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Trade News

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Cab Section

THE CAMPAIGNING PAPER FOR THE LICENSED TAXI TRADE

APRIL 2011



LESS THAN 500 DAYS TO GO!

By **MIKE HEDGES**

There are now less than 500 days to go to the start of the Olympic Games opening ceremony followed by the Paralympics, provided of course that the countdown clock actually works.

There have been many rumours about transport at the Olympics that it is time to get the facts straight. It is worth just looking at some of the numbers involved to get a feel for how big the Olympics will be. There will be 7.7 million tickets sold for the Olympic Games and 1.4 million for the Paralympics Games with a 4 billion global audience.

Most people think of the Games taking place at Stratford, but there are numerous other venues across London and the rest of the country. The main focus will be the Olympic Park in Stratford, but there are the River Zone, Central Zone and outer Zone, just in London alone, without adding the football Mountain biking, road cycling, canoeing and Yachting. AS well as the venues there will be a large screen erected in Hyde Park to cater for 50,000 spectators.

The River Zone will comprise the venues at Excel, Greenwich Park, North Greenwich Arena (O2) and the Royal Artillery Barracks. The Central Zone comprises venues at Hyde Park, Earls Court, Horse Guards Parade and Lords Cricket Ground. The Outer London area consists of Wembley Arena and Stadium, Wimbledon and Eton Dorney. At all of these venues there will be a constant flow of spectators throughout the day and night on almost all days of the Olympics.

The Olympics will start with the football on 25 July, with the Opening Ceremony on Friday 27 July when the Games officially starts. The closing ceremony will be on Friday 12 August



with the Paralympics running from 29 August to 9 September. During this time London and the venue areas will be transformed. But how will it affect us as taxi drivers. Certainly London will be the focus of the world but how will London and the other areas cope with the demand for Transport over the Games period.

There will be a dedicated Olympic Route Network (ORN) that will be reserved for official London Olympic Games Organising Committee (LOGAC) vehicles. Taxis, Addison Lee or any other Private Hire vehicles will not be allowed to travel in the ORN roads during their operation. The vehicles using the ORN will be about 4,000 vehicles being used to transport the Olympic Family, athletes and team officials and the media. None of these vehicles will be supplied by any

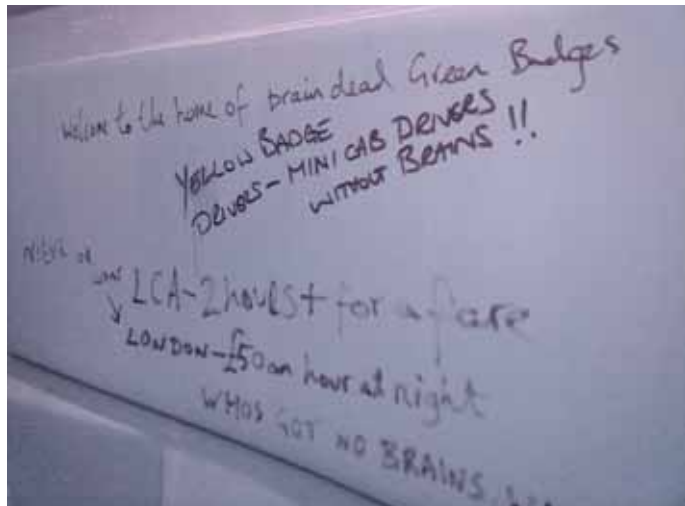
private hire company. The vehicles will be supplied by Mercedes and driven, for nothing, by volunteer drivers selected by LOGAC. These vehicles will also travel along specific routes and will not be available for general booking.

Unite, along with other transport unions, are currently working on the transport arrangements for the Games. The logistics of transferring so many spectators throughout London to all the venues cannot be underestimated. It is an immense operation, that when it goes wrong has disastrous consequences. The worrying aspect is the lack of progress that we are currently experiencing. There is a taxi working group that has been set up. But so far there are no concrete plans for ranks, Games information and expected traffic levels. One thing is

certain that private hire will not be allowed to ply for hire during the Olympics nor will they be allowed to rank at any of the venues. Unite Cab Section are intent on finding out the effects the ORN and the number of spectators will have on traffic levels and demands for transport. We will also be making sure that there are plenty of rank spaces at all the venues with clear access throughout the day. This is going to be an on-going process that will speed up as we approach the Opening Ceremony. We will be working hard to insure that nothing is left to chance or rushed. We are assured by the ODA and LOGAC that they will plan well ahead. We will hold them to that in our regular meetings and keep the progress well reported in future editions of Cab Trade News.

IDENTIFIERS!

By **JIM KELLY**



UNITE has been informed that a provisional date for the introduction of taxi identifiers has been set. The former PCO, now the rebranded LTPH, has scheduled late April as the start-up date. The new signage has been agreed.

The main points are:

- A clear colour code differentiating between green and yellow badge holders
- Suburban licence holders will have their sectors named
- The identifiers will be placed in the front and rear windscreens
- The individual drivers badge number will also be on display

UNITE has stated that, on a matter of principle, these proposals are unnecessary. UNITE has felt that the identifiers had the potential to divide our trade at a time when we needed to stand together. While the clear majority of all London licence holders appear to support the proposals, on the basis that suburban drivers have been working out of area, UNITE has seen no cast-iron evidence to

totally support this. Most suburban drivers play by the rules.

The issue of some radio circuits allowing suburban drivers to pick up work outside their areas has not been dealt with by the Identifier proposal. UNITE'S view is that this is illegal and that LTPH should be taking action to ensure that taxi legislation is upheld when it comes to radio work.

A new development which has been reported by UNITE members recently at City Airport, is anti-Green or Yellow Badge graffiti and hostile comments by both Suburban and All London Badge holders. This is precisely what UNITE had predicted. It is hoped that this is just a very small development that will be quickly stamped out and that all licensed taxi drivers will stand together when there are many bigger threats to our trade. Green and Yellow badge holders have successfully worked City Airport since it was opened and have kept the Private Hire trade out to a great extent.

UNITE will be meeting LTPH to further discuss what disciplinary measures LTPH propose to introduce alongside the new signage.

WESTMINSTER COUNCIL IS TO CLAMP DOWN ON ILLEGAL MINICABS IN THE WEST END



Parking bosses will use new powers to stop unlicensed minicabs from blocking the city's streets and touting for trade by issuing tickets to drivers, even if they have driven away.



Currently if motorists leave before a ticket has been placed on their windscreen the ticket has to be cancelled. However, new powers mean parking attendants can now issue a ticket and send it to drivers in the mail.

This new type of enforcement will be used in known trouble spots to combat unlicensed cabs from simply driving around the block when being asked to move on.

It is also hoped the new powers will tackle the problem of licensed private hire minicabs waiting at the kerbside for a customer until they see a ticket being issued, and then drive away before it is placed on the windscreen.

Private Hire vehicle drivers are only allowed to pick up people who have pre-booked fares. Any minicab that is not booked through a licensed minicab operator is illegal, uninsured for carrying passengers and potentially dangerous.

The council began using 'vehicle drive away' enforcement at the end of January and issued Warning Notices for two weeks before sending out any parking tickets. The council issues an average of 14 tickets per day using this enforcement.

Cllr Lee Rowley, (right) Westminster council's cabinet member for parking, said: "This move will be an important step in helping us to further combat the problem of people using illegal mini cabs, which unfortunately could result in serious consequences for unsuspecting passengers.

"It will also help to stop the cat and mouse game that our parking wardens face when private hire drivers flout parking controls and appear to be touting for business."

The move has received support from the three main organisations representing the taxi trade, including the Licensed Taxi

Drivers' Association (LTDA), London Cab Drivers Club (LCDC) and UNITE, who in recent years have called on the council to work to stop taxi touts.

Bob Oddy, general secretary of the LTDA said: "We have long campaigned for tougher regulations around the problems of licensed private hire vehicles touting for business and the danger of illegal mini cabs coming into the city looking for opportunist night time trade and I'm happy to see Westminster council introducing these new measures."

This new type of enforcement has already been effective in reducing high levels of illegal minicab activity in the Haymarket area of Westminster, where the threat of a parking ticket has been seen to deter illegal parking and made it easier for parking wardens to move vehicles on immediately.

When issuing a ticket parking attendants are still required to take a picture of vehicle and record the vehicle's make, model and tax disc details.



Councillor Lee Rowley, Westminster council's cabinet member for parking.

CONTRACT WIN

Manganese Bronze - Press Release

Manganese Bronze Holdings PLC (Manganese Bronze or the Group), the leading manufacturer of the distinctive London Taxi, today announces that it has won a substantial order for London Taxis from the Republic of Azerbaijan.

A new private company, the Baku Taxi Company, has been established to develop a programme originally announced by the Transport Ministry of Azerbaijan to update the taxi fleet in the capital with the Group's TX4 London Taxis.

The agreement for 1,000 London taxis in 2011, to be supplied by Shanghai LTI (SLTI), the Group's joint venture with Chinese car manufacturer Geely Auto-mobile Holdings Limited (Geely), is the single largest contract the Group has received for its London Taxi. The first

shipment of 100 vehicles is scheduled for the end of April. The balance of the order is expected to be built and shipped by the end of November 2011. The total value of the order is around \$27 million.

International interest in the Shanghai-built TX4 has increased in the first two months of 2011. In addition to the order from Azerbaijan, 180 vehicles have been ordered from a number of markets including France, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Italy. International sales of the Shanghai-built TX4 were 226 in 2010.

John Russell, Chief Executive of Manganese Bronze, said: "We are delighted to win this order which is the culmination of considerable effort by the teams in Manganese Bronze and SLTI. The order demonstrates the potential of our partnership with Geely and the appeal of the London Taxi worldwide."

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CTN

Comment

PROTEST

By FRANK HULL

In these hard financial times, various agencies are looking at the taxi trade as one source that will help ease some of their financial problems. We are not surprised; we have had it all before. The answer is not to give in and meekly accept what is demanded unreasonably from us.

The Guilford taxi trade has been successful in its complaints to the audit commission about the Council's attitude in implementing licence fee rises. The cost of actually licensing a local taxi trade must be reflected in the licence fees, which must be to cover the cost rather than for making a profit. After all, a licensing office is not a business subject to the whims of market forces. Now, because of Guilford's failure to observe taxi law on licensing fees it has had to refund many thousands of pounds to licence holders.

We congratulate the Guilford taxi trade on its success just as we congratulated the Uttlesford taxi trade on a similar success last year. We cannot help but wonder how many other areas in the country have cocked up on this issue.

Another local taxi trade undergoing financial problems is Bishop's Stortford, where the station rank owned by National Express is going to be sublet to the local taxi firm Omega Taxis. This firm is going to increase the station rank permit from £800 to £6,000 per annum. The trade has had a 2-day strike and protest rally that has been featured on Anglia TV.

Whilst we wish the Stortford trade well in this battle, we can't help but cast our mind back to the days of this union's free and open access campaign. If only the Stortford taxi trade had joined us at the time, perhaps it would not have had to undertake this current protest. Alas, like some other local taxi trades, they did not support us!

It is obvious that the taxi trade in this country is undergoing changes that are being placed on it by outside forces. There are many in this country that refuse to accept the difference between the taxi and private hire trades and would prefer it was a one tier trade.

That is probably the reason why no real effort is being put into stopping the bare-faced touting that is rife even in London. If things proceed as they are the average taxi driver will ignore this blatant infringement of the taxi trade and that will be a further step towards that one tier trade.

The Government has announced that a £20,000 fine will be imposed on those who tout tickets for the 2012 Olympics. If anyone is serious about ridding London of the taxi tout why then can't heavy fines be imposed for taxi touting now? This, we are sure, would help protect many visitors to those games.

Why not UNITE with us to put forward the case for the taxi trade in this country.

Frank Hull is a UNITE Cab Trade Committee Member.

HARLOW

By CTN REPORTER

The Harlow Licensing Committee sensibly turned down a proposal from the conservative group to allow the local taxi fares to be regulated by market forces instead of regulation by the council. No member of the taxi trade or taxi user had requested any change to the method of council regulation that for over fifty years has protected the taxi users of Harlow.

At the same meeting the trade's agreement to phase in the condition that all taxis will reach Euro emission standard three over a period of three years was agreed. However, one conservative councillor wanted it phased in over two years.












UTTLESFORD

By CTN REPORTER

Uttlesford Council has licensed its first smart car to be worked as a private hire vehicle.

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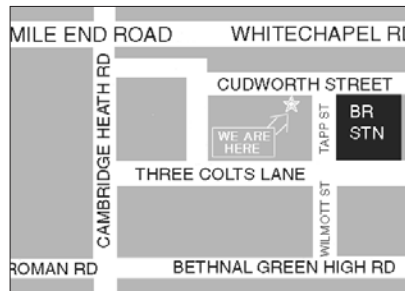
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London-WIDE

By **PETER J ROSE**
Secretary UNITE Cab Section, London Branch

SOME GOOD NEWS AT LAST?



The situation at Abacus in Cornhill has for ages now been one of utter frustration. We've had a taxi rank placed in totally the wrong location, been told that parking enforcement can't happen because cameras can't see at night.

We've been told that the City of London can't send parking enforcement officers (real people) down to the venue because they get threatened. We've been informed that we can't have a rank outside the door because of traffic regulations, so the taxi trade responds' "what about the minicabs parked outside? Are they not in contravention of traffic regulations, shouldn't they be moved on"? "Please refer to our previous answers", is what always comes back. Now at last something positive, looks to have been done - Abacus has been read the riot act!

As UNITE Cab Section Committee member Peter Bond explains in his Compliance report on page eleven, this action was announced at a meeting with the recognised driver trade bodies UNITE, LCDC & LTDA and follows many months of complaining and a taxi demonstration at Bank Junction called by the LCDC for March 30th, which UNITE is supporting.

The final straw was placed when the minicab drivers presumably on the instruction of their operator, started to wear high-viz jackets while milling about outside the door of the club. Peter informed me of what was happening, so the following night I paid a visit to see if anything had changed.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that: The drivers were out of their hi-viz, the minicabs were parked way down the street beyond – not on the new taxi rank and there was no sign of a Clipboard Johnnie.

Only one minicab was outside Abacus, presumably waiting for a pre-booked job.

All good stuff you might say? Put that together with the Westminster Council story regarding parking enforcement on page two and things look to be on the up for the London taxi trade.

However we should not lose sight of the fact that Abacus is only the tip of one very large iceberg and a lot more needs to be done. It is clear and been said many times that Satellite minicab offices are out of control and uncontrollable, which is why UNITE in our response to TfL's private hire consultation made it very clear that minicab offices should not be licensed in third party venues. This would eliminate the Satellite minicab office and their requisite Clipboard Johnny. Further to that UNITE has also said that everyone employed by a private hire operator that comes into contact with the public should have a Criminal Records Check.

Interestingly this will be a requirement for the Olympic Volunteers. So the public can feel safe in the knowledge that while they are at the games they are being looked after by proven fit and proper persons but after an evening out at their chosen night-time venue, they may not be able to feel so confident because the person holding the clipboard outside, directing them to a waiting minicab, under present conditions, will not have been subject to the same scrutiny.

Following many articles and an informal visit by me and the deputy director of LTPH, it looks like the situation at a certain nightclub in South Woodford is finally being taken seriously.

I have been informed that the venue has been built in to enforcement's deployment plans over the next few weeks and a TfL/Met police site visit is also in the pipeline within the next month. The deputy director has also informed me that LTPH are contacting Redbridge Council to bring them into the mix for rank allocation.

If a rank can be achieved it will bring a much needed source of revenue to local London taxi drivers in the area, which in this time of downturn and austerity, is much needed.

Good news at Woodford but the situation down the road at Faces in Gants Hill, still remains an issue. Drivers are still complaining of the illegal 'Cab Service' signage and the parking abuse on the existing taxi rank by minicab drivers.

As with the Woodford venue, because of the way the minicab rank works and these can only be described as minicab ranks, local taxi drivers are finding it hard to get a job into their cabs. The only way for them to overcome the minicabs might be to get out of their vehicles and ask potential customers if they would like a taxi. But to do that would be touting, wouldn't it?

Be seeing you.



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TRANSPORT SELECT COMMITTEE PART TWO

On Tuesday 15th March the Transport Select Committee held the second evidence session into issues relating to the licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles.

The Select Committee is holding this enquiry following the lobbying from Unite to obtain a change in the law regarding cross-border hiring. Unite gave evidence at the start of the first session of evidence in which we outlined the changes we are lobbying for. Unite want private hire vehicles to return to their base if they are in a different licensing area after they finish a booked journey.

They should be barred from sitting in a different licensing area awaiting a job. The most awaited part of the evidence on Tuesday was the appearance of Norman Baker MP, parliamentary under-secretary of state, Department of transport. He appeared in the third session of evidence when he answered questions from the committee members.

The Chair of the committee is Mrs Louise Ellman MP, also present were committee members, Mr Kwasi Kwarteng, Mr John Leech, Mr Paul Maynard, Mr Iain Stewart. Below is a resume of the minister's evidence.

Third session

- Norman Baker MP, parliamentary under-secretary of state, Department for Transport.

Taxis and the DfT

Starting off the committee's third session with transport minister Norman Baker, Ellman asked how high up the agenda taxis were within the Department for Transport.

It was "an important part of my portfolio," Baker said.

On reviewing taxi legislation, Baker said that Law Commission was hopefully looking at the issue upon the department's request.

He said that the four pieces of legislation covering taxis was built on "higglety pigglety" over the years.

He said there was no definite date on when or if the commission would look into taxis but Baker said he expected a speedy response

By MIKE HEDGES

which would take 12-18 months to complete.

The minister accepted arrangements were varied across the country and acknowledged that legislation was quite 'archaic'.

National scheme

Kwarteng asked if the London model could be replicated across the country.

Leech raised the issue about PHV firms being licensed in certain areas but operating in different parts of the country.

Baker said enforcement was important.

He said there needed to be an arrangement of tighter links with private hire operators, which has a driver relationships and location of private hire operator.

Leech stated that licensed operators worked within certain geographical areas. He asked Baker if there was a danger that national licensing schemes would drive down standards.

Baker said it depended on what the national standards were.

He said he was not sure standards were the problem as different standards applied to licensing regime in different regions.

Baker said that Unite had raised particular concerns about insurance issues.

He added that licensing was a local function and would go against giving power to local authorities.

Moving towards national standard would be regressive, Baker said.

Leech pressed the minister of enforcement of standards.

Baker said local authorities were sovereign bodies and responsible for licensing.

Disabled passengers

Maynard asked about the impact of proposed changes on disabled passengers and asked what was being done to protect and enhance accessibility.

Baker said there were options for local licensing authorities to control how many taxis

operate in a certain area.

He said they could introduce a requirement on licensing authorities to have a certain percentage of operators that provide access for disabled passengers.

Baker said refusal by operators to carry guide dogs could lead to fixed penalty fines.

The minister referred to his written statement on £10m allocated to rural local authorities to encourage community transport.

He stressed the need to avoid isolation of rural areas.

Technology

Stewart pressed Baker on cross-border hire issues.

He asked if there was potential to use new technology to help guide regulation. He suggested using satellite navigation technology to calculate an aggregate of journeys and use the information for changing the licensing regime.

Baker said technology provided opportunities for greater information gathering.

He said the existence of satellite navigation should mean that people are better informed to serve their customers.

But, the minister stressed that navigation systems were "not a substitute for common sense."

Best practice guidance

Responding to Kwarteng regarding local knowledge, Baker said he was "loathed to start imposing on local authorities a better way of acting."

He said the government recognised the value of having drivers who know their way around.

Baker referred to the department's best practice guidance but he said questions remained over whether local authorities were applying it and if not why.

Baker stated that there was no evidence of local authorities not complying with best

practice guidance.

The department monitored compliance via complaints and discussions with local licensing authorities and trade bodies.

PHVs and licensed taxis

Ellman pressed Baker to justify distinguishing between different vehicles.

Baker said they had different functions.

He stated that a taxi could be flagged down and were obliged to take you anywhere within 12 miles. They also have meters, where PHVs do not.

He highlighted the PHVs often had particular functions such as limos.

As a result, he said the different functions justified a two tier arrangement.

On areas of operation, Baker said he was not convinced that PHVs were working against the interests of passengers nor did he consider it to be unfair practice in terms of the taxi trade.

He also raised concerns about the carbon implications of returning back to base.

"In practical terms are quite difficult to deal with," Baker said.

National transport plans

Concluding, Ellman pressed Baker on how taxi and private hire vehicles could be incorporated more into national transport plans.

Baker said the department was looking at end-to-end journeys.

He said taxis, buses and cycle hire facilities had an important role to play.

He added that he was in contact with the Association of Train Operating Companies to ensure that there is information for passengers on what happens next once they have reached a railway station.

Baker said that this included maps and information about taxi ranks, bus stops and cycle hire facilities at railway stations.

He also raised the issue of smartcard technology which at some point could be accepted by taxi operators to link transport modes.

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TAXI! LIMA STYLE!

I have been driving a cab for 25 years now, so I thought it would be a good idea to take a little time off and explore some of the world.

South America has always had a great appeal; the land of salsa, Spanish & soccer... as a child the Mexico World Cup of 1970 left a big impression. Dark horses of that tournament were Peru, as they were described, in their white shirts with a red diagonal slash. They summed up the mysticism of Latin America, south of the equator, a land that seemed a complete contrast to my early seventies suburban London. My travelling companion to Peru was a good and dear friend, Martin, whom I have known since a year after the Mexico 70 World Cup. He doesn't drive a cab, but he does a very good impression of a cabbie... Yeah Gov!

The journey to Lima bizarrely begins with a flight from City Airport where KLM transfer you via Amsterdam on to the Pacific Ocean Peruvian capital. This article won't mention silly things of the Andes with Christmas cracker jokes or the London Paddington Bear connection, however, Jose de San Martin, the Liberator of Peru, Chile & Argentina deserves inclusion as he is remembered in London with a statue on the north-east corner of Belgrave Square. So do Nobby Solano, Claudio Pizarro, Alberto Fujimori & Vargas....



LIMA BUS LANES – BELGRAVE SQUARE. SAN MARTIN – TINY DAEWOO TAXIS

The guide books like Rough Guide, Lonely Planet and The South America handbook will not say very much complimentary about taxi-drivers in Lima. Travellers can have their anxiety levels raised by stories of woe where cabbies bundle passengers off to be robbed by street gangs or slip small packets of cocaine into your change only to have a complicit corrupt policeman ready to search you as you exit the taxi. We did not have to worry about this as the hotel we were booked into had a driver to meet us and nothing untoward happened. Nonetheless tourists need to use cabs. We threw caution to the wind and later wandering around Lima we hailed cabs at a whim and found all the drivers courteous, helpful & free of criminal intent.

Driver, Cesar Serna Malaga, drove us from the Miraflores beach to Plaza de Armas in the centre of the city, a monument to the former Spanish colonial days. Jorge Fernandez Lazo and colleague Miguel ferried us around too. I know their names as they gave us their cards and were willing to fulfil other trips. The best driver was a guy called Luis Alves who recited Shakespeare, in Spanish. Then he recited Churchill's... never have so many owed so much to so few... speech, also in Spanish, before reeling off his list of British icons... Margaret Thatcher (La Dama de Hierro), Tom Jones, The Beatles and ending wonderfully with Lord Baden Powell... Peru has a presidential election this April. I reckon Luis is voting for the candidate of the conservative right. Lima with its similar population to London (9 million) is a city of the very wealthy and the very poor rather like London, although poverty in Peru is a long way from perceived deprivation in London.

Lima would appear to have a totally uncontrolled market in taxis. Any vehicle is used as a cab. Drivers using larger saloon cars dismissed the tiny Daewoo taxis as death-traps. Some vehicles run on LPG. I did not see any female taxi drivers but there were many

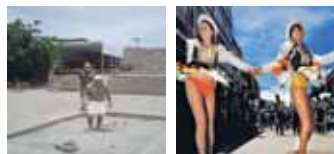
attractive and athletic looking women in police or military uniform controlling traffic or doing security checks. Driver's documentation and vehicle inspections are commonplace.

There is a new bus lane network that completely separates buses from the rest of the traffic. As in much of the developing world, the traffic is mad. It makes London driving positively toytown and serene.

Ceviche is one of the national dishes we consumed. It's raw fish marinated in lime juice. Reputedly it is supposed to be a hangover cure too. Which is just as well, as the national drink, PISCO SOUR, a local grape brandy based cocktail of egg white, sugar, lime, crushed ice, angostura bitters and cinnamon is really pokey. A couple of those and your evening goes with a swing. Tacama was a very drinkable Peruvian wine and food from around the world is readily available. We were never far from a pizzeria or a Chifa which is a Chinese restaurant. In one Chifa the waiter was Bangladeshi. People of planet Earth keep moving round this globe. Peru thanks the Scottish and English sailors who brought football to their shores. Universitario, Alianza Lima and Sporting Cristal are the 3 big clubs of Lima. Football is everywhere, always on TV, not too different to Europe I guess. One last chunk of Peruvian education is their red and white flag. This is inspired by a flamingo with its wings spread out, red on the edges and white in the middle... "Another Pisco Sour por favor camarero, no on the other hand, an Inca Kola is probably better"....?

Huaca Pucllana is a pyramid burial ground in the Miraflores district of Lima constructed by a civilisation that existed over 1500 years ago. Walking around these burial sites and hearing a guide speak about ancient rituals surrounding sacrifices to their Gods, I thought.

"Thank goodness the human race has moved on. The idea of killing animals, and even worse, kids as sacrifices to the Gods shows we have become more civilised." One thing which made me think early humans were morons was the idea of crafting a large pot as a sacrificial gift to the Gods, then, smashing it to pieces before making the pot a sacrificial offering. I'm sure any God would have preferred a complete pot rather than one that would be useless.



Peru has loads to offer. In addition to the Amazon areas there are The Andes and the charming city of Cusco which houses the closest airport to Machu Picchu. Almost 3,000 meters above sea level the lost city of Machu Picchu is breathtaking, enough to lift the spirits of anyone. Lake Titicaca, the highest lake in the world is also breathtaking as well as freezing for those who want to take a swim. The city of Puno on the western side of Titicaca hosts a great festival of music and dance called, Le Virgen Maria de la Candelaria, more religious nonsense, but great music and wonderful simulated bullfighter dancing. The Pacific coast is a surfers' paradise and the affluent pueblo of Punta Hermosa, just south of Lima, is a good place to ride the ferocious waves.

Stay tuned to Cab Trade News as the Melange Column goes higher to La Paz, the highest capital city in the World... Taxi La Paz style... proximo mes en America del Sur.

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Street Legal

By VICTORIA PHILLIPS

STRIKE BALLOTS

The UK has the most restrictive trade union laws in Europe. And it's not often that a court rules in favour of unions, against employers.

Unions are forced to clear higher and higher hurdles in order to take lawful industrial action. They must comply with balloting procedures that allow very little room for error. No other type of voting process, including general elections, are so easily challenged in the courts.

These laws were used by employers against rail unions ASLEF and RMT to stop strikes on London Midland and the Docklands Light Railway late last year and early this year. Injunctions against the action were granted by the High Court on the grounds that the notices given by the unions were defective and the explanations given by them to describe the steps they had taken to identify which members to ballot were inadequate.

The law which applies, the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 (TULRCA), allows for small, accidental failures by unions when they ballot their members.

But in the Metrobus case against Unite a couple of years ago, gave employers the opportunity to persuade courts that even minor errors in the notice of ballot and action – the sending of ballot papers to a small number of members who shouldn't have had them for example or a typographical error – were enough to render a strike unlawful.

And so ASLEF had it's planned 23 December London Midland strike stopped because it accidentally balloted two members who should not have been sent ballot papers and thus that the explanation it gave about the process adopted to compile its list of members involved was insufficient. With 86.9% of members who returned their ballot papers voting in favour of the strike, sending ballot papers to two people who shouldn't have received them was never going to change the outcome. And the Docklands Light Railway employer SERCO succeeded in its injunction application because the union's explanation was "too generic" and failed to show what the union had done, when it had done it and who had done it.

It will be a huge relief to unions therefore that the Court of Appeal has overturned those injunctions. In a decision that restores the law to where it was before Metrobus, the Judges said that international recognition of the right to strike must be reflected in UK laws.

The court was clear that the small, accidental failures provisions of the law should have applied to the notices in both cases and went so far as to say that the High Court judge "misdirected himself as to specificity required" in the explanation given by the unions.

This is not the "green light" to a spring or summer of discontent by the unions that some sections of the media have claimed. Unions must still comply with the complexities of the balloting procedures if they are to take any form of legal collective industrial action. The difficulties in doing so remain. But it does restore common sense to how minor errors are treated and restores to some degree the fundamental human rights of trade unions and their members.



T H E A T R E

By TRUDI-JOY LEVY

THE WIZARD OF OZ at the London Palladium

Following Andrew Lloyd Webber's televised search for an actress to play Dorothy, there can't be many people who are not familiar with L. Frank Baum's original story and the music and lyrics of Harold Arlen and E Y Harburg. The final winner, Danielle Hope, is a charming Dorothy, although she struggles to compete with the adorable little dog playing Toto, who steals every scene he's in. The true star of the show, however, is undoubtedly the amazing set and costumes. The trap doors and revolving stage are constantly employed to send witches flying above our heads and fields of poppies bursting forth. The Kansas cyclone is evoked through realistic projections, and I half-expected the technical designers, Jon Driscoll and Robert Jones to take a curtain call, such is their contribution. The truth though is that all this technical wizardry swamps the performers, who, in spite of amplification, cannot hope to compete. Even Michael Crawford, playing four parts, fails to make an impression. He is given one of the new Lloyd Webber/Rice songs to sing "Wonders of the World" which is a truly awful catalogue song. Hannah Waddingham, as the Wicked Witch of the West does have great stage presence, but it is arguably easier, as she is playing the archetypal pantomime villain. So, accept this as a pantomime and you won't be disappointed. The children will love it and you'll be amazed by the sheer technical brilliance of the production, but don't expect to be moved or emotionally involved.

BLITHE SPIRIT at the Apollo Theatre

Noel Coward himself described this play as a "superficial comedy". This is true, but it doesn't stop it being one of his most entertaining. Novelist, Charles Condomine (Robert Bathurst) is married to Ruth (Hermione Norris), following the premature death of his first wife, Elvira (Ruthie Henshall). He asks local medium, Madame Arcati, (Alison Steadman) to conduct a séance in the presence of another couple, the Bradmans. The consequence of this event is to conjure up the ghost of Elvira,

although she can only be seen by Charles. I've always thought the part of Ruth to be the most difficult. She is an unsympathetic character with loads of lines, but, from her first entrance in a stunning red dress, Hermione Norris takes control. The relationship with her stage husband is believable, but they played a married couple in television's "Cold Feet", so it is to be expected. Robert Bathurst conveys the right air of self-centredness and there is a delightful cameo from newcomer Jodie Taibi, as the maid, Ruthie Henshall flits about, creating mischief, which is all she is required to do. The only disappointment for me was Alison Steadman, as Madame Arcati. I have long been an admirer of this actress's work but she fails to convey the essential gentle English eccentricity of this character. Director, Tea Sharrock, has failed to rein her in and she gives a totally over the top coarse performance, stomping around the stage emitting animal noises. Unfortunately, this affects the delicate balance of this superficial, but delightful, comedy.

THE EXONERATED at the Charing Cross Theatre

Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen have extracted a script from transcripts, documents and articles from six cases of people in the US who were convicted and sentenced to death row, only to have their cases subsequently overturned and their eventual release - 22 years later in one case. They originally interviewed 40 wrongfully convicted death row inmates, which is as strong an argument for the abolishment of capital punishment as I can think of. This has been performed around the world, and been made into a film, but somehow I found it unsatisfactory. I can imagine this working on the radio, or as a documentary, but it is far too static to work as a play. Each of the actors sits on a chair and tells his story without emotion. And here lies the heart of the problem. Because they show no emotion, the audience feels no emotion, other than pity at their situation. It's all played on the same level; there is no set and very little variation in the lighting. One feels guilty for criticising a piece that is so well-meaning, but it must be judged as a piece of theatre and, in this, it doesn't succeed.

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Taxi community newsletter – March 2011

Blackwall Tunnel Refurbishment

In 2011 further weekend closures will be required and the dates will be confirmed shortly. The good news is that the refurbishment works are going very well and are 6 months ahead of schedule (New completion date of June 2012). We will keep you updated when we know more.

Next Newsletter

The next newsletter will be sent out in May with the usual 3 monthly calendar of events. We also plan to send out the event calendar on a monthly basis via the email distribution list and via hard copies given out at the rank.

Forthcoming Events at The O₂ March-May 2011

Date	Day	Event/ Artist/ Group	Approx finish time	Approx Attendance
26th March	Saturday	The Script	23.00	16,500
28th March	Monday	Elbow	23.00	15,500
29th March	Tuesday	Elbow	23.00	12,000
30th March	Wednesday	Taylor Swift	23.00	15,000
31st March	Thursday	Peter Kay	22.30	12,000
1st April	Friday	Peter Kay	22.30	11,500
2nd April	Saturday	Peter Kay	22.30	11,500
3rd April	Sunday	Peter Kay	22.30	11,500
4th April	Monday	Peter Kay	22.30	11,500
7th April	Thursday	Kylie	23.00	16,000
8th April	Friday	Kylie	23.00	16,000
9th April	Saturday	Kylie	23.00	16,000
11th April	Monday	Kylie	23.00	16,000
12th April	Tuesday	Kylie	23.00	16,000
15th April	Friday	Jamiroquai	23.00	14,000
18th April	Monday	WWE Raw	22.30	10,000
19th April	Tuesday	WWE Raw	22.30	10,000
20th April	Wednesday	Andre Rieu	22.30	15,000
30th April	Saturday	N-Dubz	23.00	13,500
4th May	Wednesday	Barry Manilow	22.30	15,000
5th May	Thursday	Barry Manilow	22.30	15,000
6th May	Friday	Barry Manilow	22.30	15,000
7th May	Saturday	Barry Manilow	22.30	15,000
11th May	Wednesday	Roger Water "The Wall"	22.30	16,000
12th May	Thursday	Roger Water "The Wall"	22.30	16,000
14th May	Saturday	Roger Water "The Wall"	22.30	15,000
15th May	Sunday	Roger Water "The Wall"	22.30	15,000
17th May	Tuesday	Roger Water "The Wall"	22.30	15,000
18th May	Wednesday	Roger Water "The Wall"	22.30	14,000
25th May	Wednesday	Rush	23.00	10,000
28th May	Saturday	Duran Duran	23.00	10,000
31st May	Tuesday	Sade	22.30	8,000

For more information on events please visit our website www.theo2.co.uk

Forthcoming Events at The indigoO₂ March-May 2011

Date	Day	Event/ Artist/ Group	Approx finish time	Approx Attendance
31st March	Thursday	Sally Morgan - Psychic	22.30	1,000
3rd April	Sunday	Jake & Elwood Blues show	22.00	1,000
7th April	Thursday	Magic of The Beatles	22.30	1,000
9th April	Saturday	Andy Parsons	22.30	1,000
15th April	Friday	30 Years of Brit Funk	23.00	1,000
16th April	Saturday	GLOW	23.00	1,500
17th April	Sunday	U Got Jokes Comedy Showcase	22.30	1,000
18th April	Monday	Chas & Dave - Final Tour	22.30	1,000
21st April	Thursday	The Dualers	22.30	1,500
22nd April	Good Friday	Audio Bullys plus DJs	23.00	1,000
23rd April	Saturday	The Orb plus 808 State DJs	23.00	1,000
24th April	Easter Sunday	Norman Jay & Jazzie B	22.30	1,000
6th May	Friday	Ali Campbell	22.30	1,000
18th May	Wednesday	Glenn Miller Orchestra	22.30	1,000
25th May	Wednesday	Orchestre National de Barbes	22.00	1,000
27th May	Friday	Kevin Hart	22.30	1,000

For more information on the events please visit our website www.theindigo2.co.uk



AGAIN! ON-STREET- COMPLIANCE TYRES! TYRES!

By **PETER BOND**

I'm told the more you repeat something the less impact it has, but bald/faulty tyres heads the list for failures again – fines and points per tyre for the driver/journeyman, NOT the owner. This can ruin your day, week, or even your future driving a cab.

Also our regular complaint regarding too many taxis being checked on-street compared to PHV's, which is still the case, could be improved in our favour if the yearly SGS test is replaced by two MOT's. It was confirmed that the target for taxis to be seen (15,000 per year) only came in to force when the 6-monthly SGS test was removed, and that the two MOT's PHV's require is the reason there is no set target for PHV's – so presumably, the target for taxis will be removed if, and when, we require two MOT's – but don't hold your breath on that one.

The numbers of drivers being warned for not wearing their badge, parking on taxi ranks (PHV drivers have also been warned for this offence), not having or signing their licences is on the increase – so beware.

Four suburban drivers received warning letters for working outside their area; one more was a second time offender and has been referred to the Licensing Authority (Mary Dowdye's office).

Also on the increase are complaints about the condition of taxis from the public – excessive smoke, dirty taxis, damage etc. LTPH (still PCO to most of us) still encourage all to contact LTPH.Enforcement@tfl.gov.uk with intelligence (their term not mine) regarding any misdemeanour related to our trade. Even anonymous reports are acted on but some cannot be acknowledged due to data protection. Be careful when sending videos from your mobile as some drivers have incriminated themselves by filming whilst driving their cab (a very serious offence!) and then giving their own details by email.

Problems at Wimbledon Dogs, Wimbledon Tennis, Woodford (Funky Mojoe's) and other venues in the East are on their agenda although, as always, far too slowly for our liking.

Unfortunately, the City of London Police (COLP) couldn't attend this meeting. We were hoping for a discussion on venues in the City, particularly at Abacus. Whether, or not, the demo called by the LCDC, which UNITE supports, in the City regarding the abuse of Diamond Cars' satellite office and, possibly, Abacus itself, and the lack of any enforcement by COLP prompted the Licensing Authority's representative at the meeting to announce an imminent visit that afternoon, is immaterial, as initial reports since have seen the new rank (which still needs to be moved right outside the front door) free of PHV's and less abuse by the 'Clipboard Johnnies'.

As always its the 'Chicken and Egg' scenario - cab drivers need to know the rank at Abacus is not full of PHV's and hassle free before they work it, which can take a while – so congratulations to LTPH on this so far, but the enforcement pressure needs to be kept up and we need to do our bit to make it work – Nobu in Berkeley Street being the best example, which took a lot of work and dedication from Drivers, UNITE, LCDC, LTDA, DaC and Martin Low at Westminster Council – the same needs to be done with Abacus.



National monthly paper of the licensed taxi trade

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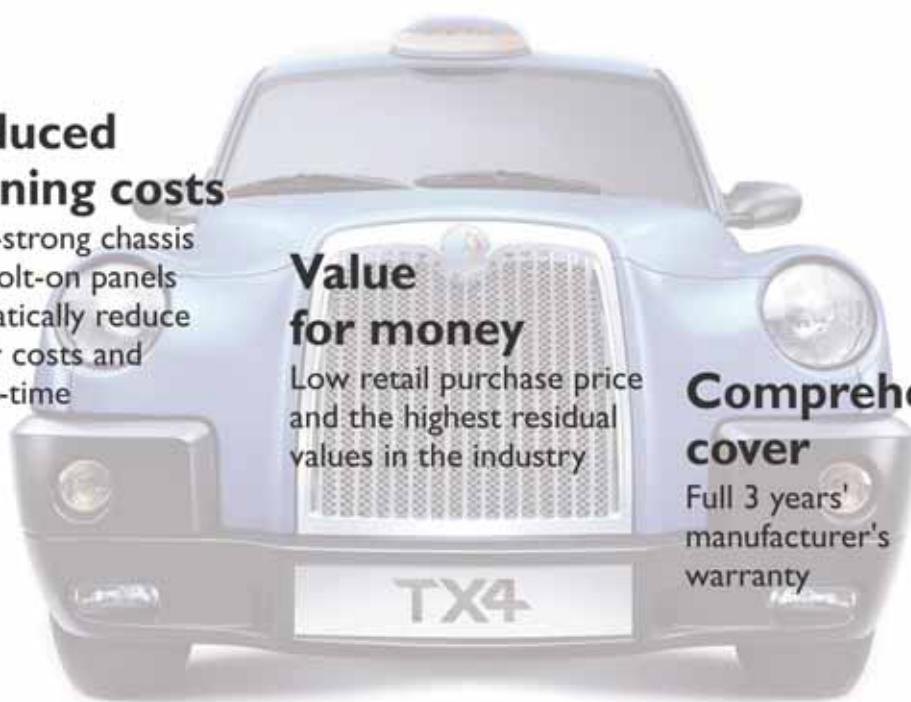
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