



THE GOLD STANDARD

EDITION

01

JULY 2019

UNITED TRADE ACTION GROUP

LAUNCH EDITION FUNDED
BY UTAG SUPPORTERS

UTAG LEGAL
ACTION

TREVOR MERRALLS

FROM THE
DUG OUT

JOHN SITTON

CLARKSON
ANGELA CLARKSON



DAVID
VERSUS GOLIATH
JOHN LOWE

DON'T BACK
DOWN
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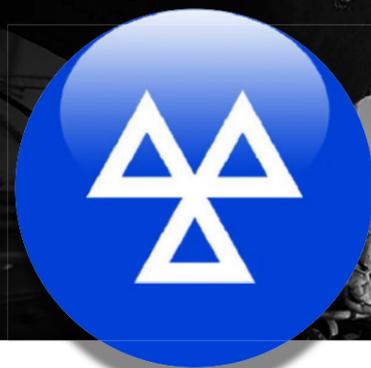


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WELCOME TO THE FIRST EDITION



GOLD STANDARD - THE MAGAZINE OF UNITED TRADE ACTION GROUP

On behalf of UTAG, we wish you a warm welcome to the first edition of The Gold Standard magazine, brought to you by the generosity of our Stakeholder sponsors.

The Gold Standard is published in an extended effort to keep those in the trade who are not active on social media up-to-date with our actions. The Gold Standard is not designed to compete with other taxi publications, as we did not sell advertisement space. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Cab Driver News, TAXI and the The Badge for promoting UTAG to their audience. The Gold Standard will be apolitical in an effort to finally bring unity to our great, but fragmented industry.

A vast number of drivers have asked "which suppliers are financially backing UTAG, as we wish to support those who are supporting us?" Due to the Judicial Review (JR), we were not previously in a position to release that information, but now that the JR is completed, we can openly thank the stakeholders who have made contributions.

The adverts in this issue have been offered to our stakeholders, free of charge, as a thank you for their backing. We are not in a position to disclose the exact amounts donated, but stakeholders who have donated £20,000 and above have full pages, with £5,000 being the minimum amount required to be given advertising space.

Whatever the size of donation, we applaud all contributors as, without their generous support, we couldn't have commenced the UTAG actions, starting with the JR against Westminster Magistrates Court.

In addition, we would like to extend a special thank you to the six stakeholders for their equal contribution to UTAG's original Legal Opinion:

Black Taxi Rentals, Cabvision, Colts Cabs, E1 Taxis, Lee Drinkwater (London Taxi Consultancy) and the United Cabbies Group.

Further, three suppliers have sponsored the following marketing collateral:

- The Gold Standard Magazine - A&S Garage, Hoddesdon
- Lanyards, pens, air fresheners, printing - Cabvision
- UTAG supersides - Colts Cabs

We would also like to thank CMT, HP Taxis and Sophisticats for their financial support.

It would be remiss if we didn't thank all the drivers who have backed us with their hard earned cash. Thank you to each and every one of you for your support, both financial and promotional.

We would also like to thank The LMCPA (London Motor Cab Proprietors Association) for matching the very large donations given by Cabvision, Colts, KPM, E1 Taxis, Ascotts and Taxiworld.

We hope you enjoy reading and find our publication informative. You can learn more about UTAG at www.UTAG.london. Any feedback is welcomed. Please share your thoughts at Utag@Utag.one or Twitter @UTAG17 by direct message.

Thank you,

United Trade Action Group

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A CHANGE IS OVERDUE

“

Throughout my career I have worked in a number of diverse industries, and I am confident in my belief that the taxi trade in London is like no other industry I know. Despite the myriad of recent challenges, it remains a fiercely proud, independent and charitable industry. Conversely, it suffers from being dysfunctional and apathetic; collectively a truly baffling mix that has no logical explanation.

Due to this eclectic mix, I often ponder whether drivers would be in a stronger position if the industry devolved from Transport For London towards a self regulatory regime. This would very likely entail drivers losing the self-employed mindset and to consider themselves part of a black taxi franchise. I strongly believe that a common set of standards, upheld via a self regulated taxi trade charter, would be hugely beneficial for the industry, as mutual ownership and commonality of service would have a positive economic impact.

Historically, I have tried and failed to discuss 'activist' ideas with other Stakeholders and Drivers' groups, who, for the most part, appear to be happy with the status quo, which I believe fails our industry. With no platform for Stakeholders to debate views and ideas, I decided to engage directly with Drivers via the London Taxi Drivers Forum (LTDF). I wanted to share ideas in an effort to canvas opinion, warts and all, and the only place I found that gave me access to drivers was the LTDF. After a baptism of fire, I found myself engaged in mostly sensible conversations with a small group of regular contributors who gave me a much better understanding of what Drivers were thinking. After all,

it is in Cabvision's interest to understand what our potential customer requirements are, where they saw shortcomings in supplier services and where they wanted improvement.

When Trevor Merralls and Angela Clarkson raised their concerns with me about the trade's long-term prospects and bemoaned the absence of a platform where Drivers and Stakeholders could engage, I knew something positive was about to happen. They went on to express deep concerns with TfL's divisive strategy. I was initially taken aback by the holistic view they had concluded i.e. that Stakeholders should be in a position to input at TfL lead meetings, as they would be, at the bare minimum, equally effected by any policy change. Due to their candidness, our conversation moved on to a very frank exchange of views, where Trevor took the opportunity to pitch their idea of a working collaboration between Drivers and Stakeholders. This was something I had craved for a number of years, therefore, I was naturally very interested in helping to develop the idea. It was from this ad hoc conversation that the Hoxton Meetings were arranged, which eventually led to the embryonic concept of United Trade Action Group ("UTAG").

"This for me, shows the level of anger throughout the trade."

Developing UTAG from an idea to a fully fledged legal entity was not an easy task, and I applaud all those involved in its inception for having the foresight and desire to implement and bring the UTAG movement to market. Most Stakeholders I know are apolitical, therefore, working collaboratively with two serving members of the United Cabbies Group ("UCG") initially felt asymmetric and was viewed as a potential barrier to any collaboration. However, after an hour or so of the first of a series of Hoxton meetings, it became clear that stakeholder reservations were misplaced. Angela and Trevor were very pragmatic and had a profound understanding of the problems that both sides were facing. This made it incredibly easy for the Stakeholders in the room to quickly agree to the UCG's request for assistance to help fund a legal opinion that would be designed to protect the trade's working practices.

A few short months following the initial meeting, incredibly, UTAG issued proceedings against Westminster Magistrates Court to challenge, via Judicial Review ("JR"), the decision of Judge Arbuthnot to grant Uber London Limited a 'probationary licence'. This legal action could not have commenced without Stakeholder support, as funding for this action needed to be pledged in advance and nobody at that point could even predict, let alone guarantee, the level of financial appetite from drivers. However, since the initial JR action, I am informed that driver support has significantly increased and more



contributions are being made from both sides of the trade every week. This for me, shows the level of anger throughout the trade and the recognition of the injustice that is being inflicted upon us.

Over the past seven months, UTAG has grown in status and has become an important entity within the trade. UTAG's dynamic growth is mainly due to the hard work of Angela and Trevor, as well as the Driver Advocacy Group who have worked tirelessly in their endeavours to sign up drivers. The difference about UTAG is that the 'movement' benefits from unilateral support and is uniting the trade (something I really didn't believe was possible), as well as having good professional representatives. At Cabvision, we maintain our apolitical view towards unions and driver organisations but are firmly behind the UTAG movement precisely because it is apolitical. We believe that this factor gives it a broader appeal to the rank and file drivers and makes it easier to support from a Stakeholders' perspective. Nobody more than me wants to avoid being drawn in to 'trade politics'.

UTAG is finally giving Drivers and Stakeholders a platform where we can work together to improve the long-term prospects of our industry. If you feel as we do, then we hope that you can join us in financially supporting UTAG, as together we are undoubtedly stronger. ”

Lee DaCosta

Managing Director, Cabvision Network Limited.



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UNITED TRADE ACTION GROUP (UTAG) LEGAL ACTION



Trevor Merralls
Director, UTAG



The United Trade Action Group (UTAG) has been created specifically to bring legal action against TfL, the regulator and Uber on behalf of a united taxi trade. UTAG believe that the KoL, the purpose built vehicle and Plying for Hire (P4H) are all intrinsically linked. Taxis are publicly hired, PH (Private Hire) are privately hired. Taxis work in the immediate hire market by allowing PH to enter the immediate hire market. It makes the two tier system no longer viable. TfL are aware of this. It's no coincidence that the KoL numbers are at an all-time low. Why would people invest years in doing the KoL to become a taxi driver, when you can apply to become a PH driver and be licensed in a number of weeks. TfL are also allowing PH to enter the immediate hire market (doing what we trained for) via an app. UTAG is a non-political collaboration, open to all of the taxi trade fraternity. This legal action is dedicated to protect our trade against current and future threats to our exclusive and historical rights.

The action already has significant support and the intention is now to bring our trade together. That's drivers and stakeholders alike - those whose business interests are intrinsically linked to the taxi trade. In simple terms, if we go down, the businesses go down with us. We're all in this together.

Other similar actions are exclusively seeking damages, but our action goes much further. This action will seek more than damages for any previous loss. It will seek to protect our trade from current and future threats to our exclusive right to ply for hire in London and which has been held for 360 years.

The UTAG legal action will be against Transport for London under multiple causes of action, including its failure to regulate the statutory regime.

Uber is under multiple causes of action, including economic torts and the interference of your exclusive right to ply for hire.

BACKGROUND & MISSION

Whilst many members of the taxi community hold strong views about who is ultimately responsible for the failures, UTAG has removed the need to speculate by gaining a legal opinion from a pre-eminent commercial QC. This help to clearly understand and define who has caused harm to the trade, taking action to preserve one of the oldest and most respected institutions in the world.

With the efforts of the UCG and five taxi business stakeholders, who worked collaboratively to finance the original advice, we now find ourselves in possession of the legal opinion confirms there are prosecutable actions, with a good chance of success. It feels good to know that as a trade we are correct. We now need to be vindicated by gaining a verdict.

For our action to be successful, we need UNIFIED TRADE ACTION to see the legal process through. Unity must be absolute. Just as the actions of TFL and Uber are attacks on all of us, the fight back must be from an army that is not divided or fractured. We have a duty to protect the future of the Black Taxi Trade as, without such action, our future is very grim.

We want future generations to know that what we do now, today, will change the course of history. We must fight back as one unified entity to defend our trade and more importantly, secure our right to exist now and the many years to come. We have a proud history and we must ensure that the iconic taxi is part of London's future. It's now incumbent on us all to put the same effort into defending our badge as we did attaining it. UTAG is asking you, the working cabbie, to sign up to giving £250 so we can begin this legal action. In the grand scheme of things, £250 to defend your livelihoods should not be insurmountable. After the Civil War in 1654, Oliver Cromwell set up the Fellowship of Master Hackney Carriages by Act of Parliament, and taxi driving became a profession. This makes the licensed taxi trade the oldest regulated public transport system in the world. That our heritage, our trade is facing the most difficult time in its illustrious history, it really is 'now or never'.



P4H

THE LONDON BLACK CAB SPECIAL STATUS

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"By virtue of their legal status, only black Cabs can ply for hire; they are subject to the role of 'compellability'; they must be recognisable and capable of conveying persons in wheelchairs, and their drivers must set the fares for their services by means of a taxi meter and have a particularly thorough knowledge of the city of London.

It follows that Black Cabs and minicabs are in factual and legal situations which are sufficiently distinct to permit the view that they are not comparable." – ECJ 2015.

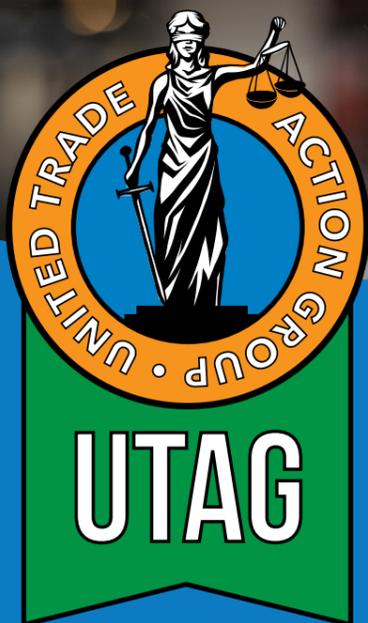
KEY:

CoF = Conditions of fitness

C&T = congestion and toxic charges

KoL = Knowledge of London

PBV = Purpose built vehicle the Hackney Carriage



WHO ARE UTAG?

UTAG is a unified collaboration between Drivers & Supplying stakeholders of the Taxi Trade.

WHAT ARE UTAG'S AIMS?

The aim of UTAG, through a series of legal actions, is to secure the long term future of the Taxi Trade.

UTAG SHALL COMMENCE ACTION – WE NEED REDRESS

In the coming months, UTAG aim to commence action against TFL for their failure to regulate the statutory regime. These are just a few examples of the regulator working against us and leading to the decimation of our 360 year old trade.

1. Their disregard for and erosion of the rights earned by us completing the Knowledge of London and agreeing to drive a designated vehicle.
2. Allowing Private Hire to ply for hire via smartphone technology aided by display of their availability.
3. By removing our ability to obtain a clean Euro 6 diesel engine vehicle.
4. Restricting our choice of new vehicles to one electric taxi whilst allowing private hire the choice of buying a wide range of new Euro 6 diesels until 2025.
5. Knowingly allowing the private hire industry to flout regulations over a sustained period.

DON'T LET APATHY KILL OUR TRADE. UNITE IN THE FIGHT.

Please join the fight and donate here. **It's now or never.**

WWW.UTAG.LONDON

UTAG is a reference to United Trade Action Group Ltd



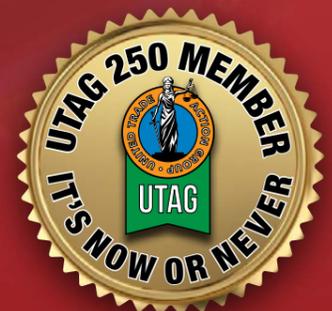
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CLARKSON

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“Take them (TfL) on now or be ruled by them forever, in any way they see fit, whether within the regulations or not.” (Robert Griffiths QC, May 8th, 2018). They were the parting words of UTAG’s QC at the end of our first meeting and are even more pertinent today.

Since that meeting at Pump Court, TfL, aided and abetted by the worst Mayor ever thrust upon us, has gone into overdrive to dismantle the rights we have earned, by virtue of completing the world’s most arduous and stringent test to become a licensed taxi driver, The Knowledge.

I totally understand that some drivers do not realise the scale of TfL’s involvement in the gradual deconstruction of our trade. In fact some have told our ranks teams that, “TfL have done nothing wrong” - so I shall try to make it clear what they stand accused of and why we must act now to protect our future.

When we signed up to the KoL we entered into a covenant, either implied or inferred, that certain rights would be granted to us in exchange for completing the world’s most arduous test to become a cabbie, agreeing to drive a prescribed vehicle subjected to very rigorous Conditions of Fitness standards, having our fares regulated and metered and meeting very high standards of ‘good character’. These are far higher than PH, despite TfL’s nonsense that we and PH have the same background checks, which is untrue.

Most importantly, the rights to Ply for Hire and to display our availability by virtue of the roof sign or, more recently, via display of our position on an app. To this day, it’s illegal for PH to do this, but TfL have decided to pretend that smartphone technology makes it a grey area. IT DOES NOT. Our rights are set in stone by Parliamentary Legislation and, until such time as the legislation is rescinded or changed, the law is on our side.

To simplify it, TfL are selling our inalienable and hard-earned rights for the princely sum of £300 to anyone who fancies playing Taxi. 106,000 PH are doing the very thing we trained so hard to achieve and they are done, dusted, licensed and plying for hire / displaying availability within 6 weeks of applying.

Why would anyone spend 3 years training when TfL will sell it to them within 6 weeks for £300? At the peak of PH applications, TfL were issuing a licence every 3 minutes 42 seconds. That their offices were open, based on a 40-hour week, it equates to 650 new PH each week. Let that figure sink in for a minute or two.

Some trade sages say the KoL needs reforming to make it easier and streamlined, that is rubbish. The K could be streamlined to 3 months, but all the while our rights can be replicated via an app within 6 weeks, people will always choose the latter. The Knowledge does not need streamlining or given Bronze, Silver and Gold stages, it needs to be worth doing. At present it is not, but UTAG will fight in court to restore its importance. Knowledge applications are at an all time low and with no new applicants our trade will wither and die. FACT. No one with a Green or Yellow badge will have a long-term employment cushion unless we act now.

TfL care nothing for adherence to the regulations or have any concern for public safety, in my opinion. And all the longer we allow this attitude to persist, the sooner we shall be consigned to history and Silicone Valley spivs will have the whip hand. In January 2016, I was in a meeting with the Cab Enforcement Unit (CEU) of the Met. The CEU is funded by TfL, their remit is to ensure we and PH are abiding by the regs and pose zero risk to the people who use us. On Jan 29th 2016, the then head of CEU handed Len Martin and myself a document containing mostly boring spreadsheets and graphs. About how many PH / taxi drivers their compliance officers has admonished for not wearing their ID or badges etc.

At the end of the document I found what I was after, the assault stats for Jan to Dec 2015. The figures were shocking in that PH assault complaints accounted for almost 99% of the total. Naturally, I wanted to publish the stats to alert people to the possible risks to personal safety by choosing cheap over us. The reply from the Head of CEU was, and I quote, *“Angie, you can publish anything from this document but do not release the assault figures.”*

I told her that this was unacceptable and surely the priority of CEU and TfL is to protect the public, to which she replied “TfL do not want to



put the public off using PH.” This is the extent to which TfL will go in order to cover up the facts. That is not acceptable behaviour from a neutral, unbiased regulator, however, we know TfL are neither neutral nor unbiased.

At the recent UTAG JR into Emma Arbuthnot’s granting of an imaginary provisional 15-month licence, Mr Kolvin (Uber’s QC) need not have attended court because Martin Chamberlain (TfL’s QC) agreed with everything he said and did Uber’s job for them. They are nowhere near neutral. My own view is they bend over backwards and forwards to accommodate any whim ULL desire.

At a Taxi Operational Performance Seminar on April 10th 2017, senior managers at TfL admitted two important things:

- 1) As far as they were aware, no one had ever witnessed the Uber app in ‘real time’ to see if the booking went directly to the driver; illegal under the 1998 Act.
- 2) They only took ULL’s word that the job was sent from the London office as the regs dictate. Uber said all is fine, TfL said ‘fair enough.’

I asked that these facts be added to the notes for publication as it showed lack of due diligence. Unsurprisingly the request was refused. There are a myriad of examples showing TfL’s bias against us, the most recent of which is our inability to purchase new Euro 6 vehicles, among the cleanest available, whilst PH can purchase new E6 until 2020; a full two years after we were banned.

Decommissioning has caused huge problems for those wishing to rent cabs, as there are none available. As I write this, 3650 cabs have been put in for decommissioning, roughly 18% of the fleet and, if the 12-year rule is forced upon us, the results will be even more catastrophic.

People refer to restoring a ‘level playing field’ - that is wrong. As far as playing fields are concerned, we are qualified to play at Wembley, but PH only make the grade for Hackney Marshes.

TfL fear unity more than anything else. For the first time ever, UTAG has achieved unity between the drivers and suppliers. This is a huge step forward and will be extremely advantageous to us, whilst at the same time, an anathema to TfL.

The GLA investigation found TfL to be ‘woefully inadequate,’ I say they are not even that good. If you back UTAG the most you stand to lose is what you have kindly donated, but if we win, the benefits will be priceless. With your help we can secure our future.

In closing, let me remind you of what Helen Chapman said to my friend and fellow UTAG founder, Trevor Merralls, when he questioned her about the glaring illegality of the Uber and other PH apps. She said as only someone with the smug assumption that it could never happen, “We hear what you say, if you don’t like it, take us to court.”

UTAG are offering you the golden opportunity to do just that and either way, win or lose, clarify the future of our unique trade. You sacrificed a lot to get your badge, please don’t relinquish it without a fight. This is our last chance to act!

Best wishes, be lucky and let’s do this together. ”



Angela Clarkson
Director, UTAG

“

It's amazing the parallels I've seen and experienced in the only two jobs or professions, call them what you will, that I have had since I left school. I was in and around a professional football environment for 25 years and I've been a black cab driver for sixteen years. I've seen at four clubs Chelsea, Millwall, Gillingham and Leyton Orient how to do it, how to spoil it and how not to do it. I came into the trade on Valentine's Day 2003 after being on the Topographical Knowledge of London for five and a half years.



ON REFLECTION

Within six weeks of being in the trade, like some of the clubs I have played for, I asked myself, "why is it so disorganised? Why is it so fragmented?" And because it was one of the ways it was spoiled at Chelsea, "why is it so complacent?" I know the numbers have varied and fluctuated over the decades, but I couldn't help thinking that, working on a basis of the trade being 20k strong, why wasn't a pot built up by the drivers and or a trade organisation?

In my opinion we should have been buying up vast swathes of London. In different buildings in different areas we should have had our own eateries, coffee shops, watering holes, hostels for the out-of-town boys to get their nut down and even a portfolio of hotels, travel agents, and insurance offices to turn the tables, as unpaid tax collectors, on those who govern us. Bursaries for our kids to go to private school, our own insurance cover, fleets owned by the trade, cheap servicing in garages owned by us, cheap tyres and cheaper fuel bought by the trade wholesale. I saw at football clubs that I played for, the exact same, some would say, apathy, lack of vision, fragmented, disenfranchised situations involving lazy institutionalised people. Particularly at my last club Leyton Orient. At Chelsea it went from visionaries like Dave Sexton and Eddie McCreadie to being a whisker away from administration.

Whether it's football, cab driving or any other job, as I was told during a forty five year martial arts career, "your biggest enemy is complacency." This is where over the years the trade has been let down by dishonourable men in a once revered and honourable profession by playing the high game, cherry picking and saying things like "Streatham is too far south. Crouch End is too far north. Acton is too far west. Walthamstow is too far east." Now the chickens have come home to roost, the same as it did in football at my four clubs. Chelsea took ten years to recover, Millwall had to change ownership, Gillingham never invested in their success, Leyton Orient are still suffering to this day and have only just climbed out of non-league after not listening to me 25 years ago behind the scenes.



Photography by Sam Coates Instagram @londoncabphotography

We are getting it from all sides. Fickle customers, a non-tax paying U.S corporation, sexual assault and rape app, mini cabs (including Uber) being licenced at a current ratio of six to one over black cabs, a self-appointed quango in TfL that has wasted billions in ruining London's cityscape, extortionate salaries, apathetic trade organisations and, in my opinion, the worst Mayor out of the three we've had the misfortune to have in London.

I believe in gathering intelligence and taking the fight to our adversaries as quickly as possible and with as much venom as they have used in striking at the heart of a trade that has been serving London since 1654. May I suggest you join me in becoming a UTAG 250 member so that we can fight back before it's too late and, at the same time, sue the so-called subsidised competition for loss of earnings? Thank you for taking the time to read this and may you all be lucky. ”

John Sitton

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“DON'T

Robert Griffiths QC and Stuart Jessop, both from Six Pump Court Chambers, recently represented the United Cabbies Group in its application for a Judicial Review of the decision made by District Judge Arbuthnot to grant Uber London a temporary licence as a transport operator. Robert and Stuart were instructed by Darren Rogers of Chiltern Law. The case was heard before the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Burnett and Mr Justice Supperstone. Although the application was dismissed, the case has generated a great deal of discussion as to the reasoning behind the Divisional Court's Judgment. The case has resulted in a substantial amount of support for the United Cabbies and UTAG's claim that Uber has been operating unlawfully in London. Your historic trade is under threat from less than consistent regulators and operators who flout the undefined plying for hire. Never before has your exclusive right to ply for hire been taken for granted by others and used as their right. This is unfair, unsustainable for you and actionable.

A series of commercial civil actions are planned by UTAG against Uber and Transport for London for damages. It is not the intention of this profile to consider the merits of that claim, other than to stress the importance of an action relating to matters of great public interest and the future of the black cab industry in London and in other major cities throughout the world. It seems that UTAG is leading the way and trying to protect the trade and doing all they can through legal actions. It's imperative that the trade supports these actions to ensure they are funded properly and given every chance to succeed.

BACK DOWN”

We believe we have very strong arguments and evidence to support the inconsistent approach taken by Transport for London to allow other operators to encroach on your exclusive right. We believe we have similar strength arguments to show that Uber has been allowed to get away with trampling over your exclusive right and how they continue to abuse their position and aren't fit and proper.

Robert Griffiths comes from Wales. His father, John, was Welsh speaking. His mother, Megan, aged 98, is of English and Scottish descent. She still lives in a little village called "Johnston" in Pembrokeshire where Robert went to the local Primary School, then to the local Grammar school and thereafter to St Edmund Hall, Oxford, where he was a scholar.

On his father's side, the Griffiths family come from a village, Heol Las, which is near the mining and steel town of Port Talbot. Robert's grandfather was a coal miner. The family are closely related to the Hopkins and Roberts family – singing and acting are in their blood. Two Oscars resulted; Silence of the Lambs (Hopkins) and Rachel Roberts, who was married to Rex Harrison, starred in one of the best sporting films ever made, This Sporting Life, where she co-starred with Richard Harris. This family background beckoned Robert to an acting and sporting career. But in the end it was the court room drama of Perry Mason that made him want to be an advocate.

This career nearly backfired when Robert was appearing before a testy Judge at Chelmsford Crown Court in the early days of his life as an advocate. When Robert was making an impassioned plea for an acquittal and too closely approached the jury, the Judge stopped him in his tracks, asking him rhetorically, "who do you think you are? Perry Mason?"

Robert has been variously described by The Times as "one of the biggest names at the Bar" and "one of the UK's leading commercial QCs" with an "ordered mind and razor tongue." He was called to the Bar in 1974 and appointed Queen's Counsel in 1993. He was appointed Senior Counsel in New South Wales in 1999. He is a Master of the Bench of Middle Temple. Before he joined Six Pump Court he had been joint head of Chambers at 4-5 Gray's Inn Square. He has been a member of the MCC Committee for almost 20 years and was the Chairman of the MCC Laws Committee for six years.

He has always felt drawn to cases in the cause of strong-minded and committed individuals. During his career he has represented some pretty forthright people; Muhammad Ali, Kerry Packer, Darrell Hair, Pete Townsend of The Who and most recently a pub landlord in Hampstead, Jimmy McGrath, in his case against Camden Council. He admires those who stand up for themselves and for others and do not back down. That explains why his favourite song is Tom Petty's "I won't back down" and in particular the words, "you can stand me up at the gates of hell, but I won't back down."

The song reflects the stand that United Cabbies and UTAG are taking against Uber. Petty wrote the song when he was involved in a case relating to a dispute over the ownership of the copyright to one of his songs. His argument was that he had the exclusive right to record and sing the song. He sent the recording of "I won't back down" to the other side, making his intentions abundantly clear. The case resulted in a favourable outcome for Petty.

Maybe that was the sentiment which attracted Robert to United Cabbies and UTAG in their attempt to protect their exclusive right to ply for hire in London. Don't back down.



Robert Griffiths QC





“As one of London's world famous taxi drivers, you could be giving a visitor to this city their first or last impression of London. Please make sure it's a good one.

When I was asked to write something for the UTAG magazine I sat back and thought what do I want to get across? First thing will have been mentioned many times in this magazine, the aims of UTAG. For me, we are in a monumental battle on many fronts at the moment and have been for many years. Laws not being upheld, competition buying their way into traditional black cab work, police seemingly too busy to uphold the law when it comes to things like the use of handheld devices. The list is endless. So I thought what does the future hold? I work at Heathrow Airport and the wait times are increasing. It doesn't matter if the amount of work goes up, this strangely makes matters worse as it makes Heathrow even more attractive to town drivers. With congestion, road closures and demos, who can blame any taxi driver for wanting a seemingly easier life queuing at Heathrow for a job?

In my old business we survived two potential moments when the business could have been wound up and liquidated. But it survived for more than 25 years and was sold early last year (2018). I did not cash in on the bonanza as I sold my shares 8 years earlier to become a taxi driver. But the key thing was we survived. We survived making bold decisions, fundamentally changing direction on certain things. It was painful, it went against the grain, but it was essential for our survival.

The taxi trade is at a crossroads. Competition, regardless of whether we believe it's legitimate or not, has made lots of people question our service. We need to up our game and do it quickly. All those drivers that say "well I only have a few years left in the trade then I am gone" please step aside. Allow those who will be trying to leave a trade still running when they retire in 20 or so years time, try to modernise their businesses and give them a chance to be creative.

The choices are these: Do nothing and allow market forces to dictate our future, or change from being a taxi driver focused business to a customer focused business. Let me say this, if we don't change I see the future like this: A lot of drivers clubbing together in small groups going the extra mile one way or another to retain small groups of customers. It would be better if we could do this collectively rather than in small groups. Without change, Heathrow will be a place only those that can afford to work it, will.

We are a premium product, the price reflects that, the service delivered needs to reflect that 100% of the time. One dirty cab, one dirty driver, one job not done to the best of our skills is enough to lose a customer. When that customer goes we all lose. Working practices have to change at Heathrow. Heathrow Airport have made it very clear that they want to reduce our footprint as well as private hire. They want to see less ranking up and more efficient journeys. Our jobs are getting smaller, whilst I still hear about roaders going up the M1 they are becoming less and less frequent. Crossrail (Elizabeth Line), when it eventually opens fully, will take some of the better jobs away from us. Let's not wait until that happens, let's plan for it now. As most reading this know, I was a rep for the LCDC. I stepped down from the role a couple of months ago, main reason is we are wasting our time asking for things (Heathrow and TfL). Don't expect the orgs to deliver solutions, they fundamentally don't have the skills to do so. I am not being bitter, I have a lot of respect for a lot of the reps of all the orgs and unions. They are just not capable of delivering what we need. Reps are taxi drivers and are not necessarily professionals in the fields we need them to be in.

Heathrow will give us nothing on a plate. They are being offered money by our competitors to chip away at our work. Why would they turn their nose up at that? Of course I would love a situation where Heathrow did stuff for the love of the trade, that is just not going to happen.

I would love to do a driver survey of tag holders. The last time I tried I got very little help from other reps, so I believe we are at the stage where drivers need to do stuff for themselves rather than expecting orgs to do it for us.

We need to look at every job as an opportunity. Before I hit the tunnel going from T2/T3, I have already asked most of my customers what they do for a living. It's not a hard sell, I am genuinely interested in all the different jobs people do and where they come from. I win a lot of return journeys, but importantly I win a lot of repeat custom. We can do so much more to retain business and it's not all about offering below the meter fares, it's also about service.

We all have to do our bit, to improve work levels, it's not someone else's responsibility.”

Alex White

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DAVID VERSUS GOLIATH



“

Well it feels like it's taken an eternity in coming, but finally a long overdue legal challenge to the injustices we've faced at the hands of TfL could be on its way.

Through no fault of the smaller, cash strapped orgs, TfL have revelled in being unchallenged. Our trade's judicial inactivity has granted TfL carte blanche to dictate and shrug off our grievances like a bullying Goliath that never feared reproach.

Never in their wildest dreams did TfL believe that the cab trade could unite and create enough financial muscle to be able to hold them accountable in a court of law.

However, like most things that TfL believe, they could not have been more wrong. Thanks to UTAG, David is limbering up to throw a very large boulder firmly in the direction of this wayward Goliath.

After years of filling in worthless consultations, years of lobbying disinterested politicians and years of waiting for our war chest to open, drivers are at last feeling positive at the possibility of justice being served.

And why shouldn't a court rule in our favour? Whether through gross incompetence or wilful neglect, TfL have sold off our jobs for the price of a private hire license. They have given away our hard-earned right to exclusively ply for hire, leaving the very future of our historic trade so precariously balanced that morale is weakened and the number of new applicants on the Knowledge of London has plummeted to an all

time low. Despite this, TfL don't seem to care if your green or yellow badge remains priceless or merely worth its scrap metal value.

I will never forget watching Peter Hendy smirking at City Hall whilst deludingly announcing that "The cab trade is thriving under TfL's leadership." Or my anger at hearing Leon Daniels state on live radio that "if cab drivers don't earn enough money, they should simply work more hours" at a time that I was already working all hours under the sun to put food on my family's table.

Hearing this sweat shop endorsement of a race to the bottom from a man that was earning 12 times my salary was particularly hard to stomach.

But with non-disclosure agreements signed and hefty golden handshakes received, some of TfL's management have moved on. But what has improved under the new regime? Roads continue

to be closed off to taxis at an alarming rate, the promised lobbying of Parliament to cap private hire numbers remains non-existent. In fact, the song lyrics "Meet the new boss... same as the old boss" seem very befitting of a regulator that is still in denial of any wrongdoing.

This is why it is essential that we all do our utmost to persuade colleagues, friends and family to support UTAG in the hope we can effect change and regain some of the hard-earned rights that we are entitled to. The immensely influential (and constant thorn in TfL's side) Bob Crow once said, "if you fight you won't always win but if you don't fight you will always lose." Those words will be echoed by everyone who has contributed to UTAG - because let's face it, in our current predicament, doing nothing is simply not an option. ”

John Lowe

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THE EURO TAXI TRADE SYNOPSIS

“

When I first joined the UCG committee, I was tasked by Len Martin to make contact with other European taxi organisations. At the time, things were easy enough to follow on twitter, it was more a matter of getting to the horse's mouth, to forge links. What followed was a semblance of a Euro Taxi Symposium, where meetings were held in Paris, Brussels and Barcelona. For what they were worth, they were often more like an AA meeting where each country told their story of how Uber had affected them.

From my observations, the most practical and proactive were the Italians and the Spanish, which still rings true today. The nature of the problem was different in each territory, the whole concept of minicab or private hire was indeed foreign. It's safe to say that the framework provided by the UK PH model has ended up being another British export, most unwelcome.

In France, the introduction of private hire or VTC, was the brainchild of Sarkozy, he had a particularly prickly relationship with the North Africans who make up a greater part of the taxi drivers in Paris. Taxi drivers in France are quasi civil servants, under the principle of being available for public hire, something that we never view to be the case in the UK. I actually think we are missing a trick here, what with our own status as being publicly hired in accordance with all the responsibilities and legislation in being so. The civil service still stands for something in France, although now a certain Monsieur Macron is wielding his axe in an attempt to mould the French economy to a more Anglo Saxon Thatcherite experience, hence the squeezing of many trades and vocations

and the uprisings of the Gilets Jaune. In the case of Italy, the modus operandi of Uber was heavily employed in leaning on legislators to establish their maligned. The Italian Unions were slow on the uptake and it was the taxi drivers themselves who sought remedy. The organisation of Soffokati was formed and lawyers employed to set about combatting the onslaught of Uber's designs on their market place. Yet again the concept of private hire was new and set up by the politicians as a parallel taxi fleet.

Spain has proved influential to the rest of Europe in its staunch defence of its taxi trade, as in other countries the drivers formed their own proactive units where their unions had failed them. The umbrella group is called ELITE, with regional chapters in the cities and provinces of Spain. Barcelona took the lead. As a region it has a politicised break away movement so the local politicians were keen to latch onto workers' movements if it meant rebelling against the central government in Madrid. Advocacy and strong legal cases severely clamped the establishment of Uber in the Spanish mainland. ELITE did not hesitate in fundraising and demonstrating with well orchestrated media campaigns. Private hire was the focus, not just Uber, as there is a big player in the Hispanic markets, globally linked to the Galileo tourist booking platform, which goes by the name of Cabify. They literally have first pick of everyone who has booked a flight or a hotel room on their system, giving them the first chance to sell them a cab ride as part of their travel package.

ELITE spawned chapters throughout Europe, especially in France and Belgium, the enthusiasm and level of professionalism proved inspiring. Although they were set up primarily as protest groups, their ability to politicise their arguments led to meetings with MEPs in the European Parliament, these are yet to prove fruitful. In a similar vein in the UK, the political route has been less productive. Brexit has held up everything in the House, which doesn't bode well for any speedy resolution through that particular route.

The formation of the United Trade Action Group as a brainchild of the UCG, has come about with a very different and interesting twist. After having exhausted political avenues, social media campaigns and on-street industrial action, the legal avenue has remained the elusive strategy. The traditional orgs and unions reach and power is severely limited, and their inability to look beyond their own fiefdoms naturally lead to the UTAG solution. An ingenious look at the situation from a pragmatic commercial standpoint, led to the partnering up with taxi trade stakeholders. This did not happen in Europe, as any car can be licenced and driven as a taxi. The very specific nature of the London Taxi Trade means specialist businesses are involved, with very specific interests in alignment with the cab drivers themselves.

Our European counterparts are far from being free of the PH onslaught, high unemployment in the EU zone beckons employment solutions for politicians more so than workers, and PH provides them on very unfavourable terms for any potential driver. Interestingly, the failure of PH or VTC in France has helped swell the numbers of applicants for the Paris taxi knowledge. All the same symptoms of undefined employee

status, no working rights or adherence to employment laws have been the downfall for anyone taking on the uncertainty sold as convenience and flexibility of Gig economy jobs throughout Europe.

Should UTAG be successful in their attempts to curb the illegal activities of plying for hire of PH firms and drivers in the UK, it will have ripple effects throughout Europe. The UK is Uber's prime market in the European territories and if they fall from grace here, they will inevitably go hunting elsewhere in Europe. They have already set their sights on Germany, who managed to nip any of Uber's ambition in the bud at a very early stage back in 2012. Uber's lobbying machine is currently greasing the German politicians palms, metaphorically or otherwise.

The UK is a far more advanced market where it comes to personalised public and private hire transportation than the rest of Europe. We have had PH since the sixties and Uber have been the conduit for establishment of such service throughout much of Europe. Their legislating has been on the hoof, whereas ours has been in existence but ignored and flouted with impunity. The success or otherwise of UTAG will have a massive pivotal effect on not only the UK market, but could provide precedence and clear structural basis for other European countries. The public and private hire aspect is the key to argument. Other European countries have not based their arguments on this. ”

Brian Garvey



FIGHT OR FLIGHT

A BUTTER'S PERSPECTIVE

“

In April 2013, I decided to embark upon The Knowledge, under no misapprehension of how difficult, time consuming and, at times, soul-destroying that long journey can be. If you are reading this, the chances are you know precisely what I mean. We've all got soaked, cold, broke down and gave up any meaningful social life for anything between 3 and 8 years, maybe even longer, to gain the coveted Green Badge and become part of the world's most admired taxi service.

When KoL examiner Mr Harvey gave me my Req in September 2016 he congratulated me and added, "The Knowledge is difficult for many reasons, among which is your absolute and unique right to Ply for Hire anywhere within the Metropolitan Police district. When someone wants a cab, they just stop you in the street. That's what the yellow light is for, it shows you are available for immediate hire. When the passenger gives you the destination, off you go, no map, no sat-nav because there's no need for either. They get in knowing you have that famous Knowledge. Mini cabs can never do what you are entitled to do and stop for a hail, it is totally the right of you and your licensed colleagues, you earned it and they (mini cabs) will never have the rights that you have."

Well it didn't take long before I had grave doubts. Not only about Mr Harvey's pep talk but also if I'd totally wasted three and a half years of my life. Today, nearly 3 years on from badge day, those doubts have become major worries for me. I'm not alone either. My so-called unique right to P4H doesn't seem unique at all, in fact its clear that TfL are selling my (and our) sole rights to anyone who fancies playing taxi for the nominal sum of £300.

What we worked so hard for is being undermined, ignored and sold on. Why would anyone now commit to 3 years plus to get a Green and Gold metal badge, when within 6 weeks they can have a bit of plastic that seems to instil in them everything we worked for. As far as mini cabs are concerned TfL say this; You want to P4H? No problem, crack on. You want to display your availability? Fill your boots You want to drive any vehicle you fancy? Feel free. You don't want the aggro of being banned from

buying a new Euro 6 diesel? That's fine by us, no worries until 2020 but even then, until 2023 feel free to buy one that's over 18 months old and not previously registered here as PH. OK by us. You want to plot up illegally in view of the public hoping they will approach you because of your little yellow roundel? Seems a great idea, please do. Oh, and don't worry that you are banned from Bank Junction etc. because we'll ban those pesky Black Cabs, too. While we are giving their rights to you we will throw in a huge rank at Heathrow for you and your untrained, unchecked, unruly mates at no extra cost. That'll be £300 please, but to help you recoup that, charge whatever you like. If it's raining, or sunny, or daytime, or nighttime use a multiplier to increase your fares; don't worry about the public, it's what they want. Have a good day and tell your mates to come and see us, with £300 quid naturally.

Scratch the very thin veneer of Khan's rhetoric about how he wants to help our trade and the above is exactly what you will see. Our special status, given to us by Parliament in the 1870's is being eroded day by day. Khan has now decided, on a whim, to remove us from the Mayor's Transport Strategy, consigning us to the same dustbin in which PH reside. Apparently, we are now privately hired and not, as we have been for 360 years, Publicly Hired. Deny it if you will, but do so at your peril.

The trade is in a parlous state, UTAG has striven to give us the chance to swim or sink. I have backed them to fight for my future, I hope you will back them to fight for yours. Whatever the outcome of this legal battle, you and I will know where we stand. Fight, or retrain? I've made my choice, over to you. Be very lucky.

James Baglin

”



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ROAD BLOCK

“

One of the biggest concerns to come to light recently, and something that directly affects our ability to Ply for Hire is the Taxi Trade's exclusion from 'continued highway priority' within the Mayor's Transport Strategy (MTS) published in 2018.

In fact, there isn't anything contained within the two pages dedicated to taxis - out of an extensive 322 page document - that says we should be allowed access to ANY of the road network. An example of this punitive policy in action is our exclusion from Bank Junction and Tottenham Court Road. And if you're thinking both of those are the responsibility of Camden Council and the City of London respectively, you'd be right. The Local Authorities are under obligation to follow the MTS within their own Local Implementation Plans.

If that wasn't bad enough... several times throughout the document (and it hardly makes bedtime reading) taxis are aligned alongside private hire vehicles and cars driven for personal use. In one section, the MTS claims that nearly 40% of trips in London are made by using a car, TAXI or private hire vehicle (PHV), all of which involve a minimal amount of activity, whereas cycling and public transport journeys involve significantly more activity. How they can determine someone's physical fitness from this is anybody's guess?

Bus services are also prioritised within the Strategy to ensure they 'remain reliable' and the right to review the hours of operation to include evenings and weekends has been reserved. The policy, however, stops short of specifying what a 'key route' is. But judging by its context, we can reliably interpret it as meaning any road in London that they identify as a 'key route'. No doubt this will be used to propose policies to remove taxis under the premise of ensuring their buses 'remain reliable'. To be clear, we can be excluded from any road, street, bus lane, zone, or area that TfL chooses. Examples of this are the south side of Portman Square (already implemented) and Bloomsbury Way (yet to be implemented).

We should all take issue with this, no thought has been given to breaching a wide array of discrimination orders, not least those needing access to a door-to-door service. The exclusion of which forces the taxi driver to use routes that are more costly and time-inefficient. Similarly, the 'collaboration' with the local authorities to restrict taxi access to certain areas negates the rule of compellability and compromises many of the benefits of using a taxi.

The exclusion from the MTS and recent protests called by the ITA have prompted a response from certain local councillors, especially those who've been eager to jump on the environmental issue. The latest opinion came courtesy of Feryal Clark, a Labour councillor for Hoxton East and Shoreditch, when she posted a tweet stating, although she "loves" using taxis, unrestricted access to black cabs is "not a human right."

Ms Clark's tweet added that she 'does not understand why cab drivers think they should be allowed to pollute our lungs and be allowed to cause danger to the most vulnerable on our roads' (sic).

I'm sure I'm not the only one to find this ignorant statement infuriating. Not least because taxis are factually the safest transport option available, but because Ms Clark hasn't even considered putting in provisions for those who are physically

or emotionally incapable of furthering their journey on foot. Is she so self-absorbed that she hasn't even contemplated her policies from the perspective of those she claims to be concerned about?

I'm even more puzzled by Ms Clarke's comment regarding access to black cabs not being a 'human right', after all, it's not the driver who's late for his appointment, check-up or flight, it's not the driver who's taking his sister/daughter/loved one out for their birthday, it's not the driver who's doing his mom's shopping for her during his lunch break, and it's not the driver who's struggling because he/she is elderly, anxious or disabled. So it's not the human rights of the driver that's being impinged but the basic needs of 'the most vulnerable' in society... and that can apply to every one of us, at any given time.

Unless you've been in hiding for a couple of years, you would have noticed that there is an agenda to scale up the environmental damage caused by taxis - and pollution in general - and many of the adherents have, over the years, been drawn into local politics. Why is there no mention by our local councillors with regard to the positive contribution that cabbies have made to the Mayors Clean Air Plan by complying with varying EU 'emission' Strategies, undergoing stringent smoke tests twice a year, and ultimately, moving towards a zero emissions taxi fleet. I can only conclude that their collective, flawed reasoning has more to do with consensus amongst mates as opposed to information gained from credible sources.

It'd be interesting to know who Councillor Ms Clark (amongst others) takes advice from, or if any of her colleagues are (or have been) licensed taxi drivers? It would also be interesting to know how many of her colleagues are avid cyclists? It's a poignant question to consider; who are our policy makers being influenced by and when does politics mutate into personal agendas?

The issue is a very serious one - not least for us - as the local authorities are overly keen to exercise their dislike for the cab trade and implement policies that restrict access to certain routes. However, there is one glaring oversight; applying these restrictions contradicts guidelines set out in the Dept. of Transport's (DoT) most recent Inclusive Transport Strategy (ITS). The document supersedes the MTS and emphasises that every

journey should be considered door-to-door, so consistency of expectation, experience, and accessibility for all should be of primary importance.

Even though the ITS focuses on making travel easier for disabled people, many of the improvements also benefit other travellers. Chapter one, sets out the Government's ambition for disabled people to have the same access to transport as everyone else, and to be able to travel confidently, easily and without extra cost. As it stands, taxis are currently the only mode of transport that offers a door-to-door service, offering equal access for disabled people, with added facilities for the hearing & sight impaired, with assistance if required. It is easy to apply this same policy to the infirm, those with heavy shopping or luggage or those who are late for an appointment, etc.

When a member of the public hires the service of a taxi driver, they do so for a number of reasons, one of them being the safety that comes with a service that provides door-to-door transportation. Only, I'm now expected to tell my passenger to alight prior to reaching their destination. There have been no guidelines on how to go about this, no concessions for the disabled, and even if there was, some disabilities aren't always noticeable, so it is not for me to determine if someone has a disability or not.

The local authorities seem to have forgotten the we deliver a service that is quite distinct from other modes of public transport, a service that has been formulated over the years to cater for everyone. Why do our councillors now think the liberty of the individual should be thrown out with the garbage?

It is crucial that the requirements that are clearly laid out in the DoT's Inclusive Policy are reflected within the MTS, to ensure that taxis have full access to the entire road network and are also included in all future traffic modelling proposals by TfL and the local authorities. As far as TfL's secondary legislation goes, the Inclusive Transport Strategy shouldn't even be up for debate, protected groups need to be afforded the same ease of access and be able to be picked up or dropped off at a location that is convenient to them. If all else fails, UTAG should go some way to redressing the balance in our favour.

Sean Paul Day

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*“Who are our
policymakers being
influenced by?”*

A VIEW FROM THE REAR SEAT

“

I don't know if there's such a thing as a typical black cab customer, I'm sure everyone is different, but I've been asked to write about why I use black cabs and why I support the trade. So this is just my personal perspective.

I first came to London in 1978, a young Welshman, via a few years in Stoke, who'd seized the 60s/70s opportunities for social mobility to move from a Wrexham council estate, via a grammar school, to a university degree in English Lit and a trainee job with Deloitte.

I'd taken a drop in pay from my summer job as a dustman in (appropriately) Staines. I was obviously aware of black cabs, but on my £42 a week take home pay, I could barely afford to eat. As I saw well-dressed gentlemen and their elegant ladies hailing cabs home without a care in the world, I used to think, "one day!" as I shuffled off to the Tube in my Mister Byrite pinstripe.

Things changed fast as we entered the 80s and before very long I was an Armani-clad City dealer, doing well and with a serious black cab habit. Well, as serious as it could be given that I lived in Greenwich and my pushers (or was it mushers?) often said "nah, mate, I ain't goin' sarf..."

It was an age of conspicuous consumption. Greed was good and lunch was for wimps. We worked hard, we played harder and black cabs were our transport of choice... fast, convenient, prestigious and a bit expensive. I suppose they defined the lifestyle we had aspired to and were delighted to have achieved.

My relationship with the cab trade changed with the Millennium. In December 1999, a single man again, I moved into my house just off Gibson Square in Islington.

Not only was this close enough to the City to justify my taking cabs both to AND from Deutsche Bank, but I very soon realised that saying "Gibson Square please" at the end of a long day guaranteed a stream of anecdotes about The Knowledge. From then on I enjoyed thousands of entertaining chats with drivers as they gleefully recounted their treatment at the hands of Mr Ormes, Mr Wilkins and the rest of the Penton Inquisition.

In 2011, I was getting ready to take the early retirement I had always promised myself, when the telephone rang, and one of my previous co-directors of the King's Head Theatre charity asked if I'd be interested in reforming that Board and buying a West End theatre. It seemed an ideal opportunity to move smoothly from City to West End, from Finance to the Arts, and from being a heartless banker to a sensitive luvvie.

So a year or so later I was in the back of a black cab, chatting to the driver about shows we were thinking of producing, and he said "you want to do a stage version of that "The Knowledge film!" which got me thinking. I sent off to Amazon for the DVD and sat down to watch it. I wasn't optimistic. I'd seen the film in 1979 when it came out and I remembered how funny it had been, but I also recalled lots of scenes of cabs driving about, which is a bit tricky to portray on a stage!

But I watched it, then watched it again, and realised that the film isn't about driving at all, it's about the people. The film deals with the Knowledge boys' relationships with their partners, with each other, and with the God/headmaster/father figure of Mr Burgess the examiner. It's a tale of family, camaraderie and having the determination to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles in life to build a better future.

So began a three-year journey to get The Knowledge onto the stage. We had to get in touch with Maureen Lipman, the widow of writer Jack Rosenthal, to obtain the stage rights, we then asked Maureen if she would direct the show, she eagerly agreed, and we were off!

I learned a lot more about the cab trade over those three years. I and Simon Block, the writer/adaptor, spent hours talking to current examiners and even sitting in on genuine Appearances (thanks to Ma'am Chennells and Mr Thomas). I tracked down Mr Ormes and spent a pleasant afternoon hearing him reminisce - such a nice man!

As we finally entered rehearsals I was asked to do an interview by London Taxi Radio. They'd spoken to Maureen the week previously, so presumably laboured under the misapprehension that I'd be as entertaining as the award-winning comic actress/writer that is Miss Lipman!

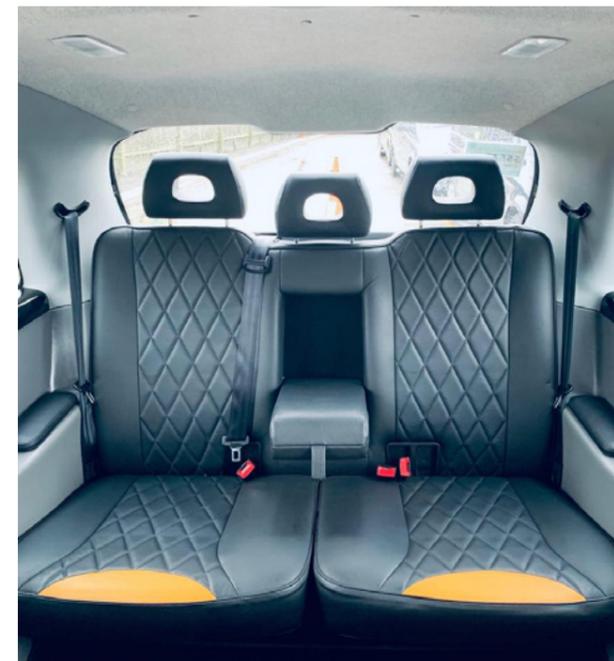
I think it was Jon Cox (@ParkerCabbie) who picked me up in his cab to take me to Brewery Road, where he manned the camera while Joe Cartwright (@theholborncab) interviewed me, including demanding that I called over the route from Manor House to Gibson Square!

Jon and Joe both live in Islington like me, so we subsequently became friends, worked on musical projects together (remember "Fairytale of London" at Christmas?) and are releasing our debut single: "We Are London" this summer. It's never too late!

And what do we call ourselves? That was easy, we're "The Knowledge!"

The Knowledge show went well. My naivety regarding cab trade politics was starkly revealed when I put Steve MacNamara virtually next door to Jim Thomas on the Press Night, presumably thinking they'd have a lot to talk about. That night I also had the pleasure of introducing Ma'am Chennells (the current chief examiner) to the legendary Mr Ormes, she actually seemed quite nervous!

So that's how I got to know the cab trade. A long period of being a regular user, then a close association during my theatre show which led to my becoming a keen supporter.



"I believe that Black Cabs are one of the things that make London special."

I believe that black cabs are one of the things that make London special. London, as Jon, Joe and I vividly express in our song (available on iTunes, Spotify etc. from late July!) is the world's greatest city and it deserves the world's finest cabbies.

I believe that TfL made fundamental mistakes in licensing Uber when their app did not comply with the laws on plying for hire. While I am a committed capitalist, I don't believe in totally unrestricted free enterprise. The public and workers need to be protected from extreme behaviour by ruthless corporations in pursuit of every last cent of profit.

That said, I believe in the future of black cabs in London. The increase in down market competition means the trade may need to brand themselves more explicitly as a premium "affordable luxury" product aimed at business people, well-off visitors and their traditional clientele of affluent Londoners. As always, the enemy of progress in that direction lies within. The customers are doing you a favour by using your services, not the other way round. Every scruffy, impolite driver in a dirty cab damages the trade every day. It doesn't take many of them to undo the good done by the vast majority who offer a superb service. And please be careful what you post on social media... you really don't want to give the competition open goals to aim at!

Uber are facing a number of headwinds: fundamental unprofitability, employment law issues that potentially increase costs, potential VAT on their fares etc. etc. I welcome UTAG's initiative to hold both TfL and Uber to account. That's why I was one of the early non-cabbie subscribers to UTAG and why I staged the "Taxis Show Talent" event to support their cause...

...well, that and the chance to premiere "We Are London" live on stage with my cabbie mates! So I wish "break a leg" to UTAG, to the 'Gold Standard' and to the whole cab trade going forward.

Vaughan Williams

Like a lot of people, the week is almost empty without football. But before getting enthusiastically into the new season, it might be an idea to do a summary of the season literally just gone, as I write. Whilst it's fresh in my mind, I think it's best to start at the end and work my way backwards, beginning with the two supposed show piece finals – the Champions League and FA Cup final. There were a lot of similarities in the respect that I thought both Spurs and Watford were disappointing, naive, unimaginative and as a glaringly obvious consequence, not very competitive. Before people start screaming from the cockpit of their cab about Spurs dominating possession, all I'll say without looking at it again, is the possession was in areas that did no damage to Liverpool with quite possibly the Spurs centre backs having more touches than anyone else. One of the main talking points after a limp, lacklustre performance by Spurs was whether or not Harry Kane should have played. I thought he looked no less sharp or match fit than anyone else in my opinion. Perhaps the three week gap between the end of our league season and this poor spectacle proved too long. As an ex-player, I can tell you that you can lose a lot in three weeks. Sharpness, decision making, general fitness, touch, technique, awareness, etc. etc. I thought the whole thing was an anti-climax.



FROM THE DUG OUT

Likewise, Watford's diabolical capitulation v Man City. Like Spurs, I thought their formation and game plan was a let-down, poorly thought through and as I've said, unimaginative. I've been at a stage for a long time now whereby I think Spurs might now implode with players wanting to leave and the Manager and his coaching staff a bit of a myth.

One of my old clubs, Chelsea, continues to be a basket case but has somehow managed to qualify for the ECL, contest the League Cup final and win the Europa League. I think there might now be massive upheaval. Cahill has already left, Hazard will probably follow him out the door, the Manager wants to return to Italy and the squad needs a massive overhaul. The problem is there is a massive transfer embargo. So it will be an interesting situation to say the least, seeing what develops.

Arsenal have done ok under Emery but I can't help thinking the same problems remain: there are too many players not of Arsenal quality! West Ham in my opinion seem to have a culture problem that affects the players, the politest way of putting it is to say they are inconsistent. If I was feeling more brutal I'd go as far as saying some of the personnel are cheats. As someone who was up for every training

session and every game, I fail to see how West Ham can get up for big games and lose games that, on form, they should win. So we've spoken about Spurs, Arsenal (who both need to spend a lot of money) Chelsea (who can't spend any money), West Ham who, whether they can spend or not, are at best inconsistent which leaves Fulham who, as I predicted, were relegated off the back of one of the worst sequences of not picking up points in the history of the Premier League. They spent in excess of one hundred million, a problem and an amount of money that I might well have donated a body part to have during my time at Leyton Orient. After all, it's a lot better than having to do six jobs and save a club from liquidation. In football, like life, I'd rather have problems with money than problems without money.

In closing, I thought Fulham bought too many players at once which makes it harder, especially if they have no Premier League experience apart from one or two to bed them in and get them up and running. I like UK clubs to do well in Europe and London clubs to do well in the Premier League. We need to do far better and try and go for it, unlike Spurs in their Champions League final. If not, it will be another two horse race and we're in danger of being the new Scotland.

Be lucky and be safe ”

John Sitton



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