

## NEW DIET FOR MASTERMIND CABBIE

**F**red Housego the licensed taxi driver who became famous as winner of Mastermind back in 1980, has hit the headlines again recently. Fred has lost six stone, after his wife warned him that he was eating himself to death. By following the LighterLife diet Fred has seen his weight drop to just 12½ stone in six months. The LighterLife diet uses total meal replacements of soups shakes and bars for eight weeks for men, then gradually foods are replaced back into the diet. Dieters see a counsellor weekly too.

But Fred has had to change his lifestyle – no more drinking pints of lager and eating packets of crisps. He has also started going to the gym. He said: “I found the diet easy and the weight just fell off.” Now his waist is a whole 16 inches smaller than its previous 50 inches. His wife says: “I didn’t think he would do it. But he stuck with it and now looks brilliant.”



Before



After

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

I am a driver with Dial-a Cab but do not belong to any trade body or union. My name is Martin Hizer and I am a London Licensed Taxi Driver who has held his Bill now for 11 years. When I first contemplated writing this letter it was as a personally aggrieved individual whose own perceived injury was, if I'm honest, the only concern to me. I now upon reflection regard, the nature of my grievance as possibly one of the biggest threats that our collective trade has ever faced.

That threat comes from a technology that was initially introduced (If we believe the powers that be!) to protect us from threats ranging from muggings and car theft all the way up to international terrorism. I am talking of course about Closed Circuit Television (CCTV). I'm sure that a number of you have recently had the unpleasant experience of picking up the morning post only to find that you have been issued with a Penalty Charge notice (PCN) informing you that you owe anything up to £120 to some council or other for a parking offence.

As if the spiteful council parking attendants that replaced the dear old Metropolitan police wardens (or wasps, as I affectionately referred to them because of their black and yellow caps) aren't bad enough, I have now taken to looking up at the sky as well as around me when I now stop!

So you got a parking ticket, I hear you say, so what? This ticket however was issued by CCTV whilst I was in my cab waiting outside for an Account customer for whom I was booked. The 'offence' occurred in the part of Carlisle Street in Soho W1 that is a cul-de-sac which means therefore that there could be no through traffic to which I could have been an obstruction or nuisance to. I wrote to Westminster, the council that issued this PCN, putting this point to them - only to be told that although allowances are made for picking up/setting down, no provisions are in place to allow you to wait for clients. Now, whether you drive a London Black Taxi, a Mercedes or a Vauxhall Corsa that has been licensed for hire and reward, you must have had times where you have had to wait for clients for a multitude of different reasons, but mainly because your client is on the telephone conducting business which in some cases could mean procuring thousands or possibly millions of pounds of extra revenue for their companies and they certainly are not going to curtail such activities because the poor driver is waiting!

I have since received two more PCNs whilst on account jobs, in Soho St and Old Compton Street. Add to this one in Dean Street where I'd had the audacity to pull over and eat a sandwich in my vehicle and I guess you could say the whole of Soho is no-go. And for those of you not on a circuit, what about the clients who ask, (and they mostly do!) to go via

a cashpoint because if the fixed CCTV cameras don't get you, the new periscope fitted Smart cars will! Both fixed and mobile Cameras will take your photos even if you are waiting for a matter of only seconds!

When a client orders transportation, unless there are extreme circumstances, they expect to find you outside their door. Look at it this way, if you had ordered a cab in Frith Street and it was pouring with rain, you wouldn't want to walk to Soho Square or Great Marlborough Street to pick it up and you certainly wouldn't pay for such a poor service! So what is the answer? It goes without saying you cannot accept a job that will earn you £8 for example if it will end up costing you £120 or £60 if paid within 14 days! Surely we are not expected to give up literally millions of pounds of accounts? Not only is this unfair, but to me this is a blatant restriction of a perfectly lawful trade and as I stated before, a form of extortion. Normally the practise of 'Demanding money with Menaces' is carried out by people that most refer to as Gangsters. It has got so bad that I had a warden come over to me whilst I was on an account job the other day and gruffly shout 'move' and yet I thought "What a good lad, at least I got a warning!"

My dear brother Antony who has been a driver for over 25 years hit the nail on the head when he compared the introduction of prosecution (or persecution) by CCTV to the other bane of most drivers, the speed camera. It has removed discretion, common sense and confrontation from the process. It is now simply black or white. but there are other implications. What if you have broken down, What if you need a toilet? What if you are taken ill or overcome with tiredness and need to rest? Isn't there a multi million pound government funded advertising campaign claiming tiredness kills? Even if you appeal and have the PCN overturned, doesn't it just add to the duress of an already stressful job? To those who are genuinely taken ill should you just drive until you pass out and plough into a building or some unfortunate pedestrian who happens to be passing?

I say this must stop right now. There are currently 23,000 licensed taxi drivers and goodness knows how many from the private hire sector - like it or not this is a problem for all of us! If however we stay strong and every single one of us without exception refuses to pay every one of these PCNs by appealing them all, we as a trade could make their system grind to a halt.

At the risk of sounding overly dramatic, our entire trade is at risk. Do not take this threat lightly and please, with immediate effect, stop paying these thieves now. I will leave my address with magazine editors through whom I will happily receive your comments and views.

Be Lucky, Be Strong Martin Hizer.