not one, but two articles that were not whinging or moaning, but constructive and enlightening. I feel they can both therefore be used as ways to move this great Society forward.

We should thank Martin Cox for his letter regarding the PH view on the ground transportation business (good description), but I found the thought disturbing that some members may complain you deemed fit to even publish this invaluable look at us from the outside and the advice it contained. Well to those members, I say you are dinosaurs refusing to adapt to changing times. The competition has changed, but due to your attitudes we are unable to do so. Subsequently we are becoming extinct - slowly and painfully. The refusal to change is, I have unfortunately found, endemic throughout the trade, not just to DaC. This along with wrongly held beliefs that we are indispensable and that all our demands should be met. Just ask the miners, dockers and print workers how those beliefs worked for these once great institutions. So, if we decide to carry on as we are and ignore lessons of the past, will we also become a trade consigned to nothing more than a GCSE history question?

Also, a bigger thank you and hoorah goes to **James Griffin (T97)** for putting most of my own views in such a well thought out piece (p12 Feb *Call Sign*).

Now for my two pennies worth; I can see a common flaw in all articles relating to PH competition. Why do we keep referring to the work available as 'OUR WORK'? It's not, it is work that is out there and available to whoever can provide the service required at a price that is acceptable. So we have to get over this sense of entitlement before we can move on as a business. To all intents and purposes DaC is effectively a PH firm that uses Licensed London Taxis as its vehicles. That is therefore a market we compete within and are currently losing in.

I have also noticed a lot of articles referring to when our work returns to 'NORMAL'. Don't count on it, whenever a financial period such as we are currently experiencing happens, the previous *status quo* rarely returns. People have had to find, if not a better, then certainly a more cost effective way of doing business. So don't hold your breath on 'OUR WORK' just returning to 'NORMAL'. We must change and then we can go and win it back.



If you still think we will just get through this period and it will be back to normal, then think on. It's only a few short years to 2015 and then Crossrail will be having a go at our market share. No more Padders to Moorgate, you will be lucky to get further than Berkeley Square.

So how do we compete effectively for OUR market share? We already offer better coverage than PH, our vehicles are built for purpose, we can use bus lanes and generally do journeys quicker than PH. So what can it be? It has to be price! Now here is the bitter pill to swallow; we as drivers have to be willing to take a small loss in earnings per job in the hope that our excellent sales team can generate more jobs in the long term. How, you ask? Easy, lose the run-in (Mountview minicabs already have) and the gratuity - both unnecessary expenses to the client. Then the ridiculous £4 premium for picking up at stations and theatres. How do you get on a rank today? Never mind turning away jobs while you wait for an account client. When was the last time a theatre burst wasn't covered by loads of empty cabs? Not in years. Lose it, it's unnecessary. These small reductions have to be offered to all existing accounts now and to all future accounts. By losing these small amounts per job, you will allow our sales team and account managers to cut account's ground transportation costs by over 15% on average journeys. If they then go on and at the very least

increase our work by just one more job per day, per driver, then we all will be no worse off. Remember 85% of something is a lot more than 100% of nothing.

When you are out and about, count the somewhat alarming number of AL cars you see. There are so many of them, but their business is working on very small profit margins per job and relying on large volumes to generate massive profits for *secret millionaires* and shareholders. They have expanded rapidly and I see they have been telling porky pies about our prices (p25 Feb *Call Sign*). Surely we can use some of our surplus funds to have a lawyer at least look at this defamation, slander, libel or maybe at the very least, publish our correct prices?

Make no bones about it, AL wants all our accounts and they will not stop until they get them. Well fight back now; if we give our sales team the ammunition to go and just get back what they have already taken, we can and will start to turn the tide. Then we can go after all their accounts as aggressively as they have done to ours. AL has expanded too rapidly and though they may look strong, I actually feel this has left them very vulnerable to even be able to cope with a small percentage drop in their account work. So let's put them out of business before they do the same to us. Hey, we could even pick up a low mileage VW Sharan on the cheap for the missus!

Now I know that anything that means we take less money per job will not be liked universally within the Society, it's not even popular with myself. But I feel it is necessary to protect all our futures. The BoM, as I have read in *Call Sign*, doesn't like upsetting groups of drivers but they are there to make tough decisions, not to be popular. The members who complain the most, generally come up with no solutions or ideas to improve the situation. Don't worry, they won't like you whatever you do.

**So if you agree with T97 and myself, maybe not in our solutions but at least in our sentiment, let the BoM know. Let's hear what you all think. If, however, you don't agree with me at all, then I am open-minded and the opportunity is always there for you to change my view. But, before you try to change it, please reply to this simple statement and answer these relevant questions. With your beliefs in our entitlement to our so-called work, our right to charge a premium above what the open market sees fit, coupled with the idea that the work will just come back and pay it, please answer the following:**

A) Is your business plan working for us at this current time?

B) Is that business plan going to guarantee our future?

If you answered yes to both, then my final question is very pertinent:

C) Did you read and understand DaC's financial report for the last trading year? Really! Now I am all ears. There is however, one final group of members - those who don't care either way so long as they take their money today. Well put your heads back in the sand, someone else will sort it out and let you know how it all turned out.

Now, if I have come across in a negative manner I apologise. On the contrary, I am very positive about the future, as long as we stop dwelling in the past. I love being a Licensed London Taxi Driver and DaC is the best circuit out there. Let's keep it that way by doing what is necessary, however unpalatable it may be. If, however, we decide to do nothing, then I will see you all at the back of the Metropole waiting to get on the Padders rank and I will of course say hello to any members of DaC's office staff I see outside the job centre, we can maybe chat about the good old days!

Finally, there is a tired old expression within this whole trade, we have all heard it and some of us have even said it. "It's not like it used to be, the game's dead!" Well nothing's like it used to be and the game is not dead. We just have to work harder at keeping it alive.

Let's take short-term pain for long-term gain...

**You have now seen two opposite views. As always, anyone wishing to contribute to the debate is welcome, providing you are happy to give your name and callsign ...Ed**

# Mad Hatters Tea Party 2010



*More stars than the Royal Variety Show!*



The last Sunday in January saw the *London Taxidriver's Fund for Underprivileged Children's 2010 Mad Hatters Tea Party*. Once again it was held in the magnificent surroundings of the **Grosvenor House Hotel**. The hotel's donation for the day of the *Great Room*, allowing 750 children and numerous carers to have the time of their lives, is brilliant. They deserve a huge round of thanks and as good a service for the rest of the year as taxis can give.

The children's day began at around 1pm when they were greeted by numerous **clowns**, costumed characters and **Pearly Queens and Kings** and then led into Great Room where they were thrilled to find hundreds of mixed glow novelties, all kindly donated by **Global Marketing**. Just as amazingly, the famous **Household Cavalry** assisted in carrying guests in wheelchairs through! The children then tucked into their sandwiches, cakes and drinks, while the Fund's Hon Chairman, **Dial-a-Cab's David Lessman (D19)** welcomed them. **Audrey Sherry** kindly donated fruit for the party and boy do 750 children eat a lot of fruit!

On stage was the Worshipful **Lord Mayor of Westminster, Councillor Duncan Sandys**. His two year old son was with him and waved frantically at the crowd while MP **Lee Sharp** and his wife Estelle also joined in the fun, but the most poignant moment came when **Gerry Cooper**, now in his 80s, presented David Lessman with a cheque for £100. David informed everyone that Gerry had gone on the Fund's outings as a child – including the first ever trip – and subsequently became a taxi driver himself, driving numerous children on many of the LTFUC outings over the years.

But back to the show! The wonderful lyric soprano, **Bergit Beer**, showed off her outstanding voice with a magical version of *Over the Rainbow*. How the Fund managed to get such a busy world traveller to appear and sing at the party is just of immense credit to them.

The talented **Bournemouth Carnival Band** followed Bergit and as always, gave their usual superb performance in creating a carnival atmosphere. They led onto another donation when David Lessman was joined on stage by a member of the **Hilton Hotel, Euston** who presented the LTFUC with a cheque for £300, which had been raised from an indoor fixed bike ride held last year – one in which David took part! And no, he didn't win! **EDF Energy**, Canning Town donated a further cheque – this one for a magnificent £1000.

Two cast members of **The Bill**, **Jason Barnett** (Eddie Olosunje) and **Micah Balfour** (PC Ben Gayle) made an appearance on stage to the delight of the kids – who then stayed on the floor to welcome the **Destiny All Stars Cheerleaders**, who also gave a great performance.

Then the day's first big surprise. To a huge pop, the 2009 *Britain's Got Talent* winners, **Diversity** appeared on stage. The children's screams were so loud that even the Great Room's huge chandeliers shook! It was almost mass hysteria, quietening down just enough to hear the group say how they remembered their roots and all the support the LTFUC had previously given them before they became famous. That was why

they wanted to come back to thank all their supporters. A bunch of really great guys and the **LTFUC** were grateful to **Danni** and **Jenny** for making it happen. Diversity brought hundreds of posters with them to sign and the children queued tirelessly for autographs and to have photos taken with them.

The **Blue & White Rope Skippers** came on with an amazing display of their tremendous skills and were followed by two members from **Eastenders** – **Madeline Dugga** (Lauren Branning) and **Tom Law** who plays Peter Beale. They too stayed on to sign autographs.

The acts and celebrities just kept coming and next on stage was **I'm a Celebrity get me out of Here** winner, **Gino D'Acampo** and runner-up, **Kim Woodburn**. They entered in style using the Bournemouth Carnival Band's Batmobile – not to mention an escort of Batmen! Then came **Britain's Got Talent** competitors, **Richard and Liam of Faces of Disco** who delighted the audience with their fun. They led up to boy band **Blazin' Squad**, who were also greeted with loud squeals from adoring teenybopper fans who must have known every one of their hit records! Yet another great performance...

The next act saw a sudden arrival of male carers joining the kids as the **Cheeky Girls** – Gabriela and Monica – came for their eighth consecutive appearance at the Mad Hatters. Their performance was as good as ever, with their outfits showing that the girls were filling out compared to their ultra-skinny days – hence the sudden arrival of males! Naturally, DaC Chairman **Brian Rice** and Compliance Officer **Allan Evans** maintained their cool in the situation and stayed on the balcony with their wives – just relying on binoculars!

Next onto the stage bounced boxing's **WBA Heavyweight Champion of the World, David Haye**. After being interviewed by the ever-present and brilliant **Dave Davies** about his title win against Russian monster Nikolay Valuev, Britain's latest champion signed autographs for the huge queue of waiting children. David is scheduled to make his first title defence against American John Ruiz in Manchester on 3 April.

**Britain's Got Talent** stars **Quick Change Dance Illusionists** then went through their astonishing act, with both children and adults looking on in amazement as right in front of their eyes the duo changed outfits in a second. Then followed the annual **character parade**. This saw the children (and some adults!) rushing onto the dance floor to grab hold of their favourite character for the conga. The atmosphere was just incredible!

Former Hip Hop International World / UK Street dance Champions **Plague** performed a brilliant quickfire routine, which was the complete opposite to the party's next trio of guests. Kids suddenly went silent – the first time all evening – as the **Dr Who** music filled the Great Room. Lights lowered and suddenly, appearing in the middle of the huge dance floor, were Orion, Elsie and Nimrod – but that's only to their friends! Before our eyes came the immortal introduction sounds of: *Exterminate! Exterminate!* The three **Daleks** eased up on their usual ray exterminators and instead squirted all those close

enough with water! The kids loved it!

A star of the future, 14 year old **Jazz Blaack**, then sang as though she had been doing it forever. No wonder the children loved her – she was also the closest act to their age!

**Bergit Beer** then returned to perform an excellent version of the Sarah Brightman hit from 1997, *Time to Say Goodbye*. Even non-opera fans must have felt moved by Bergit's soprano voice on this great piece of music.

**DJ Dave Davies** then announced the disco and everyone poured onto the huge dance floor as the balloons came down!

Then a final surprise! Before leaving, all the children were led through the LTFUC's magnificent grotto piled high with brilliant toys. Thanks must go to Annette from **Jelly Cats**, Clare from **The Disney Store** and **M&S (Marble Arch)** that allowed every child to leave with a large overflowing goody bag and huge smiles on their faces! What a party, what a show...

In addition to all those above, thanks also go to **DG Leisure – Chateau Chocolate**, who donated the chocolate fountain that served over 2000 chocolate covered marshmallows at the party. Also, special thanks go to **Denise** and the great **face-painters** who worked tirelessly all afternoon! Few children went home looking exactly as they had arrived! Thanks also to the team of helpers on the balcony for making sandwiches and tirelessly serving refreshments non-stop all afternoon. Then there was the **Army and Police Cadets** who did a magnificent job in helping to keep the children safe all afternoon and manning the stairs, stage and exits. Huge thanks also to the two workshop leaders from **Albert & Friends Instant Circus** who taught the children juggling, plate spinning and diabolo!

Many others we haven't room to mention also deserve thanks for making this children's party the huge success it always is; sponsors, those who donate welcome cheques and the many who assist the day. But special thanks must go to the **Grosvenor House**, including Event Manager **Natalie Daniels** and Technical Manager **Ben Behan**. I don't think any of us would want to clear up afterwards, yet year after year the hotel is happy to put on the event. Soldiers from the **Lifeguards and Blues & Royals, Met Police** (Euston and W.E.Central) Traffic Garage, Sgt Jack Warner of the **City of London Police, Laser Creations**, Carol Burwood of **ABC Imaging UK**, Mark Cohen of **Tranceart, Cadburys** for their supply of chocolates, **Photography** (Mark Cooper & Patrick Jones), **Video** (Maurice Gilliam), **Soho Fire Station, Transport for London, Harrow Cadet Attachment, Pearly Kings & Queens, UK Garrison, London Communications, Capespan, ColourFX, Nando's, Snazaroo, Trebor Bassett Ltd, Turner CN Enterprises, Nintendo, E1 Entertainment, Next, Butlins, St. John's Ambulance** and anyone else **Call Sign** may have missed.

But of course, there is also one special group of people who donate their time the whole year round – the LTFUC committee and their other halves. Nothing less than excellent could give the day and their tireless work the justice it deserves...



# Mad Hatters Tea Party



*The day in pictures with Alan Green and Alan Fisher...*



The Mad Hatters Tea Party at the Grosvenor House Hotel has to be the best children's party anywhere and the LTFUC deserve enormous praise for their year-round work in raising funds to benefit so many children, in so many different ways and culminating with this magnificent yearly event. Sadly, the only radio circuit attending the event was Dial-a-Cab with both **Brian Rice** and **Allan Evans** watching the afternoon's entertainment unfold. The LTFUC also has several DaC members on it, but the committee as a whole deserve the ultimate praise. You can read about the party on the previous page, but this is the day in photo form...



750 children and adults watch the Bournemouth Carnival Band

Ray Levy, LTFUC's publicity man, on the other side of a camera lens for a change...



DJ Dave Davis introduces Diversity



The kids loved the Cheeky Girls (and so did the adults)!



Brian Rice with a new Board member???



Is that Mike Son with Elvis???



DaC's David Lessman, the Fund's Chairman, with the Pearly kings and queens



Exterminate! Exterminate!



The strangest Conga we've ever seen!



Having written the year's most controversial article, Mike Son responds again..

# How Can We Win Back Our Work?

Firstly, I would like to thank all those drivers that stopped me on the road to offer their comments, in addition to those who wrote into **Call Sign**. It's nice to know that - agree or disagree with the article - at least it was read and began a debate, which also continued on the internet....

There are many who have recently obtained their cab licences and have concerns about their future as a London Taxi Driver. Although I have been a cabdriver for the past 45 years and possibly getting towards the end of my career, this is still a great profession and one I am and always will be proud to be associated with. I have seen many changes within our industry - some good, some bad - and have experienced various downturns in the economy that have affected the cab trade. Even through these tough times, have no doubt that our industry will endure. I say this just in case newer drivers are wondering whether it was worth the time and effort of doing the knowledge. But we are in one of the most difficult positions this trade has found itself in - whether radio or non-radio driver.

## Fixed prices

Commenting on some items that have been raised in **Call Sign**, including fixed prices, you are probably aware that trying to lure clients away from our competitors - let alone selling our service and attracting new account clients who do not know of the services Dial-a-Cab can offer - is extremely difficult. Making contact with those responsible for their transport requirements and costs to their organisation can normally take a myriad of letters and phone calls, taking weeks if not months, just to get through the front door for a meeting! If or when a meeting eventually does take place, we are ever mindful of the expectations of the client, which will include cost saving strategies and of course service. Being seen to save the customer costs or at least being comparable with their existing transport supplier, is of course important. Cost saving may include fixed prices for regular journeys, especially at night. But bear in mind that any customers cost savings must not jeopardise the service we provide.

During the past months, some DaC members have spoken to me with a view to offering fixed rates 24/7 and have said they don't mind working for less than the meter fare. Would this strategy help to obtain new clients? It might, on the other hand once you have reduced costs, it is difficult to make an increase if and when the work gets better. I

am sure you have heard this many times before.

I appreciate those members are sincere and would take trips under the meter fare, but many would not. Sometimes, to keep an account from going to our competitors, we have been known to offer fixed rates during the day to airports and for regular and longer trips. Nonetheless, if the journey takes longer than originally calculated for whatever reason, some drivers would demand an extra payment to meet the meter fare. There are also a number of members who will not accept fixed prices under any circumstances and have instructed Driver Services to indicate that fact via the Data system. I can't understand that. I'm sure those drivers would accept a street hiring for less than the meter if the trip goes, say to the airport or a home direction?

Coverage can be a problem even when work is sparse, for example trips being dispatched and being rejected because the driver wants to take a gamble on where the next one is going or perhaps they may not like the direction of the job? Or they may be in the wrong place at the wrong time ie not in the correct zone and in breach of the rules, thus not being able to get to the pickup within 10 minutes. This adds to poor coverage and less than excellent service.

## Going Home trip (Code 77)

This was a great innovation for both the driver and customer when it was implemented some years ago, however, a number of drivers abused the system. If I can draw your attention to a reply to a driver by the Chairman in **Call Sign** back in January 2000...

*Brian Rice replied:*

*The BoM instituted Code 77 with the best of intentions, to help the driver home while also covering another credit ride. In reality, what happened was that members were sitting in the City zones with their Code 77 on. Other drivers that were working would not bid for a job in those zones because they considered that any work there would not be 'special', otherwise a Code 77 would have taken it. Consequently, coverage actually deteriorated. I do accept your point, but you are only concerned with your own well being (nothing wrong with that) but I have to consider the well being of the majority of the membership and of course the Society. If we had continued with Code 77, I believe we would have lost work, thereby affecting everyone. May I suggest that if you feel that this subject deserves a ballot, you make a proposition for the forthcoming AGM to have the Code 77 re-instated, it would certainly make my job easier. The BoM is damned if we have it and damned if we don't.*

With reference to Brian's reply, there was indeed a proposition put forward by two members to amend the Going Home facility.

## Improved earnings

I was somewhat bemused with a comment one member made about the fact that he thought I was the Board Member who was able to change his fortunes and put extra revenue in his pocket. Remember the old saying that there is no "I" in Team, all of us have to give the best possible service. I do not see anywhere in the various responses about how we can actually attract customers, only how to increase driver's revenue. Sometimes the trip offered is not always the great earner we would like, however, to give the service the customer has come to expect from us and is now getting from minicabs, we may have to run a bit further and negotiate poor traffic conditions to pick up *our* passengers. Do I want to run a long way to the pick-up? No I do not ....do I like to have the choice whether I wish to reject a job I don't fancy? Yes I do, however, over these many years I have come to realise that choice is a courtesy and not a right. Driver's choice has always been the Dial-a-Cab way, I don't want it to change but it may have to.

I also took note of a member mentioning Addison Lee, which is no doubt one of the largest suppliers of private transport in London including cars, vans, bike couriers and now coaches. Incidentally, after making a phone call, I was told that Addison Lee charge a minimum of £11 for any of their car journeys.

Another member mentioned that some of his passengers consider DaC is expensive and should reduce its service charges. On that point, I would suggest the service charges made to the client are miniscule considering what the meter rates are and the customer services provided. The customer understands and is willing to pay reasonable service charges, what they find difficult to understand is why the taxi service is so much more expensive than car companies? When explanations are given on the cost to maintain such a service, the increasing cost to purchase a taxi and the ever-increasing cost of fuel as in other industries, they do understand but couldn't care less about our running costs. They one thing they do know is about keeping transport costs as low as possible.

It is important to point out that cars and taxis are not the only form of transport used by large corporate organisations, flights are also an extremely important mode of transport organisations and millions are spent every year by large accounts on their transport costs. Where they can reduce costs, they certainly will.

One member asked about offering new  
*continued on p23*



# BILLY TIES THE KNOT!

**Billy Rice**, son of Dial-a-Cab Chairman Brian, recently married his long-time girlfriend **Sam** at a ceremony and party at Surbiton's Glenmore Hall, where around 200 people ate and danced the night away. Billy and Sam's three-month-old son Charlie did his best, but fell asleep at 7pm!

Brian was also Billy's best man and in the true tradition of the Chairman, he brought the house down with his speech when he unpacked his best DaC humour and even brought a tear to a few eyes when looking back to when his son was younger and how he'd grown!

Congratulations to Billy and Sam, Brian and Brenda and Sam's parents, Jane and David...



Billy and Sam with two happy sets of parents



Billy and Sam



inset pic: Brian and Brenda Rice - how did she stop that hat falling off!

## How can we win back our work? *(continued from p22)*

products; well a chauffeur taxi service - which was mentioned - has been tried ( ComCab's Club Class). Unfortunately it was a short-lived service, even with suitably dressed drivers offering a VIP service. The reason why I believe it failed is because a cab is a cab is a cab! But yes, we do need to offer new products although this would be a discussion for the BoM.

### Martin Cox letter

I was pleased and somewhat surprised to have received a comment from the opposition - namely ex-taxi driver and Radio Taxis Board Member, Martin Cox. There isn't much I can say about his comments, other than customer costs are less for his clients due to the driver's take home pay expectations being less than our drivers have come to expect. We are two different industries with differing needs for both drivers and customers. Some of his points are worth looking at, but he forgets that unlike his company, Dial-a-Cab is a mutual trading organisation and the Board is reliant on the support of the members.

### Trade bickering...

Those that know me personally know that I am non-partisan and not a political person, but there is one point I would like to make and that is in regard to the bickering between the various representative taxi organisations. Over the years there has been some success in the fortunes of the cab trade through the endeavours of some representatives within

these organisations. If there was just one representative body that all London cabdrivers were members of - including the radio circuits, support services, manufacturers and others - can you imagine how much clout our industry would have?

I did think the London Taxi Board was the way forward, but hey ho that went to pot due to a lack of coordinated spirit and self interest by one of its members. Radio circuits and minicabs at the airport comes to mind. So far as DaC is concerned, we are fortunate that our Chairman goes to many meetings making sure the best interests of Members are to the forefront. How easy would it be for someone to be sitting around the table, who is representing every driver? If these organisations can work together to a degree, as some do, why not then just have one?

### Dial-a-Cab on the offensive?

We need to go on the offensive and win back work from minicabs. But how do we do compete when the cost difference is there? These are the points we have to consider: Do we really need a run-in to pick up passengers? Do we have a right to expect a gratuity? As radio taxi drivers, is it commercial sense to reject trips because we don't fancy them? The questions I pose may have an effect on the revenue DaC receives from clients..

Making any radical changes, especially with the lowering of charges, could pose problems if

and when the economy improves, because it may be difficult to revert to the original charges. Many consider the green badge to mean that independence and choice is a right that is being eroded by minicab competition and our ever-increasing costs. We all want to keep our standard of living to what we have become used to, so as shareholder members of the Society, the Board must have your support and confidence in any changes it deems necessary.

In my view, some changes need to happen sooner rather than later. The Board knows what changes should be made to win back work, but is in an extremely difficult dilemma as those few members that attended the recent AGM will have heard from the Chairman. In response to a question that related to no run-ins and non-rejectable trips to try and win back work, Brian said if the Board took that track, it would almost certainly be overturned by a proposition at the next AGM and could thwart forward planning and restrict direction.

As a mutual trading company, the driver shareholder has the last word via the voting procedure and will allow or disallow the Board to make sensible plans. If changes need to be made, the shareholders must give total support with the confidence that the Chairman and the Board will always act in the best interest of the members. That's why they are Trustees...

**Mike Son**  
**DaC Special Projects**

*Mike Son's views are his own and not necessarily those of the Board...*

My usual readers (you both know who you are!) will have grown accustomed to my usual ravings about the latest gadgets I have come across online and which I either own or wish I owned - the latter being the case most of the time!



But this month I thought I'd give you a treat and instead of ranting on about one gadget, I'd talk about five of what I think were the best new gadgets on display at the recent *Consumer Electronics Show* held in January in Las Vegas. Of course I could not be there in person (if only!), but watched it online. I always watch CES and follow the various techy journalists, but this year I am particularly excited about the upcoming gadgets, because several of them will revolutionise the way we play games, watch TV and use computers (maybe).

So without further ado, here is my top 5 of the *CES 2010*...

#### Sony 3D TV

Yes, it's true – you've just gone and bought a flashy LCD, LED or Plasma TV and you're feeling quite chuffed with yourself because you're all up-to-date. Well you're more up-to-date than me, that's for sure – I still have a chunky old CRT TV! But now Sony has gone and released a 24-inch 3D OLED TV. OLED technology makes colours more vivid and blacks really dark and inky and the pin-sharp picture is as crisp and vibrant as they come.

[www.sony.net/SonyInfo/News/Press/200](http://www.sony.net/SonyInfo/News/Press/200)

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

## JON ASKS WHAT'S NEW?

**The best of the Consumer Electronics Show 2010 – a glut of gadgetry!**

909/09-099E/

#### Parrot Augmented Reality Drone

*Augmented Reality* is the definition of real-world images which are overlaid with useful data, information or rich content. This helicopter-style drone powered by four small blades, hovers through the air. It has two mini video cameras onboard, which send images back to an iPhone, which is running a special app that allows you to use the device as a remote control for the drone, as well as a video game. By tilting the iPhone, players can change the direction of the quad-copter, while images beamed back from it are overlaid with virtual pictures of monsters or aircraft zooming across the screen!

<http://ardrone.parrot.com/parrot-ardrone/en/video-games>

#### Microsoft's Project Natal

I wrote about this a few months ago. Microsoft showed us more of its exciting features and has announced that they expect to release this to the general public in time for Christmas 2010. All you XBOX 360 owners keep an eye out for this one!

[www.microsoft.com/presspass/events/ces/videogallery.aspx?contentid=360\\_natal](http://www.microsoft.com/presspass/events/ces/videogallery.aspx?contentid=360_natal)

#### Light Touch

A few years back, I wrote about hardware that could beam a virtual keyboard onto your desk so you could take a keyboard anywhere and use it with a Bluetooth device as with your phone. Now Light Blue Optics has released the Light Touch that beams a high quality computer screen, complete with virtual keyboard (much like iPhone), onto any surface.

[www.lightblueoptics.com/products/light-touch/](http://www.lightblueoptics.com/products/light-touch/)

#### Google Nexus One

Purported to be the 'iPhone Killer' this is the much-anticipated competitor to the iPhone that Google has been promising. Whilst it is aesthetically pleasing and certainly provides a wealth of apps and functions, I'm not that impressed with it considering Google are behind it. Somehow I don't think this will kill off the iPhone, but merely provide stiff competition to Apple. But that is healthy and can only mean cheaper iPhones in the future...

[www.google.com/phone](http://www.google.com/phone)

**Jonathen Winterburn**  
DaC Network Administrator

## Did you know...

...that while ill with consumption in 1818, poet **John Keats** was spotted sitting on a bench in **Well Walk**, Hampstead "sobbing his dying breath into a handkerchief" by the antiquarian **William Hone**? The bench Keats used has long since gone, but its replacement is also known as Keats bench...

## DAC REAR WINDOW AD

*Call Sign's* photographer, **Alan Green (E52)** was searching the capital's highways and byways looking for some interesting material to fill this magazine's pages, but eventually gave up saying that nothing was happening - yet! Then he wandered into the Dial-a-Cab House parking lot and there before his eyes was the first cab with the DaC rear window ad!

They are also now available for DaC drivers... but watch out for Alan Green!



**You may not need us now, but cut us out for when you do!**

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# compliance officer's update

## Hello Ladies & Gents,

Driving conditions in the capital seem to be getting more and more difficult, the Blackwall Tunnel is partially closed until 2012 and now Albert Bridge is undergoing extensive repairs that will restrict vehicle access for the next eighteen months. Other major river crossings are also under repair at the moment, so the timing seems ludicrous. If you take into account the roadworks and temporary lights, our job is certainly not easy.

From experience, I believe it is always worth mentioning any traffic problems at the beginning of a journey that may cause delays and if you are about to take an alternative route that may confuse the client, it is also worth mentioning it to them. You may even wish to ask them if they have a preferred route...

## Repetitive articles?

Every month I try to highlight the types of problems that occur on an almost daily basis, and again I must point out how important it is to follow the guidelines and procedures that are laid down. I know that those of you who read these articles may feel that they are too repetitive, but as you can see from the list of complaint results in this issue of **Call Sign**, the same procedures are regularly violated and



you can also see that they come with a cost to those members who do not work within the rules that are there to make it fair for all of us.

Clients are rightly very vigilant and cost conscious and with so much competition, it is up to all of us to use our discretion and show professionalism at all times. The reports that clients receive are highly accurate; run-ins and meter fares are readily captured and any anomalies are highlighted. It is important that you press your **arrival** button when you have actually arrived at the pick up and not on route and that if you are unable to park exactly outside of the account address, please noti-

fy the call centre of your true location.

## Credit Cards

I have once more been asked to mention that if you are not able to swipe a Credit Card through the terminal, you must make alternative means of payment. If at the end of the trip you are unable to print a receipt through the terminal, it is essential that you take a rubbing of the card on a manual receipt and ask the passenger for a valid signature, matching the one on the card – always on a street hiring. Banks will honour the payment if you have proof that the card was physically in your possession at the end of the journey. It is even more important on a longer journey when you may be out of signal range.

*Finally on a personal note, I would like to sincerely thank those of you that have either phoned, text or sent your condolences by card or email regarding the sad loss of my dear mum just before Christmas. To see workmates and members from Dial-a-Cab attending the funeral was really touching. Many friends and colleagues have told me that you only have one mum – how true that is. Thank you once again...*

**Allan Evans**  
DaC Compliance Officer

# DaC at WCHCD Pancake Day!



Pat and John tossing their pancakes

As usual, **Dial-a-Cab** were well represented within the *Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers* team for the 6th Inter Livery Pancake Race. The event is organised annually by the *Poulterers Company* and takes place in The Guildhall Yard. Pancake races are held all over England on Shrove Tuesday. Those racing must toss the pancake so that it returns to the pan in one piece before crossing the finish line.

Teams of four liverymen/women race for the prize of an engraved frying pan! There is also a novelty hat race to raise funds for the Lord Mayor's chosen charity – this year's theme was musicals.

The *Gunmakers Company* started the races, while contestants wore gloves from the *Glovers*. DaC's **John Dixon (B67)** and **Pat Graves (L53)** joined Tony Norris and WCHCD Master, Michael Davis, but failed to win any of their races!

John Dixon told **Call Sign** after the event: "I think they gave me a heavier pancake than everyone else! But it was great fun – even in the rain!"



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Fellow of the Guild of  
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## As Blackwall Tunnel suffers night closures for 3 years!

In a press release, *Transport for London* informed **Call Sign** that from February, the Blackwall Tunnel southbound bore would be having night closures while they totally renovate the old Thames crossing and bring it into the 21st century. They also add that these extensive upgrades – said to be costing around £70million – were scheduled to last for three years!

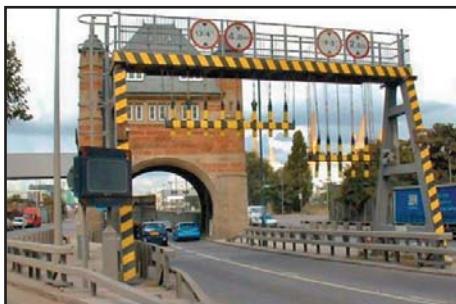
The closures run from 9pm to 5am on Sunday to Friday, with northbound traffic diverted to the southbound tunnel and southbound traffic being forced to use another route.

**There is also a 20mph speed limit in place each night that will be enforced by average speed cameras.**

The Editor of this magazine, young Mr Fisher, with his own assumption that the question was rather silly, still asked me to question TfL on how a three-year closure would affect the Olympics? This is bearing in mind that the Olympic Park on the north side will house the swimming, athletics, cycling and other events in addition to being home to many of the athletes. Then there is the south side with the O2 and its gymnastics and shooting, while Greenwich Park seems certain to have its grass messed up when hosting the equestrian events.

**"After all,"** young Mr Fisher said with a certain amount of embarrassment at how silly the question sounded, **"the Olympics begin in 30**

# TfL: "What Were Those Games in 2012???"



**Will the tunnel be closed to everyone except those involved with the Olympics**

**months times, so with a 3-year closure isn't there something of a clash? Even though they claim it will remain open until 9pm, we know that means that it might stay open till 9pm if it suits them to leave it! And why did they not begin the work 6 months earlier to avoid any clash?"**

So I asked TfL and at first their spokesman seemed not to know, telling me he'd come back later. Following a three-hour wait, he came back to announce:

**"The Blackwall Tunnel refurbishment**

**works have been planned in such a way as to ensure that they do not affect the London Olympic and Paralympic games. Should work on the refurbishment programme encroach into the Games period, TfL will put the works on hold to allow the tunnel to be used as part of the Olympic Route Network."**

Could TfL mean that someone had forgotten the Olympics were coming to London in July 2012 and that they were now backtracking? We doubt that very much.

*Then suddenly it clicked! What TfL mean is that the southbound bore will be closed to ALL traffic for four weeks while renamed as an ORN priority route! Whilst the ORNs will be huge nuisances, traffic using them will be relatively light compared to that of a normal day and in this case, well away from those silly taxi drivers who believe that paying £400+ a year in road tax gives them some rights! So if during the Olympics, your passenger from the O2 wants a cab to get to the Olympic Park, you will have to use either Rotherhithe – assuming they don't close that – or Tower Bridge! Why didn't they just say so! It would have saved the editor asking such a silly question!*

Back to the original 3-year closure; TfL chief operating officer for streets, Garrett Emmerson, told **Call Sign**:

**"We are doing everything we can to ensure the refurbishment of the tunnel is carried out with the minimum disruption and ask people to bear with us while these important safety improvements are made."**

Among the improvements promised are better lighting, improved ventilation, a new communication system, new fire and incident detection systems and better access for emergency services. The improvements have been designed to extend the life of the tunnel – which was opened on 22 May 1897.

That sounds like a reasonably worthwhile venture. But in the February **Call Sign**, we wondered how an ORN could possibly operate through the Tunnel – now we know. They will use these repairs and renovations as an excuse to allow only official Olympic traffic through it. The whole Tunnel will become an Olympic Route Network. And if that is the case, it is nothing short of a deceitful disgrace...

**Richard Potter (T51)**

## Interesting Appointment!

**He used to be head of sales for LTI's opposition!**

After LTI's announcement last year to serve notice on its independent dealers, the company has been developing its plans for Scotland especially. Now they have announced the appointment of a well-known taxi trade professional as General Manager for Scotland.

**Gary Ranson** has returned to the trade from his position as Dealer Principal for Evans Halshaw, but of more interest to **Call Sign** is the fact that Gary spent five successful years working for **Allied Vehicles / Cab Direct** as National Operations Manager.

**"I was in charge of sales for the whole of the UK for Allied and Cab Direct and of course that put me in competition with LTI,"** said Gary, **"but I left them to go back to the retail motor trade. Now I'm really excited to be working with the best taxi product in the UK - and I should know, I've tried the rest!"**

Gary's philosophy for success is simple, look after your customers and they will remain loyal.

**"I have seen too many times in my career that today's sale is the most important part of the process. After that, big companies aren't bothered until they want to sell you another car. In my book you gain loyalty by looking after people every day - when they have problems, need accessories or are just in for a service. I aim to talk to all my customers as regularly as I can, so that I can fix any issues that they tell me are important to them."**

**Rob Laidler**, Sales Director for LTI, is very supportive of Gary and sees his place on the LTI team as vital to making Scotland a good purpose built taxi market again. He told **Call Sign**:

**"Gary has exactly the right attitude and brings a lot of taxi experience with him. He is keen to get out there and talk to people and I think his focus on customer service will see more LTI taxis being sold in markets where we used to dominate, not just Glasgow and Edinburgh."**

Certainly an interesting appointment...



**Gary Ranson used to head sales for the opposition**

## Call Sign

**March 2010**

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**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*

*Continued from February...*

### Rain and smog...

During the 1960's, we suffered smogs that were so bad that even at midday you could not see half a car's length in front of you. In the smog, I and many others used handkerchiefs tied over our nose and mouths to avoid choking on the filth; refolding them constantly until you'd have to start a new one and trust it would last you till the end of your shift.

I used to get home by working my way to the Embankment then, with my windscreen wide open and my headlights on dipped beam, I followed the tramlines to Streatham, where I lived. One night, driving at around walking speed and leaning forward to try following the rails, they made a sharp turn to the left. Not having a clue where I was, I realised the gloom had got brighter and because the rails divided at that point, I stopped. Out of the murk, a figure came up to the cab and asked what I thought I was doing? I discovered why the gloom was brighter - I had driven into a ruddy tram depot!

Then there was Boxing Day 1963. I was in my cab driving down Seven Sisters Road at around midday, it was bitterly cold and I was on the way to work. It began raining heavily and the road instantly turned into a sheet of ice. My cab gently slid into the gutter with the tyres rubbing against the kerb. With the grit in

the gutter I managed to keep in control but whilst this was happening, a Ford Consul overtook me in the middle of the road. There was just one thing that was a little strange, the vehicle was facing the wrong way and going backwards. He ended up stopped by the brickwork of the railway bridge!

That winter lasted until March and there was not one day the temperature rose above zero. The snow was so thick that in Highgate and Hampstead, some clowns had made igloos in the road big enough to park their cars in! *The Evening News* actually published the photos! Judging by very recent history, there is a vast difference between life then and today. In those Artic conditions with blizzards blowing most days, the buses continued to run, postmen delivered the mail, dustmen collected the rubbish, everything continued - albeit with difficulty - but it all continued. A little different from today when a slight dusting of snow shuts nearly everything down. No buses, dustmen, postmen, schools etc.

### Which radio circuit?

At one time or another, I have been on all the radio circuits. One day the dispatcher began to laugh and all over London drivers were pushing buttons to know what the joke was. To put you in the picture, if you tried to do a three-point turn and did the first part so that your rear wheels were against the kerb, you could have problems. The automatic cabs of those days had what today's drivers would find

unbelievably strange. On cold winters mornings, it was not unheard of to see one cab pushing another up the road, with white smoke pouring from the exhaust of the pushed cab until, with luck, the engine would fire and nice black smoke would emerge. In an automatic, over the accelerator pedal was a knurled nut. If the cab would not start, you screwed down this nut pushing the accelerator down, which then helped a cold engine to fire. So to return to the laughing dispatcher. He had told a driver the following solution to his problem. Put the cab into neutral, screw down the nut until the engine was running just above tick-over and put it in first gear. Then, with driving door open and your feet against the kerb, give it push and once moving jump in. Problem solved.

Well matey did as advised, only he got the engine revving at a rate of knots working on the idea that the more revs the better. He then gave the cab a good push. By now the spinning rear tyres had melted the ice and with this new freedom from having some human twit telling it what to do, the cab took off, straightening the steering and galloping up the road. It happily changed gear and disappeared. On its way, it collected a parked mini, pushed it through a brick wall and into a large garden pond. I wonder what the insurance claims looked like...

*Continued next month...*

**John Edwardes**

**In November 2003, Board member Allan Evans negotiated special subsidised fares on the Eurostar to Paris and Brussels for DaC drivers. Sadly the following statement from Eurostar signals the end...**

## EUROSTAR STATEMENT



From 1<sup>st</sup> January 2010, the existing unincorporated joint venture operation that manages Eurostar has been replaced with a fully unified ownership structure and business model. The new company, *Eurostar International Ltd*, will set us up for future growth and development and our focus will be on contribution rather than turnover, with a clear focus on increasing revenues and reducing costs.

In moving towards this structure, we have undertaken a thorough review of all of our revenues, costs and distribution. As part of this review and after careful consideration, we have reached the decision to withdraw partner concession facilities and reduced rate tickets for Dial-a-Cab employees with immediate effect. We will of course, honour existing bookings that are confirmed and paid for by the Friday 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2010.

I would like to thank you for the support that you have given Eurostar and wish you every success for 2010.

## Taxi Drivers & Owners Legal Protection Ltd

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email [topsltd2009@googlemail.com](mailto:topsltd2009@googlemail.com)

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

# Dial-a-Cab Credit Union

**Hope you are all well and that business is picking up! I just thought I'd let you know the date for this year's DACCU AGM. It will be held on 11th March and we are hoping to start between 6 to 6.30.**

We were going to hold it at our new offices, but feel there may well be more members than usual turn up, so we have booked the conference room at the **Days Inn hotel** just across the road from our office in Hackney Road. Just in case you don't get to read **Call Sign** in time, we'll put out messages on your terminals but due to cost, we will only be serving tea and coffee with biscuits. I do hope this does not put off the regulars as I know they like Lil's grub!

Since the start of our 7% investment scheme, the Credit Union has gone from strength to strength, as I'm sure you will be told by that bastion of all things Credit Union, Mr Barry Epstein. If you have any financial queries, he is your man.

As I was saying, the CU is doing very well thank you and we are thinking about financing

## AGM Time!



new cabs! We are already helping with your credit card problems. In case you didn't know, we will pay off your outstanding credit card debts and put the outstanding amount onto a loan set over an agreed period of time with repayments that you can manage. We have already helped out several members in this way. We never mention names, if they want to then it would be up to them to tell you how we helped. Before I move on, I hope that everyone

who is in the 7% investment scheme is happy with what they are getting and having no problems. Mind you, I'm sure they would be on the phone very quickly if there were!

I do hope you are not getting too fed up with the **Tiger Tyres** messages that go out every other day. It is a new business and needs all the help it can get, as those who have come down to see us have found out. It is the convenience of our location, which is good and involving very little downtime. There is, of course, always the added attraction of coming upstairs and seeing Brian, Terry and me... well me anyway!

That's about all for now and I hope to see you at the AGM or when getting your new tyres. Be lucky, but above all be very careful out there...

**John Riley (K38)**  
**DACCU Vice-President**  
**Unit 14, Peterley Business**  
**Centre, 472 Hackney Road,**  
**London E2 9EO**  
**Tel: 020 7729 8171 or**  
**020 7749 0585**

## Vito Electric Cab "Not Launched!"

The press – both taxi and general – have recently been running a press release concerning a proposed electric version of the Mercedes Vito known as the **eVito**. The eVito taxi was said to be a zero-emission, lithium-ion battery vehicle that was being marketed by **Eco City Vehicles** and which has been developed by a consortium of high-technology engineering companies including Eco City Vehicles manufacturing partner Penso, Mercedes-Benz UK and Zytec Automotive.

Peter DaCosta, Chief Executive Officer of Eco City Vehicles, was quoted at the time as saying: "The eVito is the first all-electric wheelchair accessible taxi... and a major step towards our goal to become a leading supplier of niche eco-friendly vehicles."

The PR went on to say that the consortium planned to conduct controlled trials later this year to confirm the eVito's suitability for road usage as a London licensed taxi.

**A clarification from Eco City Vehicles PLC has been received by Call Sign. It reads:**

*Cenex, Zytec and the partners involved in the eVito electric taxi programme would like to clarify some of the points made in the press release:*

*The eVito Taxi was developed by a consortium that is comprised of Zytec, Penso, Vocis, Valence and Mercedes Benz as part of a collaborative research programme part-funded by Advantage West Midlands and managed by Cenex. Eco City Vehicles was not part of this group.*

*The eVito Taxi is an engineering prototype that will be used to prove that the technology is achievable and practical for use in an urban taxi. The vehicle has not been 'launched'.*

*Zytec, one of the world's most experienced developers of power-trains for electric and hybrid vehicles, will be holding a press event during the second quarter of this year at which eVito and other electric vehicle programmes and technologies will be discussed.*

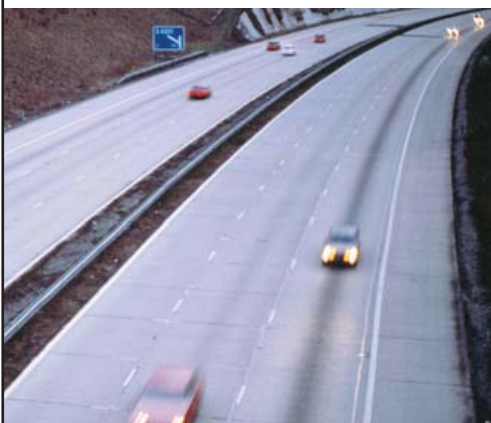


**Eco City Vehicles CEO**  
**Peter DaCosta**



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Within 24 hours of the **Mail on Sunday** releasing it, the story of **Dial-a-Cab** and the Royal family flew around the world and newspapers as far away as India and Australia were carrying it – not to mention a very amusing peace from **Al Fresco** in his *Two Fingers TAXI* column!

Of course **Call Sign** has long known about our famous passengers and Editor **Alan Fisher** had in the past carried **Princess Diana** following her divorce from Prince Charles, while DaC's **Jon Trevor (W94)** had taken **Prince Charles** himself following a visit to the Hanover Square shelter where he "took tea" with several drivers including Jon - whom HRH then asked if he would take him back to Clarence House. The fare came to £9.20 and HRH, presenting a crisp new tenner with his mother's face on, told Jon to keep the 80p.

Many DaC drivers have also picked up from Buck House, Clarence House and Kensington Palace, but **Call Sign** has refused to breach confidentiality. However, the secret was never really up to MI5 standards!

However, as the **Mail on Sunday** has now broken the story, the secret is out and **Call Sign** is confirming **Nathan Kay's** story, which claims that several Royals take taxis to unofficial engagements as the Queen attempts to keep a tab on costs. They had previously been using their fleet cars, but now Royals such as **Viscount Linley** and **Lady Sarah Chatto**, regularly book **Dial-a-Cab** taxis. Indeed, Her Majesty's advisers are said to have devised plans for more senior Royals to use DaC taxis wherever possible. These would include **Prince Harry** and Prince Andrew's daughters, **Princesses Beatrice** and **Eugenie**.

On the downside, members of the Royal household staff who used to take cabs, are

## The Royals and Dial-a-Cab...



It was July 2004 when Brian met Prince Charles. Is that when the account was opened...???

being encouraged to use public transport or even walk to official events or meetings!

A Royal source said: "**Viscount Linley and Lady Sarah Chatto have all used the Dial-a-Cab service, as indeed has Chelsey Davy. This is a cost-cutting measure.**"

Continuing with the statement, the source added that Viscount Linley was a great fan of black cabs and in particular those with the fake walnut interior!

Ending, it said: "**Prince Harry, Princesses Beatrice and Eugenie are all being urged to use the service whenever it is deemed possible. Royal protection officers are not**

**worried about the security implications as black cabs are viewed as an excellent way to uphold anonymity.**"

It was back in July 2004 that Brian Rice and the DaC Board met Prince Charles at a meeting of the Royals with our trade charities. Could that have been when the main accounts were opened???

Buckingham Palace and Clarence House confirmed they both hold accounts with Dial-a-Cab, however a DaC spokesperson refused to give further details and said that as with all account customers, the Society would expect its drivers to maintain confidentiality...

## Warszawa wita Londyn taxi!

*Or if you don't speak Polish...Warsaw welcomes the London taxi*

Warsaw recently played host to a very special new arrival in the form of the world famous London Taxi. The vehicle, which is promoted by local Polish company, **Dufort London Taxis**, was unveiled in the capital city at **Motorfest**, an established car dealership and vehicle repair workshop centre situated close to Warsaw airport.

This was the first European launch of the year for LTI's new International sales brand, **The London Taxi Company**. Their International Market Development Director, **Matthew Cheyne**, told **Call Sign** following the TX4 launch:

"It was a great evening, enjoyed by all. Everyone I have spoken to is very excited about being able to use a proper London taxi as opposed to a saloon car. We have been building the taxi in the UK for over 60 years now, so no one knows more about taxis than we do. But also producing in China gives us a more global appeal now, so we aim to see the London Taxi on sale all over the world. Poland is the first European Capital city to launch the London Taxi in 2010 and we are sure it won't be the last. In 2009, we sold vehicles in Germany, Spain, Austria, Serbia and Kosovo."

**Jacek Kurowski**, official representative for the LTC in Poland, was delighted with the reaction of those at the launch. He told **Call Sign**:

"I have been working for a long time to bring this fantastic vehicle to Poland and people obviously love it just as much as I do. I am now able to help taxi companies in Poland offer a real alternative to the cheap cramped saloon taxis or expensive limousines. Passengers can now get a fantastic unique vehicle, a great service, professional dri-



vers and their own private space in the cab. What more could they want!"

Leading local taxi company, **Wawa**, will operate the new TX4 as a premium taxi service initially, but with a second batch scheduled to arrive later this month, Jacek aims to sell more taxis onto the streets of every city in Poland!

Anyone wanting to know more can visit [www.londontaxis.co.uk](http://www.londontaxis.co.uk), [www.lti.co.uk](http://www.lti.co.uk) or [www.dufort.pl](http://www.dufort.pl).

## POWER PILL

**Helps cut the cost of diesel – and reduces smoke!**

Chris Hayball is happy to supply any Dial-a-Cab drivers with the amazing Power Pill & at an even better rate than before!

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Or by visiting [www.powerpillonline.com](http://www.powerpillonline.com)

Pay via PayPal [ziggystardust1000@hotmail.com](mailto:ziggystardust1000@hotmail.com)

(Enter promo code DAC 10)



Having lived within a licensing authority where both Hackney and PH have meters in their vehicles, it has puzzled me why there is such a lack of enthusiasm by TfL to do the same here. But then I looked at the PH bill and it clearly states that meters will not be permitted.

Well maybe that was a mistake because you hear stories of them charging £25 to go from Leicester Square to Victoria etc. Indeed, taxis are accountable for every penny they charge, so shouldn't PH be too? Six years on, I'd say PH has legitimacy without accountability. Can a PH driver be charged for taking a devious route? How can the public get their money back? What if the driver changes the cost of the journey half way through? Who sets their fares in the first place? To the public, their service and price is done on a take it or leave it basis - or get a taxi. TfL's own guidelines are that you approach the PH company first before getting them involved.

It is unquestionable that our fares have reached levels that some say are unjustified, yet it wasn't long ago that our fares were competitive. Via the cost index, politicians put changes upon us that forced the meter up.

#### Ken Livingstone

was a great one for this. The problem was that PH didn't have such demands placed on them, so the gap has got wider and wider - a simple political ploy and good way of getting more work into PH to make it worthwhile being licensed. Remember the days when a new cab cost £18k? The fares were much lower in comparison, but the work plentiful. Today, cabs are at their most expensive; our charges are at their most expensive and the work has dried up. If the mayor wants any new changes to our working practices / vehicles, City Hall should pay us via subsidies and not our meters.

But from a punter's point of view, what represents good value? If the trade were to demand that PH had meters in their vehicles to make them more accountable, stop them from making it up and put up their costs, then the price gap would get smaller. Companies who use PH may say if they are paying that much for a PHV, they may as well get a taxi. If you are an account in Finsbury Square and your PH account charges, say £25 to go to E14 because they don't really want to service all the account, then if the PH vehicle had a meter, that account could demand a meter fare and not a price made by inconvenience. If the PH company then had to cover all aspects of their accounts and not just give us the jobs they didn't want to do, they would become stretched and more work would come our way.

With reports of huge sums being asked for short journeys by PH, Call Sign's Richard Potter poses the question...

## Should Private Hire Have Meters?



Richard Potter asks whether PH should have meters



Personally, I think the product and service we supply is excellent and

we are only expensive by comparison, but our prices should be put on hold through the recession. If we lowered our prices, so would PH. There has been plenty of talk about "winning work back." Force PH charges up and narrow the gap, we would then win plenty of work back! It's all about cost - accountants demand best value and aren't that fussed about who supplies it.

#### And Yellow Badge drivers...?

Yellow badge drivers have meters and

drive taxis, so does that make them ok? In February 2009, a **Dial-a-Cab** driver wrote in **Call Sign** about yellow badge drivers plying for hire outside their licensed area. Well the more you scratch the surface, the more you find.

The other evening I was working on Clapham Junction rank and the two drivers in front of me were having a chat - both wearing yellow badges. I didn't realise it at the time, but Clapham Junction is a green badge only rank. You hear of sightings all over, with yellow badges working at Heathrow on Christmas Day because the attendants don't work and it is a known fact that yellow badge drivers work *Wimbledon fortnight* and then disappear again! I even heard a story about the yellow badge driver from Essex who was a regular at a major hotel near Hyde Park corner! He handed his taxi in to take a holiday and his garage rented it back to another driver, this one a green badge whose cab was in overhaul and who was also a regular at the same hotel. He said he knew the driver and cab to the garage owner, who then went on to *spill the beans*.

Call me a cynic, but with trade bodies refusing to allow big increases in green badge requisitions through a quickie Knowledge, flooding the suburbs may have been an indirect ploy to boost numbers of central drivers, as yellow badges looked to pastures new simply to make a living, whilst legally making their boundaries bigger and bigger.

Richard Potter (T51)

## 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.

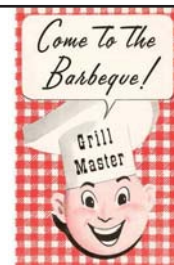
Sizzles can provide all the food and salads or we can cook your own food. The decision is up to you.

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**





For those new to **Dial-a-Cab**, *Call Sign* has been following the progress of **Sam Bezzina** - son of Dial-a-Cab driver **Dean Bezzina (M10)** - and his ambition to box for England. To do that, he needed to win a **Golden Gloves Championship**. And last season he did exactly that when the ABA Schoolboys Championship honours were decided at Dagenham's Goresbrook Leisure Centre. Sadly, though, injuries have delayed his International representations.

The new season is now here and Sam has decided to start his new campaign with a change of club and a move from Newham to **West Ham Boxing Club**. And as Sam has always done, he did so in style when after just four weeks training back in the gym, he made his West Ham debut in the northeast of England at the **Hull Fish Trade's** show. With so many injury problems last season - the worst of which was accidentally self-inflicted when he tripped in a rabbit hole - there was some nervousness from dad Dean who had told *Call Sign* before the bout that whilst he knew Sam was good enough to win, there was always the problem of ring rust after such a long time out of action. But Dean needn't have worried.

The opposition was **Jack Pyrah** from the West Yorkshire town of Cleckheaton and from the first bell it was Sam who worked stylishly behind his jab, never allowing his strong opponent time to land any of his best punches. The second round saw much of the same with Sam growing in confidence and by the final round he was dominating the fight - his combination punches being just too much for Pyrah. After a superb performance, there was never any doubt that the judges would give Sam a unanimous points decision - making it

# SAM: NEW SEASON — NEW CLUB!



**Sam is hoping for his most successful season yet...**

a perfect start for a new season and club.

Although Sam had an excellent season at Newham in winning all nine of his bouts - not to mention winning a national title - Dean told *Call Sign* that Sam still felt something was missing, but now feels that he has found that missing piece at West Ham. The walls of West Ham BC are an archive of champions, a who's who in the world of boxing. Memorabilia includes a pair of signed gloves used by West Ham boy **Terry Spinks** to win a gold medal for England in the **1956 Melbourne Olympics** and the official Olympic torch that carried the flame through the streets at the **1948 London Olympics** - the last time they were held in the UK. Those are just two pieces of the history on the WH walls that inspire the boys who train there.

It was probably only a matter of time before

Sam - who has been a **West Ham United** fan since birth - made the move to the boxing club as well. Dean said that his son was settling in well, looks great in claret and blue and more importantly, had told him that he was now enjoying his boxing more than ever. That is obviously great news, as so many young boys of Sam's age - just 15 and a half - are distracted from their sports with their talents ending up wasted, adding to the statistics that no one wants to be part of - those involving alcohol and drugs abuse, crime and unemployment.

And the immediate future? Could 2010 see Sam on the championship trail? The amateur season begins with the CYP (Clubs for Young People) championships in February with the finals at end of March. That's then followed closely by the start of the Junior ABAs - the most prestigious title that can be won by an amateur of Sam's age. Dad Dean told us:

**"I have never seen Sam so fired-up and enthusiastic about his boxing as he is at this moment. I really think it's going to be a very interesting and challenging season for Sam - and hopefully very successful..."**

*Many older readers will remember the name of former West Ham boxer, Terry Spinks. With his gloves on the Club's wall and the London torch too, could they be the signs that say we'll be seeing Sam Bezzina at the 2012 London Olympics? There's a long way to go, but as the saying goes... never say never! More news on Sam's progress soon..*

Former Dial-a-Cab driver, Bob Woodford, writes a regular column for Call Sign from his home in Languedoc, France...

## CALL SIGN EN LA BELLE FRANCE



It's a nice warm sunny day here on the Med and I've just looked at the weather forecast for London - more snow on the way! But Stansted is where I am heading for again soon and as I discussed with my accountants in Bow, I spent more days in the UK in 2009 than in France!

But that's understandable as in the last year or so I have set up what I believe will be one of the premier sightseeing options in the capital - **London Black Cab Sightseeing Tours**.

It all started with passing the **Cabguide Course**, then passing the **City University Guiding Skills Foundation Course** and now currently sitting the **City of London Guide Course**. It might not finish there; I have half an eye on taking up the **City of Westminster Guiding Course** next full term followed by what looks a fascinatingly interesting **Clerkenwell and Islington Guiding Course**.

As a taxi driver, I believe you should all add another string to your bow. I know your time is valuable, and I know you need to work more hours at present in these difficult times, but adding a qualification or two along the way can only increase your earnings potential.

But more than that, the kind of study involved here is also fun, especially if you like history and the odd execution or hand stricken off! There is a lot beneath the surface and so much to learn about the City of London that you live and work in. There is 2,000 years of *rubbish* underneath the streets of London - a multi-level sandwich that is dug constantly for remains that puts the story together.

My favourite period goes back to the days of the Tudors, when there were so many changes in English history that set our stall out for what we are today. But the Romans of course were here for one-fifth of recorded British history - it is sometimes hard to imagine that!

The current **Cabguide Course** is over subscribed, so get your name down early for the next paper, which takes place in the autumn. This course is aimed at London Taxi drivers and others whose existing knowledge of the City's geography is extended and refined by a course that covers the history and development of the capital. The aim of the course is to provide those drivers with sufficient knowledge to enable them, when transporting passengers across the City, to inform them in a clear and concise manner of the sites of historical interest and buildings they are passing. Also, to conduct an informative and entertaining tour covering all the major places of interest, in and around Central London.

**Please note this course is held at Knowledge Point, 429-431 Caledonian Road, N7 (opp Pentonville Prison). Classes are held on Monday nights, from 6pm until 8pm. Walks on Sundays start at 10:30 am, from various locations.**

Contact the Worshipful Company of Hackney Carriage Drivers, 25 The Grove, Latimer, Bucks HP5 or email: clerk@chcd.fsnet.co.uk.

**A bientot...**

**Bob Woodford (Ex-P49)**

**Saint Genies de Fontedit, Languedoc, France**

Repeating something our taxi trade has been saying for several years, the **London Assembly** in a new report has now called for a reduction in the number of buses serving the West End saying that *Transport for London* and *Westminster Council* should assess the possibility of re-routing buses serving the area to reduce the number that travel through Oxford Street.

The report - **Streets ahead: Relieving congestion on Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street** - claims that 300+ buses every hour use Oxford Street, with over 100,000 pedestrians passing along the shopping hub each day. The report adds that average bus speeds are little more than walking speed.

However, when the claim is also made by **Passenger watchdog London TravelWatch** that **taxis take up 37% of the road space, but only carry 1% of the passengers, you can see which way the report is heading.**

Assembly member **Victoria Borwick**, wife of former Manganese Bronze Chairman Lord Jamie Borwick and who led the investigation on behalf of the Transport Committee said: "The wall of slow-moving metal running along Oxford Street tarnishes what should be a world-class shopping experience - delaying and endangering residents, workers and visitors."

Victoria acknowledged the competing demands for access to the area created a complex situation, but added: "We are talking about a vital retail destination that generates £5.5 billion a year for the UK economy. There has to be a better way to strike the balance between the needs of shoppers and pedestrians and the demand for transport links."

The report claims that average bus speeds along Oxford Street are little more than walking speed, accident rates are 35 times the average of all other London streets and that on average

## London Assembly: Too Many buses in Oxford Street!

*...and taxis to be banned?*



**This Call Sign photo is 8 years old and bus numbers have increased greatly since then!**

there is a collision involving a bus in the area every 3.4 days. Pollution levels are said to be 4.5 times the EU target and the area is predicted to be the most polluted in the UK by 2015.

The volume of buses on Oxford Street is huge with 23 routes running along the street with peak flows in each direction of up to 160 buses per hour or during a peak hour, over 300. Londoners make 218,000 bus trips a day to, from or within the street. **It adds that buses share the street with taxis, which take up around 30 per cent of the available road space.**

**Steve Norris**, Chair of the TfL Board's Surface Transport Panel and a former Conservative Transport Minister for London, warned of unforeseen consequences from mak-

ing large changes to the transport system. TfL had strongly cautioned against diverting a significant part of the bus service away from Oxford Street saying this would be neither deliverable nor desirable and warning of major disruptions for passengers. The LTDA warned that well-meaning proposals to reduce traffic congestion may inadvertently discourage access to the area and ultimately lead to a decline in the area's commercial interests.

**And the report's possible answers?**

\* **Part-pedestrianisation between Oxford Circus and Bond Street:** All traffic would be diverted and pavement surfaces extended across on this part of the street.

\* **Shuttle bus:** The New West End Company, London First and others have proposed a dedicated bus which would run along Oxford Street - for example between 10am and 4pm. This could either be combined with removal of all other traffic from the street or alongside other reductions in traffic levels.

\* **Ken Livingstone's tram idea:** A tram running up and down Oxford Street, with all other traffic diverted from the street, had been considered and rejected by the current Mayor as likely to be expensive and disruptive to reintroduce.

*And (in OUR bold writing):*

\* **Restrictions on taxis:** Taxis would be restricted from using Oxford Street and / or Regent Street, either all of the time or just during busy times. This would require a change in the law. The ORB includes measures to encourage taxis to pick up off Oxford Street through additional ranks on side streets and signposting. Also shifting taxi ranks to adjacent streets, usually north-south roads and at alternative entrances at the rear of department stores...



## COMPLAINTS RESULTS

A Complaints meeting was held on 11th February 2010. The results are below...



Name/call sign	Nature of Complaint	Sentence
Anthony Fairey (C44)	Driver booked into S99 when true location was A2 in Eltham SE9 and accepted a trip from Gatwick Airport <b>Rule 11</b>	2 weeks susp
William Dorrell (C78)	Driver booked into S99 when true location was A316 nr Richmond and accepted a trip from Gatwick Airport <b>Rule 11</b>	2 weeks susp
Lee Francis (L45)	Driver booked directly into S50W when true location was N.Hyde Rd, Hayes (W50C) and accepted trip offer from S99 (S50W is a back up to S99) <b>Rule 11</b>	2 weeks susp
Simon Trotter (H58)	Driver booked into Heathrow (WW00) from his home address in Acton. You must be within Perimeter Rd to book in <b>Rule 11</b>	3 weeks susp
Paul Samuels (T85)	Driver used foul and abusive language to a DaC Marshall in front of other DaC drivers and Citigroup employees <b>Rules 1, 2, 3</b>	1. 2 weeks susp 2. 1 week susp 3. Expelled

## PC running slowly?

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Viruses or Trojans?**



# PREMIER SPEED CAMERA OVERLAY SYSTEM

## Novus Talisman... for all TomTom users

**Novus** have launched the **Novus Talisman**, a premier speed camera overlay, for all **TomTom** users at an affordable price. **TomTom** users can take advantage of the award winning **Novus** speed camera alert system that features the unique road specific activation, eliminating false alarms. Users also have the opportunity to "try before they buy" with a unique 14 day free trial. **TomTom** users who want to trial the system, do not part with any credit or debit card information before they trial the system.

The **Novus Talisman** features the **Novus** natural voice as featured in all of their products, giving clear voice alerts before all fixed and mobile speed cameras. The speed camera is clearly displayed on the **TomTom** satellite navigation system. The system is direction sensitive and takes into account in which direction the speed cameras are pointing. **Novus Talisman** shows all standard fixed cameras, red light traffic cameras, average speed cameras or SPECS as they are more commonly known, variable speed cameras and possible mobile camera sites.

**Novus Talisman** can operate in a fully integrated navigation mode or in a stand-alone speed camera only mode if navigation is not required. It also offers day and night operational modes. One of the most important points is that the **Novus Talisman** does not interfere with any original **TomTom** programming.

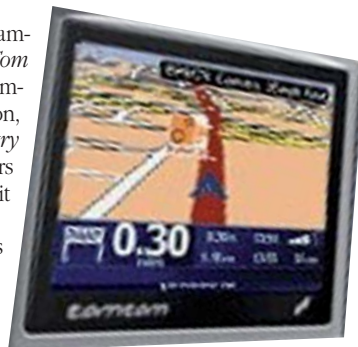
**TomTom** users can visit the **Novus Talisman** web site [www.novus-talisman.co.uk](http://www.novus-talisman.co.uk). They register their details and are provided a range of codes, which enables them to trial the **Novus Talisman** for a free 14-day trial. If the user likes the system and would like to continue to use it, they can purchase an annual software licence for £14.95 via credit or debit card and download the database updates as many times as they want throughout the year. After the year, they can renew their software licence for £12.95. If the user decides not to purchase a licence, the software program self extracts after 14 days. The **Novus Talisman** does not affect the operation and running of the **TomTom** software. If it is removed, the **TomTom** will return back to normal with no program scarring.

The unique *Road Specific Activation* (RSA) used by **Novus** Systems across all products, eliminates false alarms. The vast majority of speed camera alert systems and overlays use a simple zonal approach which is not direction specific and gives rise to many false alarms rendering the alerts virtually useless in areas of high-speed camera density.

When approaching a fixed speed camera, the standard **TomTom** overlay beeps and displays the speed limit on the **TomTom** screen, whereas **TomTom** with **Talisman** gives a clear voice warning of "speed camera ahead" and the associated speed limit. The speed limit is displayed on the **TomTom** screen until the camera is passed. If the driver is exceeding the speed limit within 200 yards of the camera, **Talisman** will advise the driver to reduce speed with further voice alerts until the driver has reduced to the speed limit or below.

When approaching a mobile camera site, the standard **TomTom** overlay is unlikely to detect the mobile camera site because it won't be in the database. **TomTom** with **Talisman** – thanks to the constantly updated database – gives a voice warning of "Possible mobile camera zone" and the associated speed limit. The speed limit is displayed on the **TomTom** screen until the camera is passed.

To take advantage of this unique "try before you buy" **TomTom** overlay service – please visit [www.novus-talisman.co.uk](http://www.novus-talisman.co.uk) or call 0845 6590959.



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

## Kupkake's Korner



I'd just set down at London Bridge there was a queue down on the rank, my job was a teenage girl ...thicker than a plank!

"Wharf Road mate, that aw' right," she said, climbing in the back? "Yes," says I, thinking I might grab a coffee - and a *Big Mac*!

I pulled away, out came her phone the lights ahead were green, I turned right, heading north, no traffic to be seen.

At the junction with Cannon Street, She let out a banshee scream, "WHERE THE F\*\*K YA GOIN MATE, I WANT WHARF ROAD , SAF EAST 17?"

"Oh it's Walworth now," I did reply recovering from my fright, "thought you wanted Islington, City Road ...on the right."

"Ya don't know where ya going I'll get anover cab, And forget it, I ain't payin" as she fumbled with her bag.

"Effin' black cab drivers all wanna rip ya off, did ya fink I was a tourist?" "No," says I, "a Toff!"

She slammed the door, I cleared my clock I heard some more profanities, ahead of me a suit flags me down... "St James Street driver please!"

**Copyright Kupkake 2010**



## Manganese results "miss expectations..."

LTI parent company, **Manganese Bronze**, has said that its results missed expectations after being hit by lower sales and higher than expected warrantee radiator repairs on the TX4. They added that the radiator issue had now been resolved, but that they had only uncovered the warranty blow while preparing the full year figures. MB also revealed that vehicle sales had dropped 12% last year to 1,724 as drivers remained nervous about financing themselves to new vehicles amid the recession.

The TX4 suffered twelve UK engine fires in 2008 that forced **Manganese** to recall and refit almost 6,000 cabs at a cost of £3.8m. That recall is virtually completed, although liability for the original problem has yet to be confirmed.

**Manganese** also warned that there could be job losses at the Coventry factory following a recently completed review.

The company has battled against recession pressures, going £600,000 into minus territory during the first half of 2009 as against a £1.5m profit just 12-months earlier. On a better note, MB added that customer reaction to the Shanghai-built version of the TX4 had been positive and that they hoped to sell around 1,000 cabs in China this year.

# Mailshot

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

## Only twenty years on DaC!

Thanks to O52 I am still on Dial-a-Cab! I, like I suspect most DaC subscribers, have been thinking of a reason to stay on the circuit due to the paucity of work and endless days of no jobs whatsoever after ten hours shifts. The management said in the good times how wonderful they have directed DaC and increased sales year on year in one of the longest bull financial economies the world has ever seen. Then I heard the inevitable admission I was prepared for:

Dial-a-Cab is a cyclical business. Did we just get lucky for ten years? I, like all subscribers, am perplexed why when large numbers are leaving, the very least the management could do is to not replace them with new drivers. I spoke to one driver who said he had been barred because he told them to find him work then he could afford to pay! Is this endemic? I even rang up Drivers Services saying there was hardly any work and as I had been on the circuit for twenty years how long before I could pay £1 like **Alan Fisher**, our Editor? Another ten years came the reply!

Then something totally unexpected happened. Whilst waiting on the Piccadilly rank, I was hit by a bus who did a hit and run. I caught up with the bus driver, fortuitously a police officer made a report noting damage to both vehicles consistent with an accident. Red paint chiselled the length of my badly damaged cab. Travelling home thereafter, sick to the pit of my stomach, I reluctantly asked voice man to put out a fleet message for witnesses. **Oscar 52** had witnessed all. Thanks **Nicholas Fielding**.

So there you have it. If you think you're better off without Dial-a-Cab, could you also require a witness?

**Stephen Berndes (R14)**

**Thanks for the mention Stephen, cos if you're asking for a loan, then I should remind you that I also pay VAT on my one pound, so things aren't that wonderful! As for the business; looking at the 2009 Annual Report, your assumption that any driver who leaves will be automatically replaced is apparently wrong as our numbers are substantially down. Finally, going back to me and my £1 subs, this was (I think) my fourth recession in my 35 years on DaC and I cannot remember ever thinking that I should leave. In addition to work and the occasional chance of a witness, there is also the safety aspect. And as a final 'finally' I usually do around 6 evening hours on the cab and even at this quiet time, I am still managing 4 or 5 credit jobs a day ...Ed**

## Copying?

*Hi Alan*

I'm trying to get in touch with a guy called **Oscar** who used to regularly advertise in *Call Sign* for doing digital transfer copies of tapes to CDs etc. Do you have a telephone number for him or know someone that has? **Barry Ward (H16j)**

**Many drivers have used Oscar's transfer services from tape to CD, Vinyl to CD or Super 8 film to DVD etc. He can usually be contacted on 07902 246 354. The best time is usually after 4pm ...Ed**

## Er... where's Martyn???

*Dear Alan,*

I'm sure by now that the error has been pointed out, but the photo on page 23 of the *February Call Sign* is not of **Martyn Madden (Y97)** but of (I believe) a now-retired driver who I knew as Eugene. I never knew his call sign or surname but I think he has left the circuit.

**Michael Harris (F79)**

**Thank you Mike, but you're right - I have already been castigated! The first person to point it out could have been any of the 2000+ drivers or members of staff... but no, it had to be the Chairman, who knew Martyn from DaC's golfing exploits! I phoned Martyn to warn him that when he opened the mag, he might become concerned at how much he had changed, but that as compensation, *Call Sign* would pay for any counselling he needed! Fortunately for me, Martyn's only concern was that the person purported to be him wasn't ugly! ...Ed**

## Cheap tyres?

*Hi Alan,*

When we had a message on our terminals saying cheaper tyres from **Tiger Tyres**, I thought as I'd recently gone and bought some that it was just my bad luck a better deal would come along! Then when *Call Sign* came out with the prices in - even with their pathetic £2 off each tyre they're still not as cheap as Universal Tyres. If you want to give the fleet this info, then please do. I paid £72.42 for Michelins - that's £6 cheaper than the Tiger discounted price...

**Keith Hancock (R47)**

**Thanks Keith. My only knowledge about tyres is that they go between the cab and the road and when I occasionally need a new one, I just go and get one. I haven't a clue how much they cost until I get the bill. The DaC Credit Union passed on the info about Tiger Tyres because they are in the same premises in Hackney Road and very handy to the City. Even more useful is that DACCU members needing a set of tyres could - with a bit of luck - take a cheap loan to pay for what has become an expensive pastime! They may be slightly dearer than Universal, who have 15 branches, but their prices**



**are reasonable and their discount to DaC drivers is genuine ...Ed**

## "I don't want to go but..."

Due to my TXII starting to cost me money with daily problems, I have decided to get rid of it. But this is where the problem begins. I have had enough of owning a cab with all the expense and worry that goes with it and have decided to rent a new TX4 for a year or so to get rid of the worry and expense. But this means I have to come off Dial-a-Cab, which I love being on. Is their ever going to be a time when DaC will allow rented cabs in top condition to be accepted? I am having to leave and really do not want to at all. If I ever decide to buy again, I will be straight back. But until then - unless rented cabs are to be accepted - I want to wish all the drivers and the staff of a truly great circuit, the best of luck for the future...

**Andy Allen (K46)**

**Hi Andy, have you thought of renting a cab from someone already on DaC and becoming a journeyman? Just ask Allan Evans or Shelagh Adkins to enquire via the driver's terminal if anyone wants one. There is usually someone willing to rent but I should warn you that as a journeyman, your long service record would cease ...Ed**

## Wonderful DaC driver!

As very long standing clients of Dial-a-Cab, I am hoping you will be able to help us. On Wednesday 16th December we ordered a cab from DaC to collect us from Carlyle Square SW3 at about 8.30pm to go to Lucios Restaurant in Fulham Road. When we arrived at the restaurant, my husband, who is not very mobile as he suffers from arthritis, had an accident while getting out of the taxi. His left foot slipped forward on the wet road and his right leg, which was still stuck in the cab, caused him to fall out of the taxi. Unfortunately, when he was helped up by our cabbie and a passer by, he simply could not move his right leg, which was stuck in a bent position and completely useless.

Please don't panic, I am not writing to sue or complain! I am writing because this taxi driver was just WONDERFUL! After he helped my husband up and helped to get him seated on the floor of the taxi, he stood out in the rain and held an umbrella over my husband for at least 45 minutes or more until the ambulance came! When the ambulance finally arrived, I looked at the taxi meter, expecting to see a very large amount on it only to find he had stopped it when we arrived at the restaurant. I wanted to give



## Mailshot

him a huge tip in thanks for his kindness or to pay extra for all the time he had stayed with us, but he simply refused to take anything saying he was very happy to have helped us. So I now would really like to contact him to thank him personally.

I have also been told that you can commend a taxi driver to an association/guild of taxi drivers. I would also really like to do this if you could help me by supplying these details as well as our cabby's name and address. We have travelled all over the world a huge amount and I know that we in London do have the very best and finest cab drivers in the world and this man is one of very best of them.

To finish the story, my husband ended up having to have knee surgery the following day and spending 5 days in Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. He also had to have his leg in a splint for 6 weeks. However, what with Christmas and the terrible weather we have had and being snowed-in in the country, it is only now that I have got round to writing to you. In this present world when everyone is always complaining, I really would like to do the opposite. So if you can give us any help to do this I would be most grateful. After all, the week before Christmas must be so busy and our lovely cabby could have done lots of other jobs instead of staying and helping my husband.

Thank you for the excellent service that Dial-a-Cab gives...

**Tara Elliot**

**Chilton Foliat, Berks**

**The driver concerned who maintained Dial-a-Cab's name as always being the best was David Fisher (A59). DaC Chairman Brian Rice responded personally to Mrs Elliot...**

### TX4 brakes

*Dear Alan*

I have been experiencing a problem with the brakes on my TX4. I have recently spoken to LTI customer services department and they say they are not aware of the problem, but have advised me to take my cab into my service dealer and their engineer will come to have a look. The problem occurs when the engine is cold. When you apply the brakes, the pedal collapses and you lose braking effort - but only for a second and the pedal then comes back up. But sometimes the pedal vibrates, the cab shakes and the engine cuts out.

I have spoken to other drivers who have experienced the same problem and would ask them to phone LTI and tell them about it so that they will then be aware of it.

**Alfred Cook (A62)**



### Camden PCNs

I read in an issue of *Call Sign* that if a council make an extra charge when someone pays for a PCN via a credit card, that the ticket becomes null and void. I paid one from Camden and when I told them about the article, they offered to pay back the 1.3% admin charge but would not cancel the ticket. Are they right?

**Kevin McKenna (S36)**

**I asked Barrie Segal who wrote the original answer. He told me that while other councils have agreed to refund the PCN when an admin charge was added, Camden decided instead to go for a judicial review to appeal against that decision. He said that in his view the charge is illegal and until the review result is known, anyone who has received a PCN that includes an admin charge for a credit card payment, should go all the way to adjudication. Most doing that have been successful. If you have already paid, then all you can do is wait for the review result and if they lose, claim your £60 back ...Ed**

*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

*This month's Flashback goes back to the November 1999 Call Sign for a piece of culture!*

### Paul wins at National Poetry Day!

The September 1999 issue of *Call Sign* invited Dial-a-Cab drivers to enter a National Poetry Challenge where a song lyric was to be the basis of their poem. The prize was pretty small by *Call Sign* standards - a bottle of Champagne, but although we didn't say so at the time for fear of frightening off entrants, the winner was to be in for a real treat. That was to be at the celebrity attended National Poetry Day and in addition, the winner would face newspaper interviews plus radio and TV appearances! *Call Sign* had over 20 entrants - the largest entry of any organisation entering into National Poetry Day! Our heartiest congratulations go to the overall winner, Dial-a-Cab's **Paul Tully (Y40)**.

On the day, Paul was ready with his entry - **Yesterday, all my troubles seemed so far away** - and sure enough it was judged to be the winning poem. The organisers then invited Paul along to a 'Poetry Breakfast' together with Poet Laureate, Andrew Motion and also 'Poet in the City', John Mole, (who had previously written a special poem for *Call Sign* that was published in our September issue). The event was broadcast on the **BBC Radio 4 Today** programme.

Later, at the Royal Exchange, National Poetry Day was celebrated by the reading of poems from the Minister for Arts Alan Howarth, John Mole, Big Issue poet Sir George Staple QC and of course the star of the show, our very own **Paul Tully** - the Poet in the City!

DaC taxis had earlier collected a host of children and teachers from Sir John Cass Foundation Primary School who had read out their poems and later released a cascade of balloons over the City.

Paul was later interviewed by the press and also made an appearance on BBC News 24 and Capital Gold, having been driven there by Allan Evans (Y83). Then it was off to the BBC Westminster studios for an interview on Radio 5 Live followed by a trip to Grays Inn Road and a live LBC interview! But pride of place went to an appearance at the Bridewell Theatre in Bride Lane, EC4 where a number of people - including Paul - read out their poetry, eagerly watched by proud DaC Board representatives, Brian Rice and Allen Togwell.

Finally - and at last - back home to enjoy his bottle of champagne as the prize for writing the best poem, the still slightly shell-shocked Dial-a-Cab driver could only say:

**"Absolutely marvellous, really great, just totally magical."**

We noted that his response didn't rhyme: **"I haven't the strength!"** said Paul...

The two runners-up in the *Call Sign* poetry competition were David Kupler and George Wilson. Both receive a bottle of Champs and our congratulations..



**Paul with children from Sir John Cass School**



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