

ADDISON LEE TAKES OVER BLUEBACK

Addison Lee has announced the acquisition of Blueback. Many taxi drivers will remember when Blueback launched in a blaze of publicity but not long after had to remove all the signage from their distinctive vehicles. Addison Lee say that this increase in driver capacity will give Addison Lee a greater flexibility during peak times. New drivers will use either black VW Sharan people carriers or one of their new fleet of black Ford Galaxy people carriers.

The first of 600 Ford Galaxy seven-seaters has been delivered to Addison Lee, who are now the UK's biggest private hire and chauffeur company. The high-specification Ford Galaxy 2.0 TDCi auto models are set to enter service at the rate of about 60 per month until the year-end.



Dagenham Motors' Edgware Road outlet in London is supplying the all-black, air-conditioned Ford Galaxy models, complete with customised telematics package and Xda handset holders.

TEXTING INTO LAMPPOSTS

You might be forgiven for thinking this was an April Fool's Day media joke but it is genuine. Text messaging is an essential part of everyday life for some people, which has led to a number of injuries being sustained whilst texting. British directory enquiries service 118118 commissioned a survey which asked 1,000 people in the UK if they had suffered an injury from a collision while sending an SMS. Results showed 1 in 10 had, with around 68,000 SMS-related injuries in the UK last year, ranging from minor bumps to skull fractures.

Almost two thirds of responders had lost peripheral vision while texting. 118118 has come up with a solution and is teaming up charity organisation Living Streets to put it in to action. Brick Lane is set to become the first street in the UK to have padded lampposts. If this trial is successful, the scheme will then be rolled out to other London streets including Charing Cross Road, Old Bond Street and Oxford Street. Needless to say 118118 will be allowed advertising on the said lampposts!

DRIVERS STILL BREAKING MOBILE PHONE LAW

A new survey shows the number of car drivers using hand-held mobile phones at the wheel has fallen by 40%, Road Safety Minister Jim Fitzpatrick has revealed.

Speaking at the Annual Lecture of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, Jim Fitzpatrick said: "Since February, drivers illegally using their mobile phone have risked three points on their licence and a £60 fine. The Government introduced this tough penalty to stamp down on mobile phone use at the wheel and this survey suggests more and more motorists are getting the message.

"Using any mobile phone when driving is distracting - it stops you giving the road your full attention and slows reaction times. Research shows it can make a crash four times more likely, so it is vital motorists do not use their phones while driving."

The research was done to assess changes in the levels of usage of mobile phones while driving over time. Drivers were not asked if they used phones at this or any other time. Observers were equipped with an electronic device that detects the microwave radiation emitted by both hand-held and hands-free mobile phones. This means that even when combining visual and electronic detection, the observers may have been unable to detect some phone use and the figures could under-estimate the actual level of use. Every day taxi drivers will see drivers talking on their mobiles whilst driving. If caught, the driver can either pay a fixed penalty or go to court. The penalty is 3 points, discretionary disqualification and a maximum fine of £1,000 (£2,500 for drivers of vans, lorries, buses and coaches).

DRIVING THROUGH THE ROYAL PARKS

Regulations governing Royal Parks prohibit any vehicle "constructed, adapted or in use for the purpose of a trade or business" from using roads in the Parks.

Currently, there is a specific exemption for London licensed taxis, but this does not cover private hire vehicles. PHVs cannot drive in the Parks if they are on business, for example taking customers to or from Park venues (such as the Zoo or the Serpentine), unless the passenger resides in the parks. Many taxi drivers would comment that they do see ph in the Parks and enforcement of the regulation has been variable. Now that ph vehicles carry licensing discs and now carry red route exemption signage, they are now more readily identifiable, thus increasing the possible risk of a fine.

The PCO has asked the Royal Parks that as private hire vehicles provide a similar public service to taxis in many respects, Royal Parks should extend the exemption to include PHVs among the vehicles allowed to use the Parks. In response to these requests, Royal Parks has agreed to review the restrictions and will be consulting on whether to allow PHVs to drive in the Parks in the coming months. In the meantime the existing prohibition remains in force.

An 1899 horse drawn Forder cab belonging to the Sherlock Holmes Museum of Baker Street is also not allowed to use the Royal Parks. Museum staff are campaigning for the right to drive this original working hansom cab through the capital's Royal Parks. John Aidiniantz, Assistant Curator at the Sherlock Holmes Museum has now taken his campaign to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the Right Honorable James Purnell MP. Requests sent to the Head of Policy at Royal Parks have been turned down, with the Head of Policy for the Royal Parks, Mr David McLaren saying the refusal is because of the restriction on advertising in the parks and "practical challenges to do with traffic management". Mr Aidiniantz feels that it is unfair to allow taxis and coaches that carry advertising, but not the hansom cab, which carries discreet advertising that is impractical to cover up. Mr McLaren explained: "Under the Regulations, taxis have long been permitted in the Parks. Some do carry advertising and specific permission has been granted by Ministers for this. We also issue a limited number of individual licenses for coaches who bring people to visit the parks."



Mr Vasily Livanov OBE - The Russian Sherlock Holmes. Image courtesy of Sherlock Holmes Museum