

Call Sign visits the ITLA convention in Chicago

Allen Togwell reports for Call Sign

On Wednesday October 13th 1999, Brian Rice and I attended the 81st International Taxi and Livery Association Annual Convention and Trade Show which this year was held in Chicago, Illinois.

The attendance was yet again considerable, not just with representatives from taxi companies from central America (over 900), but also from other parts of the World such as Australia, Canada, Singapore and the UK who in addition to ourselves, had representatives from Computer Cab and Radio Taxis Ltd.

The taxi industry in the USA, as one could imagine, is very big but more significantly, they are represented by a very powerful association in the ITLA (motto: Big or Small we all Stand Tall Together) an association that we in London could learn a lot from, particularly in the manner in which they lobby their Government over issues concerning their trade. Very soon we will see London being run by a Mayor and whatever the powers that he/she will have initially, you can be sure that they will eventually be on the lines of those in America. Already, we hear of at least two of the front runners having meetings with the Mayor of New York, no doubt to discuss ideas that might work in London. We all know what happened in 1986 with regards New York's Yellow cabs and radios and must learn from the ITLA how best we can prepare ourselves against it happening in London.

The convention itself was extremely well organised with breakout sessions running throughout the day from 07:45 to 17:00 covering numerous issues such as How to Oppose Deregulation, Airport Regulations, How to respond to the Press in a crisis, Contract Costs and Risk Analysis, Driver recruitment, Training and Retention, Government Safety Regulation Requirements, Financing, Q&A Sessions with Lawyers and Lobbyists, Women in Transportation Issues and much, much more including, as I mentioned in my report last month, driver and operator of the year awards etc.

The trade show was equally impressive with exhibitors covering all aspects of the trade including the various GPS data

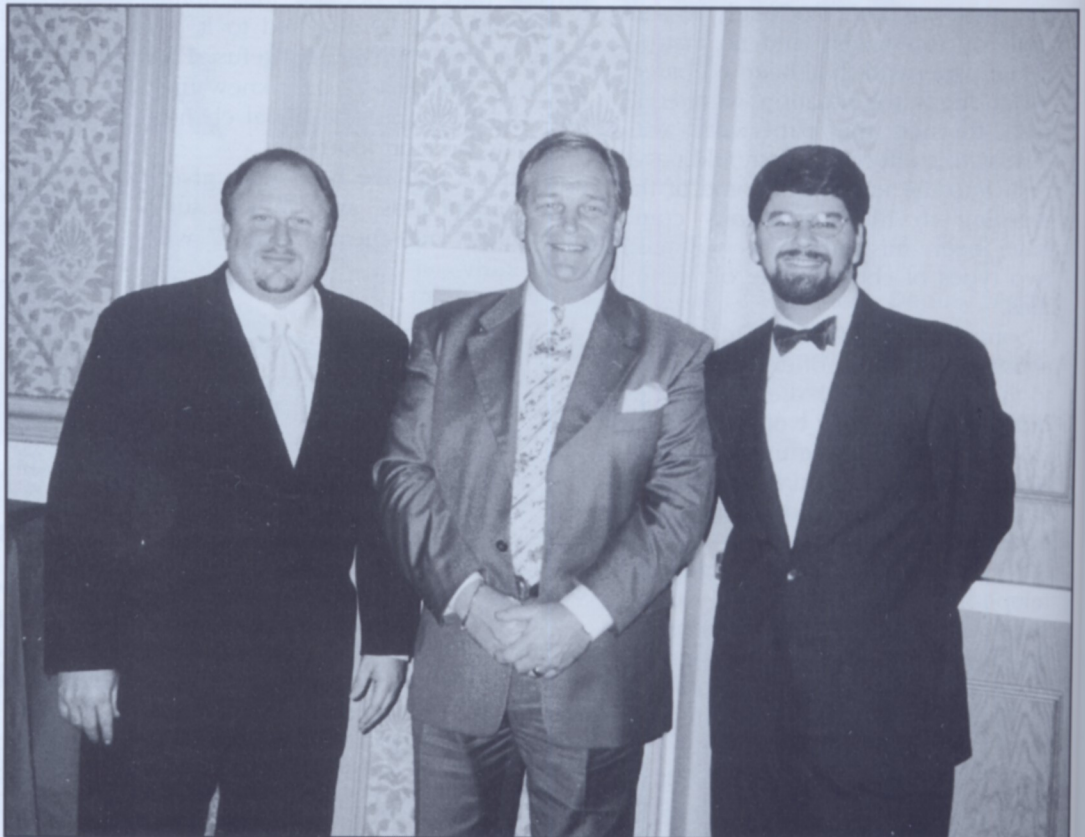
communication systems etc.

Whilst at the show, Brian and I took the opportunity to demonstrate our 'real-time booking system' via the Internet. Needless to say, with no such system yet available to any cab company in America, those watching us display our live telephonist screen, booking facilities and fleet status showing the various zones changing before their eyes etc were truly impressed. On one occasion, whilst demonstrating the driver and fleet message facility, we sent a message to Alan Fisher and they couldn't believe the speed in which it was dispatched. It isn't often we beat America to anything but we have on this occasion. **(Editor's note: Imagine my amazement to receive a terminal message headed Internet and signed by Brian Rice from an exhibition hall in Chicago - just brilliant!).**

In addition to the convention itself, Dial-a-Cab, being in the market for a new MDT system, is obviously the company of the moment as far as data suppliers are concerned and we were naturally busy being invited to breakfast and dinner meetings. As

with any business it is interesting - and I hasten to add impressive - to hear how our name is mentioned in the market place even as far away as the USA including for good measure all the rumours! We were also invited to a special dinner party organised by the outgoing president of the ITLA - Mr Hamilton Smyth IV - which apart from the pleasure of being his table guest, the venue itself held the dubious distinction of being a private dining club originally established for Al Capone.

In ending this brief report, I would like to make a mention of the host City Chicago. In commenting to those that lived there how impressed we were with the cleanliness (not one bit of graffiti), transport, traffic and safety, no one begging or sleeping rough etc. We were told that it was safe to walk anywhere day or night although it wasn't always like that. The reason for the change is due to Mayor Richard M Daley. Living proof that if there is a will, there is a way, and if one man can change the face of a big City like Chicago, so we can do the same for our trade.



Brian Rice in Chicago with outgoing ITLA President Hamilton Smyth IV (R) and incoming President Martin Zilber (L).