Boris tells law commission to leave London Cab Trade alone

FULL STORY ON PAGE 3

EXCLUSIVE
Editorial

Grant Davis

Boris fights our corner
Earlier this week I had a meeting with Mayor Boris Johnson at City Hall to discuss trade matters. He showed me a letter which he had written to the Law Commission (read opposite) in which he clearly shows his commitment to the London Cab Trade.

We went on to discuss various contentious issues surrounding the trade including the Olympics, rickshaws and satellite offices. I put the Clubs proposals forward to him for a phone on the wall to replace the current satellite offices system we have at present.

Olympics
I am becoming more and more alarmed each day as we approach the start of the Olympics. At each Olympic liaison meeting the LCDC attends, it seems to me we are being pushed further and further away from all the major venues.

My main concern is that every day it becomes clearer to me how little power TFL and the Government have over any decisions that LOCOG are making.

Hopefully in the next edition we will have all the plans for the cab trades involvement.

Rickshaw Bill Amended
You will be able to read in the Badge on page 8 that our Parliamentary Agents have informed us that the clause seeking to enable rickshaws to have ranks in Westminster has been withdrawn .Westminster Council have done this in order for the rest of the bill to pass through Parliament. (page 8 for details)

Identifiers
Finally, the deadline for the identifiers has passed and it appears that 95% of the drivers are complying. We have been asked by members what is the penalties for non-compliance.

1st offence
Written warning

2nd offence
Suspension of licence

3rd offence
Revocation of licence.
Boris writes to law commission

EXCLUSIVE

GREATER LONDON AUTHORITY
Mayor’s Office

Mrs Elaine Lorimer
Chief Executive
The Law Commission
Steel House
11 Tothill Street
London SW1H 9LJ

Date: 1 MAR 2012

Dear Mrs Lorimer

I am aware that in May the Law Commission is launching a consultation on Taxi and Private Hire licensing in England and Wales. Therefore, I thought it would be helpful to set out, in advance of publication, my key concerns around reform of taxi and private hire regulations in London.

The London cab trade is an important part of the capital’s transport services, as well as being a huge asset to this great city of ours. Black cabs, for example, are as synonymous with the London landscape as Trafalgar Square and St Paul’s Cathedral and remain an important and much-loved part of the capital’s cultural heritage. Our cabbies are ambassadors for the city and are relied upon by both visitors and residents for their outstanding knowledge of London’s streets, which follows years of rigorous training.

This knowledge will be particularly vital this year when London will experience a summer like no other. The Queen’s Diamond Jubilee and the Olympic and Paralympic Games will bring many thousands of visitors to the capital, and the London cab trade will play an invaluable role, alongside our excellent public transport network, in moving vast numbers of people seamlessly around the city.

London’s cab trade is quite different from the rest of the country, in both size and how it is regulated. There are approximately 22,000 black cabs and almost 25,000 licensed taxi drivers, plus around 3,200 licensed private hire operators, 60,000 licensed private hire drivers, and roughly 50,000 licensed private hire vehicles in London. Combined, they form one of the largest fleets in the western world.

London also has separate legislation in place governing taxi and private hire vehicles. Transport for London (TfL) is responsible for the licensing of taxi and private hire services in the capital and I would strongly oppose any move away from this current position, which serves the needs of Londoners and is supported by both the taxi and private hire trades.

However, of particular concern to me are the Commission’s proposals to reform the current two tier structure. I oppose any erosion of the distinction between taxis that can ply for hire and private hire vehicles which must be pre-booked, including the introduction of national mandatory standards for private hire vehicles and private hire vehicles acting in a more taxi-like manner. Licensing authorities, such as TfL, must be allowed to set standards appropriate to local needs and to retain such distinctions – this is especially the case in the capital given the volume of licensees and the busyness of our night time economy.

London’s private hire trade has benefitted greatly from the introduction of licensing in 2001. Standards are higher than ever before, the profile of the industry has increased significantly and the public has confidence in a safe, licensed service that compliments that provided by London’s cabs. Although some regulatory changes may be required, restructuring of the industry is not.

I would also have concerns if there were moves towards a more deregulatory approach to licensing when in fact greater regulatory powers would be beneficial in London, especially in helping to deal with illegal activity. Licensing authorities should therefore be given greater enforcement powers to ensure that all licensed drivers and operators comply with existing regulations.

To reiterate, the London taxie and private hire trades do not require radical reform and I would be absolutely opposed to the introduction of legislation that would seek to undermine the current system, and which would challenge TfL’s ability to set its own regulations.

I hope these points can be taken on board before the Law Commission consultation is published in May.

Yours sincerely

Boris Johnson
Mayor of London
Agility scheme extended

IT’S SAID that there’s no one better than a London Taxi driver to sniff out a great deal when there’s one to be had. Cab washes, breakfasts, diesel, cab servicing, or owning a new cab – someone gets to know about a good service and a special deal and the word gets around the ranks, fast! And there’s certainly one around this month, even if you are only just thinking about changing your taxi. Mercedes-Benz has just announced that it has decided to extend its ground-breaking Agility scheme. It means that London’s taxi drivers can get a new ‘12-plate’ Vito Taxi on the special deal.

The Agility scheme has fantastic benefits for London’s taxi drivers. For a deposit of £2,000 and payments of only £125 per week you can take delivery of a brand new Euro 5 Vito Taxi; you have a guaranteed residual value of over £25,400 in three years time; and an incredibly low APR of 5.4%. At the end of the three years you can buy the cab you’ve been driving, take out another Agility deal or just walk away!

Talking about the extension of the scheme Steven McCarthy, Dealer Principal at KPM Mercedes-Benz Taxis was enthusiastic, “Customers have just loved the new deal. Whether you rent a cab, own an older cab, whether you want to release equity in your current taxi or just trade up to London’s most fuel efficient taxi, the £125 per week Agility has proved to be a real winner since Mercedes-Benz launched the scheme in December last year. Our showroom has been packed full of customers at times, and it just shows you that a London Taxi driver knows a good deal on a great product when he sees one! We were hoping that Mercedes would see how well this deal was doing for the trade. They have, and as a result it’s been agreed to extend the low payment scheme until the end of March. We are just so delighted that Mercedes-Benz is leading the way in making it easier for London’s taxi drivers to trade up to a more fuel efficient, more eco-friendly Euro 5 Vito Taxi.”

Mercedes has been reporting record taxi orders in the past three months due to the Agility scheme. “These have been our best sales months since we launched the Vito over three years ago. Drivers recognise that the Vito is the best taxi around, with excellent fuel consumption and low servicing costs, more comfort and their passengers just love the ride. But now with Agility at £125 per week we have been able to make the Vito so very affordable to all drivers, it’s proving to be an outright winner! Believe me all the customers we’ve had into our showroom recently have been very careful about their costs. They know exactly how to add up their weekly repayments along with their insurance costs, and calculate the weekly repair bills. There’s not one who has gone away and said that Agility is more expensive. Indeed it’s proving so much cheaper than any other cab deal, and you get all the comfort and fuel economy associated with the Mercedes. A new ‘12-plate’ on Vito has to be the best deal around town!”

Mercedes-Benz Vito taxi takes UK market leadership

KPM Mercedes-Benz Taxis has announced that it has taken market leadership in the UK purpose built taxi market for the month of February. In the latest SMRT figures to be released, the February figures show that Vito Taxi took a clear 60% of total purpose-built taxi registrations.

Commenting on the results Steve McCarthy, KPM Mercedes-Benz Dealer Principal, said that “This is undoubtedly a fantastic endorsement by the cab trade of the new Euro 5 Vito Taxi. The Vito has been steadily growing in popularity since its launch and drivers and passengers are increasingly seeing the benefits of its lower running costs and excellent quality and comfort.”

However, Mr McCarthy claims that it’s been over the last couple of months that the Vito Taxi sales have really started to take off with Mercedes-Benz’s launch of their finance scheme called ‘Agility’. This scheme has long been used by Mercedes-Benz in their passenger car, truck and van businesses. Basically ‘Agility’ reduces the taxi buyer’s weekly repayments on a new cab and with a guaranteed residual value at the end of three years, the driver has no risk – he can buy the cab, hand it back and take another one or just walk away. “It gives the driver security and confidence to buy and that’s important in these challenging times” says Steve McCarthy. “It also encourages drivers who run older taxis that are less efficient to trade up into a far more emissions friendly Euro 5 Vito. These are the drivers that don’t want extra cost and they certainly don’t like risk, and Agility gives them the best solution. And London gets lower emissions, to boot!”
KPM Mercedes-Benz Taxis

A NEW 12 plate Vito Taxi for £125 per week
The best deal around town
Here’s why...

- A 3 Year Deal
  With Agility you can have a brand new Vito Taxi every 3 years.

- Guaranteed Residual Value
  Mercedes-Benz Finance guarantee the future residual value of your taxi.
  *(not underwritten by you)*

- The Cab with no ties
  At the end of 3 years you can either:
  - Buy the cab.
  - Hand it back and take delivery of another new one.
  - Or just walk away.
  The choice is yours!

Call 020 7375 1179 or visit www.kpmmercedes-benztaxis.com

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KPM Mercedes-Benz Taxis

Business users only. Finance subject to status and approval through Mercedes-Benz Financial Services. Based on a deposit £2000.00 then £125 per week (monthly equivalent £341.67 x 35 payments) with a guaranteed buy back from Mercedes-Benz Finance of £25,408.76 at the end of the agreement subject to 30,000 miles per annum (90,000 miles total). APR 5.4%. Excess mileage charged at 10.00 pence per mile + VAT. Terms and conditions apply. Not available with any other offer. We reserve the right to remove the offer without notice. E&OE
Airport Matters

BY PETER “THE CANNON”
L.C.D.C AIRPORT REP

The Badge (Heathrow March)
Heated arguments over how HALTS’ voucher jobs are being handed out at the taxi feeder parks are now a daily occurrence at Heathrow. Last week-end there was a succession of tense angry scenes when drivers who were queuing to get into the main park were being held up and harassed by clipboard Johnnies employed by HALTS.

Drivers were being urged to go to the assistance of HALTS’ voucher passengers who had been given the elbow by drivers working on Heathrow’s ranks. One clip board Johnny was seen to walk past five drivers lined up at the feeder park barrier, before he finally found a driver willing to go and do a HALTS’ voucher job on Terminal 4. It seems we have now reached an all time low at Heathrow and HALTS’ directors have assumed authority to decide who is and who isn’t subject to the Heathrow taxi byelaws.

At the same time as vouchers were being offered at the South Park, drivers down on the ranks were on their phones reporting back to the parks that bewildered passengers with HALTS’ vouchers were wandering about on all four Heathrow ranks. Drivers were refusing to accept HALTS’ fixed prices for destinations such as Worcester Park, Pinner and North Wembley. The reputation of Heathrow drivers is being badly damaged not only by the overcharging that goes on at HALTS’ taxi desks but by the failure of HALTS’ reps to grasp that the majority of Heathrow regulars aren’t going to readily volunteer to accept vouchers from passengers who want to go on slow difficult non-motorway journey into suburban London, where they won’t find any work after setting down. Nobody in HALTS’ office, seems to understand that logically if more and more vouchers are distributed immediately before the entrance to the feeder park, there will be a corresponding decrease in the number of drivers entering the Taxi System. At what point is BAA going to come to its senses and spell out to HALTS that their voucher scheme can’t be dovetailed to Heathrow’s taxi byelaws and the established rules of System?

Already this year, there has been a huge growth in the number of drivers who don’t go through the feeder parks before they ply for hire on the ranks. Drivers who accept vouchers from HALTS are simply adding to the size of the army of drivers who have to be manually booked in and out of the System by dilatory NSL Cabin staff. The sheer volume of the paperwork and keyboard work that now has to be done in the Cabin means it’s not being done properly and more and more drivers are working out devious ways to take jobs from the ranks without going through the feeder parks or paying the £6.54 feeder park charge. When is it going to occur to BAA that the System isn’t geared up to guarantee that all the drivers who accepts voucher jobs just before they enter the main park will pay BAA the £6.54 charge? All the signs are already there, that the System can’t cope with the admin’ problems created when voucher drivers by-pass the feeder parks.

Feeder Park Toilets
Three weeks ago BAA management gave the LCDC a firm undertaking that complaints about the overcharging of passengers who make travel arrangements at the taxi desks would be investigated. BAA didn’t give this undertaking to the LCDC in an informal phone conversation; BAA’s commitment to investigate was made in writing. Nothing more has been heard from BAA about the outcome of their investigation, but in the meantime BAA has decided to call an emergency meeting to deal with complaints that drivers are abusing the feeder park toilets and that cleaning staff have been subject to racial abuse. It could be argued that that the maintenance of high standards in the toilets and the well-being of cleaning staff are important issues that warrant proper discussion; but why does BAA have to call trade reps to an emergency meeting? Why hasn’t BAA called a meeting of trade reps so that we can discuss what can be done to stop gullible passengers from being ripped off when they call at HALTS taxi desks? It looks very much as though BAA is keen to lay down the law about drivers taking care of our toilet facilities, but not so keen to discuss the sale of overpriced vouchers at the taxi desks. Could it be that BAA has a financial interest in HALTS’ vouchers?

The HALT Cooperative
HALT remains registered with the FSA and is a separate entity from private company HALTS Ltd. A newly formed group of aggrieved HALT members is holding meetings with business specialists who are interested in finding out how HALTS directors acquired a controlling monopoly on the taxi information desks. Their plan is to raise competition law issues and devise ways of compelling the directors of HALTS to compensate the HALT cooperative for stripping the cooperative of its business assets when private company HALTS Ltd. was created. As a matter of law the business assets now being used by HALTS under the brand name of Heathrow Taxis remain the property of the HALT cooperative and can never be officially transferred to any entity other than a common ownership enterprise, where all business assets have to be maintained for the benefit of the organisation’s members. Early next year legal representatives acting on behalf of HALT members will offer to broker a settlement deal with HALTS directors. The directors will be offered an opportunity to enter into a non-negotiable agreement to compensate the HALT cooperative in full for all financial losses suffered by the cooperative after HALTS Ltd. hijacked the cooperative’s highly profitable credit card processing services. Whether or not HALTS Ltd. will be able to pay its dues to HALT remains to be seen.
Monkey taken for ride in London taxi

In London a monkey is £500. Wherever you are, it's a big fare.

Whilst on the rank at Portland Place, Andrew Wilcox was approached by an overseas visitor who needed to go to Milton Keynes and back, and asked if he could pay by card.

Andrew had a VeriFone card payment system on board, so he got the job. He was already really happy with the quick and easy-to-use system and the return fare, £473, was the highest he'd ever taken.

The system is fantastic. Wish I'd had it years ago...
Andrew Wilcox

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thelcdc@aol.com
Westminster Council withdraws Clause 17 of rickshaw bill

Hi Grant

Just to report that the Bill did receive its second reading last night, despite attempts by Christopher Chope MP to ‘talk it out’, i.e. run out of time for it.

The lawyers for the promoters have confirmed that they will provide an undertaking to ask the committee of MPs to remove clause 17, so I will let you know when they send this through.

For your interest, Bob Blackman MP said the following for the government (he seems to misunderstand that the objections were made before the promoters agreed to seek to drop clause 17), and you get a mention:

There have been substantial objections to clause 17, which deals with pedicabs. The promoters will seek to drop the clause in Committee. Despite that, there have been a large number of objections. Hon. Members who have been to the west end recently will almost certainly be familiar with pedicabs. They are sometimes known as bicycle Rickshaws. They usually consist of a large tricycle with an open carrying cabin to the rear for passengers. They operate to all intents and purposes like taxis, charging fares for what are usually short journeys. They are found mostly in the west end of London and they are currently not regulated in London at all. They give rise to a number of problems, which have been the concern of the promoters and others.

The promoters have decided to ask the Bill Committee to remove clause 17. None the less, I should briefly explain what it would have done. The clause relates solely to traffic management; it does not deal with the safety of pedicabs or the fitness of their drivers—but believe me, pedicab drivers have to be fit. The clause would have assisted the councils and TfL in identifying the owner of a pedicab and enabled them to serve a penalty charge notice when a parking or moving traffic offence had been committed.

The clause would have operated only if the councils or TfL already had arrangements in place for a voluntary registration scheme for pedicab owners or if a separate statutory licensing scheme had been enacted. That is because such a scheme would undoubtedly require pedicabs to display some sort of plate that could be used to identify the owner. The clause, in itself, would not have set up a statutory licensing or registration scheme, although there is of course a demand for that in some parts of London. An attempt to introduce a statutory registration system was made in a previous London Local Authorities and Transport for London Bill, but it was rejected by the Committee on that occasion.

Two pedicab companies, Bugbugs and Reliable Rickshaws, have petitioned against the clause, as have the London Cab Drivers Club and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, which represents taxi drivers. As hon. Members can guess, the petitioners have very different views about the merits of the pedicab trade but are united in their opposition to the clause.

Hopefully, the proposed withdrawal of the clause will appease all those who objected, but it will probably satisfy none of them.

Regards
Angus Walker

PN-067

1 March 2012

New contract to bring taxi and private hire licensing into 21st century

New contract awarded for delivery of computerised taxi and private hire licensing system and website

Licence applications, renewals and vehicle inspections to be available on-line

Hand held computers for Compliance Officers to improve compliance and enforcement activity

London Taxi and Private Hire has confirmed that from next year a number of substantial improvements will be made to the licensing process for taxi and private hire vehicles, drivers and operators. All records will be computerised and a simple online account system will be set up so users can keep track of their applications or book vehicle inspections.

A contract to run the new system has been awarded to NSL. As well as providing the taxi and private hire vehicle licensing and inspection service, NSL will also be responsible for the provision of an end to end IT system, which will be used by TfL staff for all other licensing and compliance activities.

When drawing up plans for the new service TfL listened to concerns and complaints from the taxi and private hire trade; and has worked hard with NSL to identify significant improvements that will be delivered to customers. These include:

- Computerisation of all driver and vehicle records, which, in their current hard copy format laid end-to-end would stretch for 1.3 kilometres;
- New and existing drivers and operators will be able to apply and renew online through a simple, quick and easy to use, account system that will also enable customers to track the progress of their application at any time;
- Simple, on-line booking for vehicle inspections;
- The ability for private hire operators to associate driver and vehicle information to their operator "account";
- The supply of integrated hand held computer systems to TfL’s dedicated in-house Compliance Team so that they can use “real time” validation of licence information whilst working on-street.

Helen Chapman, Deputy Director of Taxi and Private Hire, said: “We have made no secret of how the lack of good quality IT systems have hindered our ability and desire to provide our customers with the quality of service they deserve.

Following a very thorough and comprehensive procurement exercise I am delighted to announce the great many improvements that will be delivered to our customers through this new contract.

"The delivery of the end to end IT system through this contract will enable us to significantly improve the quality of service we provide. Throughout this process we have actively engaged with the taxi and private hire trades and the unions. We will continue to engage with them, particularly with regards to the location of new inspection centres.”

Steve McNamara, General Secretary of the Licensed Taxi Drivers Association (LTDA), said: "The LTDA are pleased that Transport for London has listened to our concerns and is bringing the licensing of taxi drivers and vehicles into the 21st century with this new IT system. Our members rightly deserve the highest levels of customer service and we look forward to working with TfL to ensure that this is delivered through this contract.”

It is anticipated that the new vehicle licensing and inspections service, as well as the new system, will be up and running by early 2013.

TfL will continue to hold the decision making powers on all licensing applications as well as be the key contact for all trade engagement and issue resolution.

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For just £119.17 per week, you could drive away a new **TX4** (Euro 5) Automatic, with our fantastic Sponsored Deposit Contribution scheme.*

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*Terms and conditions apply. Business Users only.
Additional customer deposit and final payment required, following 48 monthly payments, in order to complete vehicle purchase. Figures based on TX4 (Euro 5) Style Automatic.
Official fuel consumption figures for the TX4 (Euro 5) in mpg (1/100km) Urban 25.7 (11.0) - 37.7 (10.2), Extra Urban 40.4 (7.6) - 42.8 (6.6), Combined 33.6 (8.4) - 35.3 (8.0); CO2 emissions: 299 - 222 g/km.
Volume 197 - March 2012

Preamble

Transport policy plays a strategic role in shaping the overall framework to support London's social and economic development. A critical element in a fully integrated transport policy is the road network, and as such it must take into account the needs of all road users – both public and private. One element of which is the Licenced Taxi trade which sits somewhere between the two.

Operating at a disadvantage

Ask anyone what is iconic about London and they surely tell you that one of those things is the black cab. The service provided by these cabs is unique and is the envy of cities around the world and something that I believe is worth fighting to preserve.

Increasingly cab drivers are playing on an un-level playing field with the odds decidedly stacked against them. Both Ken and Boris have presided over ever greater encroachment of private-hire vehicles into areas that were once (and legally still should be) the preserve of the black cab. Traditional taxi ranks are being removed while ‘satellite offices’ are springing up everywhere. ‘Clipboard Johnnies’ working alongside a rank of minicabs illegally “planning for hire” seem to be more concerned with expansion of criminal enterprise that they do with providing a safe public service.

Even though most cabbies are self-employed sole traders Transport for London set the tariff that drivers can charge. There are many external factors, such as fuel costs which impact upon profitability and ultimately a driver’s income add to this the TFL imposed 15 year lifetime of a taxi, which was introduce after many owners and fleet operators had been compelled to spend up to £2500 making their vehicles Euro 3 compliant, and it is easy to understand why many drivers feel that they are being unfairly penalised.

Policy

- Make all new taxis VAT exempt, as they are the only form of public transport that are 100% wheelchair accessible
- Reinstate taxi ranks (and install new taxi ranks) in locations that are helpful to taxi users
- Harmonise bus lanes across the capital to allow their use by buses, coaches, mini-buses, taxis, motorcycles and cycles
- Allow Taxis to use the Olympic VIP lanes
- Put responsibility for the cab trade back in the hands of the Metropolitan Police ensuring that all drivers are properly vetted
- Reopen the counter service so drivers have ‘direct access’ and resume ‘knowledge’ and license operations back to Penton Street
- Clamp down on illegal Private Hire operators across the capital
- Review 15 year old age limits on London taxis

“I feel that as the London taxi trade is the only public transport that is 100% wheelchair accessible, there is a strong case for making their taxis VAT exempt. As at present the cost of the vehicles are solely funded by the driver.”

VAT veto on all new London taxis

Lawrence Webb
- U.K.I.P Mayoral candidate

www.lcdcorg.wordpress.com

Lawrence Webb
-U.K.I.P Mayoral candidate

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www.lcdcorg.wordpress.com
Alan’s Angle

Mall to close all summer!

I recently attended a meeting at Palestra with ORN, TfL, along with the LTDA and Unite to see the plans for the taxi trade around the Park Lane area. Whilst the final plans are not set in stone, it would appear that the story which appeared in last weeks Evening Standard stating the Mall was to be closed for 3 months is true. In fact it will be shut from mid May to mid September due to the Queens jubilee, the trooping of the colour, and preparations for the Olympics. One word springs to mind....Gridlock. As the editor has already said, in next months edition we hope to be able to publish all finalised plans.

New rank at King’s Cross Station

This month see the opening of the new rank and set down point for King’s Cross Station, we all know there as been a lot of problems with King’s Cross and St. Pancras whilst the building works have been taking place. The ranks committee was consulted over the new pick up area but was kept completely in the dark over the set down point. The drop off we use at the moment will be changed in a new road scheme and the passengers entry point in York Way will be closed. So all traffic will be forced into Pancras Road which is already congested most mornings backing up into Euston Road. Let’s hope the people who design these road layouts have got it right or we will end up with a fiasco that we experienced with the opening of the new Paddington Rank.

Important changes to the taxi rank at London St Pancras Station

FOLLOWING RECENT improvements to the St Pancras Station taxi rank on Midland Road this is to advise you of changes to the road layout which affect all taxis that use this rank. The taxi rank lane has now been extended further down the Midland Road. This lane now ends at the entry and exit point to a station service yard which receives a large number of deliveries every day. Please remember to take extra care in this area particularly at this junction and ensure the give way lines at the end of the taxi rank lane are observed before emerging out of the taxi rank lane onto the main road.

Important changes to the taxi rank at London St Pancras Station

Courtfield Road Rank

Residents in and around Courtfield Rd are putting pressure on the borough to get our rank on Courtfield Rd taken away as they feel it is not being used to its full potential as a working rank. They see it more as a car park for taxis and are taking pictures of taxis being left unattended and are building up a case for the LTPH to take it away. They have even approached the hotel who even said “we don’t use it”. I’ve stated it is being used as a working rank and have told them I’m totally against the rank being removed. But we really need to help ourselves and keep the rank clear for working taxis or we will lose it, road space is becoming very sparse and residents are looking for places for parking bays. So we do need to build up a case for us to keep this rank, or we will lose another rank and its so hard to get a new ranks appointed these days.

Remember to stop at the give way lines and ensure that is safe to proceed before driving onto the main road.
Marksman's Guide to

IT'S ALMOST here the greatest race meeting of the year – The Cheltenham Festival. As regular followers of the Marksman Column will remember, last year was a very good Cheltenham, with a profit of 200 points to a 1 point level stake. I doubt we'll do as well this year, but we'll certainly try.

Before we start our preview, let me remind you of our staking policy – 1 point is the smallest bet, up to 5 points which is our maximum bet. We have only had two five point bets recommended in last year; one was "HURRICANE FLY" in last year’s champion hurdle (won at 5/1) and last month when we gave ZARKANDAR to win the BetFred Hurdle at Newbury (won at 9/2).

Not all races will have a selected bet but for those of you who would like a bet in every race, where we do not give you a selection, we will offer a recommendation.

DAY ONE – Tuesday 13th March

WILLIAM HILL SUPREME NOVICES HURDLE

As you would expect, a very competitive event. The Nicky Henderson trained DARLAN (Odds 6/1) will have his supporters after coming to the second last very easily in the BetFred hurdle before falling when having every chance and must be respected.

GALLILEO’S CHOICE (Odds 15/2) trained in Ireland by Dermot Weld won with a lot in hand in his last race over two miles at Fairyhouse and must be respected. However, my idea of the winner is the Jessica Harrington trained STEEPLE CHASE who has won his last two hurdles and has the most to offer.

GALILEO’S CHOICE, trained at Fairyhouse by Dermot Weld, has won two of his last three starts. He is a very good horse and should be respected.

JLT SPECIALITY

HOLD ON JULIO (Odds 6/1) trained by Alan King , this horse has improved no end this season, winning both his last to start at Sandown. In his last run, he won by nine lengths, despite having made a few serious blunders.

He won’t be able to get away with that this time. I think he will be the one to follow. I’m very keen on the chances of the Martin Pipe trained “THE PACKAGE”, runner up in this race in 2010 over 2a b 2a b higher mark, and despite not being seen out since November 2010, I feel this horse has to be plotted up for this race – don’t be put off by his long absence, the trainer is a master at getting them spot-on the day.

SELECTION: 3 POINTS WIN BET.

Race four:

CHAMPION HURDLE

For me, this is the race of the meeting. "HURRICANE FLY" (Odds 4/5) the odds-on favourite, trained by Willie Mullins bought home the bacon last year when launching our 5-point bet. He is without doubt a very talented horse, and will be bang there at the finish. "BINCULAR" (Odds 5/1) won the race two years ago. Despite winning last time out at Wincanton, and having a wind operation, I think that this horse’s best days are behind it. Jessica Harrington’s "OSCARS WELL" (Odds 14/1) beaten by 6½ lengths by Hurricane Fly last time on heavy ground at Leopardstown. He will appreciate the better ground, but I still think he has it all to do. “ROCK ON RUBY” (Odds 14/1) trained by Paul Nicholls was second to Binocular last time and, although improving, may not improve enough to take a hand at the finish. I do think that Paul Nicholls will train the winner, though, in the shape of “ZARKANDER” (Odds 5/1).

Unbeaten over hurdles in four starts land us a 5 point maximum bet last month at Newbury. This was a great prep race for the Champion Hurdle, and whilst I have every respect for Hurricane Fly, I really do feel that this horse could be one of the all-time greats by not winning just winning this year’s race, the next to or three Champion Hurdles. The only negative I can see is that only one 5 winner has won in the last 57 years.

SELECTION: 3 POINT WIN BET.

Race five:

CROSS COUNTRY CHASE

This is a race I normally never get involved in, but despite a large field I think it’s between the top two in the betting. “SIZZLING AUSTRALIA” (Odds 5/1) trained by Henry de Bromhead won the race last year and holds strong claims, but I think this year the Willie Mullins trained “SCOTSCIRSH” is the answer. On December 11th, over course and distance, he looked an all-over winner until taking the wrong course. Hopefully, the jockey will know his way around now and he looks to be the one.

SELECTION: 1 POINT BET SCOTSCIRSH

Race Six:

DAVID NICHOLSON MARES HURDLE

“QUEVEGA” (Odds 4/7) has won this for the last two years and the Willie Mullins trained mare looks set to make this a hat trick. The only danger is “UNACCOMPANIED” (Odds 6/1), who may not run.

NO BET SELECTED

RECOMMENDATION: QUEVEGA

DAY TWO – Wednesday 14th March

Race One: NATIONAL HUNT CHASE

This race is for amateur riders and a good jockey can make all the difference. At the time of writing, no jockey bookings were available.

NO BET SELECTED

RECOMMENDATION: BLESS THE WINGS

Race Two: NEPTUNE INVESTMENT NOVICE HURDLE

“SIMONSGI” (Odds 3/1) trained by Nicky Henderson will run here instead of the Supreme Novice race. Second to Fingal Bay at Sandown has a big chance. My man in Ireland is very sweet of the chances of “MONKSLAND” (7/1) trained by Noel Meade has won all three starts this year on soft ground. Trainer thinks that on better ground he could be a major player. My idea of the winner is “BOSTON BOB” (Odds 7/2) Willie Mullins horse has won all three starts but was massively impressive last time when winning at Leo Pardstown, is entered in the Albert Buvett hurdle.

SELECTION: 3 POINT WIN BET

BOSTON BOB. IF NON RUNNER, 1 POINT WIN BET MONKSLAND.

Race Three:

RSA CHASE

“GRAND CRUS” (Odds 9/4) may well boycott this race to run in the Gold Cup, that’s how highly trainer David Pipe rates this horse. If running, it would have a favourite’s chance. “BOBSWORTH” (Odds 7/2) Nicky Henderson’s horse third behind Grand Crus and third in his latest start behind “INVITICUS”. Fancied by a lot of people, but not me. “FIRST LIEUTENANT” (Odds 13/2) this Mouse Morris trained horse has been a little disappointing this year but loves it around Cheltenham big chance is around form, “INVITICUS” (Odds 8/1) very impressive Ascot Selection if Grand Crus goes for Gold Cup.

SELECTION: 1 POINT WIN BET INVITICUS (IF GRAND CRUS IS A NON RUNNER) IF GRAND CRUS RUNS, NO BET FOR THIS RACE

RECOMMENDATION: GRAND CRUS

Race Four:

CHAMPION HANDicap CHASE

“BIG ZEB” (Odds 5/1) trained by Colm Murphy was beaten by SIZZLING EUROPE at Punchestown by 15 lengths and I see no reason why he should reverse the form. “FINIANS RAINBOW” (Odds 5/1), Nicky Henderson’s horse was second to CAPTAIN CHRIS in last year’s Arkle, he is the danger of bet of the meeting. “SIZZLING EUROPE” (Odds Evens) Henry de Bromhead’s horse won last year and seems better than ever – a confident selection

SELECTION: 5 POINT MAX WIN BET SIZZLING EUROPE (I know he’s short, but he will win!)

Race Five:

CORAL CUP

The Handicap are very competitive and I tend to avoid these races. However, last year, we did select “FINAL APPROACH” (Odds 25/1) to win the Country Hurdle, which he did at 12/1. He should be in this as well as two other races, but if he were to run in this, he would be in the selection.

SELECTION: 1 POINT WIN BET, FINAL APPROACH
DAY THREE
– Thursday 15th March
In my opinion this is the least exciting days’ racing, with very difficult races to try and solve.

Race One: JEWSON NOVICE CHASE

“PEDICTERS CROSS” (Odds 6/1) is our selection in the Arkle Chase on Day 1. If he runs here, he will be the selection.

SELECTION: 2 POINT WIN BET PEDICTERS CROSS. IF NON-RUNNER, NO BET RECOMMENDATION: CRYSTAL BONUS

Race Two: PERTEMPS FINAL

“OUR FATHER” (Odds 7/1) has strong claims and represents the David Pipe stable, while “ALFIE SHERWIN” (Odds 16/1) trained by Jonjo O’Neill has not been jumping well back over fences, but ran well back over hurdles last time off a low weight merits respect. My idea of the winner is “JETSON” (Odds 14/1). Won a qualifier in Ireland and has not raced since to protect his handicap mark off 10-4 has a big chance.

SELECTION: 1 POINT WIN BET JETSON

Race Three: RYANAIR CHASE

A very difficult race to weigh up. Leading fancies “RIVERSIDE THEATRE”, “RUBI LIGHT” and “NOBLE PRICE”, both from Ireland and last year’s winner “ALBERTAS RUN” all have major chances. I think it’s a race to watch and savor, but I won’t be getting involved.

SELECTION: NO BET RECOMMENDATION: VENDOR

Race Four: WORLD HURDLE

“BIG BUCKS” (Odds 4/7) Paul Nicholls’ horse bids to win his fourth consecutive win and I see no reason why he shouldn’t. “OSCAR WHISKY” (Odds 4/1) trained by Nick Henderson will give him a real race as will “THOUSAND STARS” from the Willie Mullins yard.

SELECTION: NO BET RECOMMENDATION: BIG BUCKS

Race Five: BYRNE GROUP PLATE HANDICAP CHASE

Get your pin at the ready!

SELECTION: NO BET RECOMMENDATION: CRACK AWAY JACK

Race Six: FULKE WALYNN/KIM MUIR HANDICAP CHASE

Get your pin out again!

SELECTION: NO BET RECOMMENDATION: BAILE ANARI

DAY FOUR
– Friday 16th March

Race One: TRIUMPH HURDLE

One of my favourite races of the festival. “PEARL SWAN” (Odds 7/1) beat “GRUMETTI” (Odds 11/2) at Cheltenham last month, only to lose the race in the Stewards room. Both have major chances. “SADLERS RISK” (Odds 8/1) won first time at Sandown but was beaten by “BABY MIX” (Odds 6/1) at Kempton last time. Baby Mix ran well below par behind PEARL SWAN and GRUMETTI but looks back to his best.

SELECTION: 2 POINTS WIN BABY MIX

Race Two: VINCENT O’BRIEN COUNTY HURDLE

Another difficult handicap, but it’s the only one I really like. Last year, we tipped the winner FINAL APPROACH at 12/1. This year, I really fancy another Irish horse who I feel is very well handicapped. I’m going to recommend a 1 point each way bet, but this must be doubled, should they put blinkers, visor, or cheekpieces on. “SAILORS WARN” (odds 25/1) big chance.

SELECTION: 1 POINT EACH WAY SAILORS WARN

Race Three: ALBERT ARLETT NOVICES HURDLE

Very competitive race, but should “BOSTON BOB” (Odds 6/1) run, he will be the selection, but I think he’s more likely to run in the Neptune Hurdle. I can pass on a good word from the owner of “HARD TO SWALLOW” (Odds 33/1) – they think the step up in trip will really suit the horse.

SELECTION: 1 POINT EACH WAY ERADICATE

Race Four: CHELTENHAM GOLD CUP

With doubts surrounding “KAUTO STAR” (Odds 4/1), “LONG RUN” will be a short price to repeat his win in the race last year. “BURTON PORT” (Odds 7/1) is not for me, but I would be very interested to see if “GRAND CRUS” takes his chance.

SELECTION: NO BET RECOMMENDATION: GRAND CRUS

Race Five: CHRISTIE’S FOXHUNTERS CHASE

The Queen has a runner here in the shape of “BARBERS SHOP” (Odds 16/1) but does not appeal to me. “CLOUDY LANE” (Odds 16/1) is a classy individual and will be thereabouts but I really like “CHAPOTURGEON” (Odds 6/1) only 8 years old and a festival winner has a major chance.

SELECTION: 2 POINTS WIN CHAPOTURGEON

Race Six: MARTIN PIPE CONDITIONALS HANDICAP HURDLE

Hugely competitive race and there’s no doubt David Pipe would like to win his dad’s race. Should “BALGARRY” (Odds 10/1) run he would have a sound chance. The same could be said of “BOURNE” (Odds 11/1) and TED SPREAD (Odds 11/1).

SELECTION: 1 POINT WIN BALGARRY

Race Seven: JOHN HENDERSON GRAND ANNUAL CHASE

Trainer Nicky Henderson would love to win this race named in honour of his late father and he has a few entries. “FRENCH OPERA” (Odds 20/1) is top weight. Another with a chance for the trainer is “KID CASSIDY” (odds 12/1) but the one I like is “ERADICATE” who off a low weight has a fair chance in what is a very difficult handicap. Of the others, “DE BOITRON” (Odds 10/1) is well fancied, as is “TOUBAB” (Odds 10/1).

SELECTION: 1 POINT EACH WAY ERADICATE

SUMMARY
– BEST OF FESTIVAL

5 POINT MAX BET SIZZLING EUROPE

DAY 1
RACE ONE: 1 POINT WIN STEEPS OF FREEDOM
RACE THREE: 3 POINT WIN ZARKANDAR
RACE FIVE: 1 POINT WIN SCOTTS IRISH

DAY 2
RACE TWO: 3 POINT WIN BOSTON BOB (IF NON RUNNER 1 POINT WIN MONKS LAND)
RACE THREE: 1 POINT WIN INVICTUS
RACE FOUR: 5 POINT MAX WIN SIZING EUROPE
RACE FIVE: 1 POINT WIN FINAL APPROACH
RACE SEVEN: 1 POINT WIN PIQUE SOUS

DAY 3
RACE ONE: 2 POINT WIN PEDDLERS CROSS
RACE TWO: TWO POINT ONE WIN JETSON

DAY 4
RACE ONE: 2 POINT WIN BABY MIX
RACE TWO: 2 POINT EACH WAY SAILORS WARN
RACE THREE: 3 POINT WIN BOSTON BOB
RACE FIVE: 2 POINT WIN CHARATURGON
RACE SIX: 1 POINT WIN BALGARRY
RACE SEVEN: 1 POINT EACH WAY ERADICATE

ANYWAY, BE LUCKY, ENJOY THE FESTIVAL! AND DON’T GIVE TO MUCH TO THOSE AWFUL BOOKIES CHAPPIES.

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The next few months will see Hailo further improve on what we already have; a system built by taxi drivers for taxi drivers. Gary, Terry and I have constructed a concept that will triumph because we understand what it takes to understand the workings of a London Taxi Driver.

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Walker on the march....

Micky Walker
LCDC Member

SURFACE TRANSPORT PANEL (STC)
WHITEWASH

So, the Private Hire consultation process drags on and on and on. The STC considered the proposal back in July that PH drivers undergo the same DSA driving assessment as taxi drivers in London. This makes sense as pre-booked or not, PH drivers are transporting the public in the same way as us so there should not be any complaint about us all driving to the same standard.

The police supported this requirement as did Travelwatch. However the PH organisation LPHCA squealed like stuck pigs about it, arguing that “such a requirement would be over-regulatory given the number of large, more executive PH operators already providing additional training for drivers”. The STC decided to look further into this issue and came back last month with the proposals and outcome of their deliberations. There were three proposals:
a/ All new PH licences to complete the DSA test and existing licensees to be encouraged to take the test but not forced to do so.
b/ Not to make the test mandatory but encourage all PH drivers, new and old, to take the test voluntarily.
c/ Sit on their hands, whistle a happy tune and do sod all.

You know the answer is obvious and that encouragement should not even enter the debate. If we need a DSA test to transport passengers, the PH drivers need a DSA test to transport passengers. How on earth can it be the case that one set of drivers need the test while the other doesn’t when they are clearly doing the same job – transporting the public?

You know what’s coming, don’t you? Yep, THE STC BOTTLED IT and chose option two i.e. encouragement to take the test but no compulsion to do so. The Old Bill supported compulsion. The travelling public group, Travelwatch, supported compulsion. So, why no compulsion? The additional £96 to take the test would not discourage PH drivers. It is purely because the PH operators feared that many of their drivers would be unable to pass the DSA test. This is reasonable for them to do as they are running businesses and need drivers. Surely though, the STC must have worked out why the operators opposed it and this must also surely be the best reason for imposing the DSA test? Or am I just an idiot?

RICKSHAWS

Keep your fingers crossed! TFL, Westminster and The Met may just have woken up to the downside of rickshaws. Enforcement has apparently been stepped up to focus on rickshaws causing obstruction and congestion, along with issues of road safety and public nuisance in the West End. Have they finally realised that while rickshaws themselves may be “environmentally friendly”, the pollution from other vehicles that they cause to be held up in slower traffic make them a carbon pest rather than being neutral?

Anyway, not that you may have noticed but they had a bit of a purge on the rickshaws over four nights a couple of months back. They arrested 22 riders and seized their rickshaws and let another 102 riders off with just a warning. Perhaps Westminster will now stop all this stupid nonsense about registering these death-traps and we can all get on with banning them.

IDENTIFIER STICKERS

Well, love ‘em or loathe ‘em, by the time you read this the identifiers will have come into force. Judging by the number of Green Badge (GB) drivers that put the stickers in long before 1st March, I would say they are well received by GB drivers. It would appear not so with Yellow Badge (YB) drivers as a recent demo by Stratford YB drivers included a call for the removal of the ID stickers, among their complaints. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that all YB drivers feel this way. I think that many YB drivers feel concerned that they are being victimised by the identifiers but they should remember that we all have to have them, not just YBs. It should also be remembered that although The Club supported the stickers due to the belief that there were rogue YBs working out of area, this was not LTPH’s primary reason for introducing them. The reason went back to the 2009 consultation on taxi fares and other regulatory considerations. In response to “Taxi driver identification” it was determined that a form of external identification was required. After dumping the idea of photo-cards in the partition, the stickers are the culmination of that process.

Thus, the identifiers are not something aimed specifically towards YB drivers but all drivers. The secondary outcome that they will also put a spoke in the wheel of any rogue YB driver that is not playing to the rules can only be a good thing but obviously will have no effect on the very large majority of YB drivers that play the game properly.

There have been many other complaints about the stickers. There have been concerns about cabs being broken into in order to steal the identifiers, having your badge number on show to the public, forged identifiers and enforcement resources being diverted away from tackling PH touting are among the more popular complaints.

The break-ins are easy to sort out. Don’t leave your stickers in the cab when it’s parked and your cab will not be broken into. You already have your badge number on show around your neck and the cab plate number inside and outside the cab that will trace back to your badge number so what’s the difference? As for forgeries, they would only prove that cab drivers were working out of area to begin with and so proving the need for the identifiers. It will also mean that anybody sporting forgeries will also face charges of fraud and/or deception in addition to breaking hackney carriage laws if and when they are caught. As far as enforcement goes, there seems to be very precious little enforcement of PH touting now so I doubt the identifiers will make much difference to this.

Lastly, now that the stickers are actually in, the detractors are starting to suggest that if GB drivers’ takings do not increase significantly, then drivers touting out of area could not have been a serious enough problem to warrant the identifiers. This is a daft argument. GB drivers outnumber YB drivers by approximately 6:1. Even if as many as 20% of YB drivers were working illegally in town, their removal would increase GB drivers takings by just 3% on average. If there is anybody out there that is capable of isolating this factor away from other factors such as tariff increases and general economic conditions, etc, please let us know the figure. Even if we say it is 2%, would you really notice a 2% increase on your takings? Whatever, it is hardly going to be the fortunes that the protesters say will be needed to justify the identifiers.
Marigold Hotel

When was the last time you saw a film in which the seven lead roles are taken by British actors in their 60s and 70s? Never - right? So this is a movie aiming at a very different demographic than the usual teenage-targeted Hollywood fare and it is a refreshing and welcome change that will delight young as well as old.

The plot unfolds as a group of British retirees who have outsourced their retirement, attracted by the less expensive and seemingly exotic India. They are enticed by advertisements about the newly restored Marigold Hotel and given false dreams of a life with leisure. The doyennes of the cast are Judi Dench and Maggie Smith who are both now in their late 70s but sparkle here as very different lonely singletons. Bill Nighy and Penelope Wilton play a sweet and sour couple in the thespian menu. Tom Wilkinson is a retired judge with a secret. Finally Celia Imrie and Ronald Pickup are two more sad souls who might or might not find solace together. All of the seven find that retirement can be ‘outsourced’ to an Indian hotel that certainly looks exotic in the (photoshopped) brochure, but actually needs somewhat more than the enthusiasm of its young manager (Dev Patel with romantic problems of his own). A cynic might dub this multiple storyline of comedy and romance as “Love Geriatrically”, but this is a delightful movie that makes the viewer feel good about life.

Life in London

by Edgy Eddie Nestor

Can you imagine the public outrage if the job went to anyone else? My hunch is that as soon as that £500,000 bonus is secured by Tottenham Hotspurs involvement in the Champions League he will be off. Next month I promise I will mention Fulham, and QPR.

Sometimes on my show we get stories that make me think the world is going mad. A survey revealed recently that using your Smartphone whilst driving is dangerous. Really? More interesting for the cabbies is that the expert I was talking to, thought that we shouldn’t be talking on our hands free devices either. Soon you wont be able to speak, listen to the radio or even smoke in your own car...Hold on we already have that one.

It is so interesting how people have reacted to the removal from St Pauls of the protesters. It seems that for many they were a group of unemployed, dirty so and sos who served no purpose but to make our Capital City the laughing stock of the world. To others they were an inspiration, ready to highlight injustice and because of whom many bankers were unable to take huge bonuses. Which camp are you in?

Who is going to win the race to be Mayor? Boris and Ken are neck and neck and i cant bloody wait. With all due respect to the others I think it will probably be between these two and I cant pick. Can you? Which would be better for the cab trade?

Talking of the Mayor of London, his advisor for transport, Isabel Dedring came in to see me and was just about to go under cover to see what is being done re illegal mini cabs. Having already done the tour I suggested that she take some members of the cab trade with her so that they could see for themselves and explain to others what, why and how the authorities were dealing with the scourge of illegal mini cabs... As I say I have been out there with the police and I think the problem is that we all know that when you have dozens of Mini cabs parked up at the side of the road, late at night, they are available and possibly breaking the law but how do you prove it until they do it?

May Davy Jones of the Monkeys RIP

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The return of The Nut Behind The Wheel

What an outcry when the LTDA called for a 20% increase in our fares for the duration of the Olympics. We got lambasted in the press and then discovered that most cab drivers were against it anyway. Perhaps it was a knee-jerk decision by the LTDA without them considering the wishes of the majority of London’s taxi drivers.

I’ve sometimes felt they were out of touch with very people they are supposed to represent. But hopefully that will now change with the ‘promotion’ of Steve McNamara to chairman - leader of the band, at last, Steve. He definitely seems more hands on than Bob Oddy and I wish him well in his new role.

However, a lady I took to a local Heathrow hotel recently told me that she had tried to book the hotel for later in the year and was disgusted that they had increased their prices almost three-fold for that period (the Olympics). Is this the trend throughout the capital, I wonder? If it is then it explains the fact that normal tourism for London is forecast to be down by up to a massive 90%! And theatres may close for the duration of the games. Obviously, the tourists will go elsewhere for a price that is affordable. What will that do for our great city?

We suggest a 20% increase and the lynch mobs are after our blood; the hotels put their prices up 300% (way out of the reach of normal tourists) and nobody says a word.

Then we have the PCO handing out leaflets reminding us of our duties towards wheelchair passengers even though we have been given the elbow for running the slapheads of the IOC around London on their especially dedicated routes. No, they don’t want us for that, but they do expect us to be there for the Paralympics knowing full well that they won’t be able to fit a state-of-the-art wheelchair into a BMW.

Word is that we won the Olympics for London because of our 100% wheelchair accessibility but, as usual, TfL are treating us all as mugs and expect us to be around for the Paralympics. What groveling promises did they make on our behalf for the conveyance of wheelchair passengers during the Paralympics? More’s the point - what are they going to do if we all decide to go on holiday?

JUST WHO IS RUNNING LONDON?

Boris has thrown London to the wolves – namely LOCOG – and the leader of that pack is Seb Coe, Chair of LOCOG – the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

They want to shut The Mall from 20th to 29th September. The fact that London is a working city has gone straight over their heads in their binkered quest to put on what many regard as nothing more than a boring spectacle of over-sponsored runners and bikers trying to knock a fraction of a second off someone else’s world record.

Even so, Boris and Dave, to their credit, have come out on London’s side by demanding a review in order to minimise disruption to traffic. But it seems futile when you consider the amount of events to be held in the park with a view to using Buckingham Palace as a backdrop. Couple this with the closure of most of St. James’s Park, which will be used as a sort of goods yard for the odds and sods of the Olympics and for practicing beach volleyball – how nice.

Chaos? Total gridlock for three months looks more likely. Imagine, for instance, taking someone to Waterloo from Kensington when The Mall and Birdcage Walk are closed. A long detour looks on the cards. Yes, we will be forced to take the ‘long way round’.

The question is why have the LOCOG loonies been given carte blanche to put the knife into London with total disregard for the people who live and work there?

Prior to all this we have the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations on 3rd June with the 4th and 5th designated as Bank Holidays. This is followed by the Trooping of the Colour on 16th June.

None of us would begrudge the queen her celebrations and Trooping the Colour is a traditional annual event, but it makes you wonder whether they will leave the park closed right through to the end of the Paralympics. That would sit nicely with their tidy little minds.

NATIONWIDE DEREGULATION?

Next month the Law Commission is due to start its consultation paper on deregulation of the taxi and private hire trades. They expect the project to last three years.

One area they will look closely at is – the separate systems for taxi-cabs and private hire vehicles, the identity of the licensing authorities, the number and nature of licenses and whether all forms of regulation are still necessary.

They also state – “Taxi-cabs (‘hackney carriages’) are a highly regulated market, and have been since Victorian times (or earlier – some controls were first imposed under the Stuarts)’.

Here’s another nugget – “This project engages economic and regulatory theory. It will be fundamentally deregulatory, in the sense that it will seek to question the necessity for the various strands of the current regulatory regime, and seek to reformulate those that are necessary in the light of modern understandings of the most efficient and efficacious forms of regulation”.

And another – “The first level of reform would be to reduce the sheer bulk, complexity and inconsistency of the regulatory systems. Central concepts like ‘plying for hire’ have caused considerable problems in the past’.

It’s not hard to see where this is heading, so all you younger drivers had better make your business to keep tabs on this ‘project’ and get your views known. Get onto their website and get involved.

I remember reading about this mob recently and the crux was that what the Law Commission wants, the Law Commission usually gets. So, be prepared.

THE 15-YEAR RULE

Having sacrificed the whole country at the altar of the Olympic Games – an event that will no doubt cost us billions and bring much embarrassment to us all – those in charge of London’s transport system (TfL) have, in their limited wisdom, chosen this moment in time to scrap hundreds of perfectly serviceable taxis. Well done, chaps. Just when London needs ‘em, you get rid of them.

A mate who is close to retirement owns a very presentable Fairway that is 15 years old in February 2012 but is plated until May 2012. He wanted to know if he could take the plates off in December this year and re-plate it until December 2012. Not unreasonable, but he couldn’t seem to get a decision from the PCO and obviously wouldn’t take the plates off early if he couldn’t get them back on again.

He can’t be the only driver with this problem and some clear information from the PCO would be more than welcome. After all, if he could plate it until December 2012 then London will have another cab available for the Olympics. The trouble is: does anyone at TfL or the PCO really care? Surely, in this Olympic year, a concession could be made by giving all condemned taxis at least until the end of the year before sending them to the knacker’s yard.

If they don’t, then let’s not hear them moaning about the lack of taxis for the Paralympics when most of us will be on holiday for the simple reason that children must not be taken out of school time. The whole of the Olympics take place during the summer school holidays so it stands to reason that a great many of us will be away during part of the games.
BoxNation went live on Sept 30th 2011 from York Hall, Bethnal Green, and the opening fight between Liam Walsh and Paul Appleby was voted the British Fight of the Year by Boxing Monthly. It was non a bad start!

Since that first night there have been 54 live shows, including a Commonwealth title fight that lasted just 16 seconds and the recent Dereck Chisora and Vitali Klitschko WBC heavyweight championship. It has been a very lively and entertaining and unpredictable five months.

My show each Monday has had just about everything and I’m not joking, I’ve had American former world champions who have struggled to put two words together and I’ve had lunatic and foul-mouthed British boxers. It has been, all in all, a long short journey!

So far dozens of young fighters have been shown on BoxNation shows and have gained a bit of exposure long, long before they would normally get recognised. The trio of fights so far by North London’s Frank Buglioni has seen his fans swell from 300 to just over 600.

There is more, much more to come in March and April and May. There could be a massive Kevin Mitchell fight at Upton Park, there will be Floyd Mayweather’s next fight on May 5th and there are fights each and every weekend from somewhere.

Enjoy it.

BoxNation has secured some of the most respected boxing broadcasters including presenters Jim Rosenthal, Richard Keys and Paul Dempsey, pundit Steve Bunce and commentator John Rawling, all making this home to the most knowledgeable and engaging team in the sport.

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7 March 2012. London taxi drivers have protested against a planned 20 pence per litre tax increase on sustainable biodiesel produced from used cooking oil with a vocal demonstration around Parliament Square and outside the Treasury building.

Taxis passing through Parliament Square sounded their horns 20 times and again outside the Treasury building this morning, ahead of the tax increase that will be imposed from 1 April. More than 1,000 London taxis and approximately ten percent of the UK’s heavy goods vehicles use biodiesel produced from used cooking oil.

Industry experts fear the tax increase will make used cooking oil biodiesel uneconomic, forcing current users to return to fossil fuels and leading to greater carbon emissions, substantial biodiesel industry job losses, and millions of litres of used cooking oil being thrown away as waste.

The protest has been organised by the Save our Sustainable Biodiesel campaign, which is supported by more than 40 producers, suppliers and users of used cooking oil biodiesel. Liberal Democrat deputy leader, the Rt Hon Simon Hughes MP, is also supporting the campaign.

Tracey O’Keefe, Director of the UK Sustainable Biodiesel Alliance and co-ordinator of the SOS Biodiesel campaign, said:

“This is a very vocal reminder of the damage that will be caused if the Chancellor imposes his planned tax increase. All the evidence suggests that it is a decision that will harm the biodiesel industry and wider transport sector. We would urge the Chancellor to reconsider before he implements a tax increase that will gain him little, but that will cost the industry a great deal.”

The Rt Hon Simon Hughes MP, said:

“Biodiesel produced from used cooking oil has been proven to help reduce carbon emissions and make use of millions of litres of what would otherwise be waste. It would be an enormous shame if the good work of this industry was undone.”

Grant Davis, Chairman of the London Cab Drivers Club, said:

“This is an important issue that will affect many of our members by adding to their fuel costs during an already difficult time. Used cooking oil biodiesel ticks so many boxes by reducing carbon emissions and encouraging industrial growth. It makes no sense for the Treasury to jeopardise this by making it more expensive.”

For further information or comment from Tracey O’Keefe, please contact 020 7793 2536 / 07720 054189, Chris.Rogers@whitehouseconsulting.co.uk

About SOS Biodiesel

SOS Biodiesel is a campaign to extend the current differential for sustainable biodiesel produced from used cooking oil past April 2012.

Supporters of the campaign include the UK Sustainable Biodiesel Alliance, 3663, ABM, Abode Hotels, Agri Energy, Allmanhall, Apple Fuels Limited, Barchester, Bidvest Logistics, Bliffs, Biofuel Refineries Ltd, Biomotive Fuels Ltd, Bio UK Fuels Ltd, Associated British Bio-Fuels Ltd, Brocklesby Ltd, Convert2Green, Compact Catering, Double Green, Edible Oil Direct Ltd, Equity Solutions, Food North West, Footprint Fuels Ltd, the Freight Transport Association, Green2Go, Guardian Care, Hallmark Hotels, HF Holidays, Merseytravel, National Industrial Symbiosis Programme, Proper Oils, Qingdao Rifu Chemicals Ltd, Robinsons Brewery, Rileys, Rural Development Trust, Uptown Biodiesel Ltd, Stenaline, Focus Hotels, Spire, Pabulum, Plymouth Schools, Principal Fare, Shearings, Southampton City Council, Stanwood, Veg Oil Motoring
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- **RANKS AND HIGHWAYS**
  
  The LCDC attend the Joint Ranks committee working hard for more ranks and more access for the taxi trade in London.

- **CAB TRADE ADVICE**
  
  All members can call the office for any information or up to the date news on any trade related subject.

- **MEDIA AND AUTHORITIES**
  
  The LCDC is always the first to be called when the media want the “Cab Trades” reaction. The Chairman is a regular contributor on LBC, Radio London, and the BBC. We at the Club also represent the trade at meetings with the Mayors Office, TFL, LTPH, Corporation Of London, BAA, and all Local Authorities in the Capital.

- **HEALTH CONCERNS**
  
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You can call in to discuss Sickness and Accident Insurance and
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You may also telephone for an appointment to speak with an
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